British Journal for Military History

Volume 12, Issue 1, April 2026

Cover picture: John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, Captain-General of the English forces and Master-General of the Ordnance, 1702 (c). Oil on canvas, attributed to Michael Dahl (1659 (c)-1743), 1702 (c). Property of the National Army Museum. Image out of copyright.

www.bjmh.org.uk

BRITISH JOURNAL FOR MILITARY HISTORY EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

The Editorial Team gratefully acknowledges the support of the British Journal for Military History's Editorial Advisory Board the membership of which is as follows:

BRITISH JOURNAL FOR MILITARY HISTORY

Founding Editor (2014–18): Dr Matthew Ford, Swedish Defence University, Sweden

Volume 12, Issue 1 April 2026

EDITORIAL TEAM

CONTACT US

Find us online at: www.bjmh.org.uk

Letters and communications to the Co-editors should be sent to:

editor@bcmh.org.uk

or

Alasdair Urquhart
alasdair.j.urquhart@gmail.com

Follow the British Commission for Military History and British Journal for Military History on:

BlueSky [@britjnlmilhist.bsky.social]
X/Twitter [@BritJnlMilHist]
Online [www.bjmh.org.uk]

British Journal for Military History – ISSN: 2057-0422
DOI: https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1

CONTENTS

RESEARCH NOTES

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

EDITORIAL*

When we assumed the Co-editorship of the journal back in Spring 2024 we were adamant that we wished to continue the excellent work of our predecessors, especially in terms of finding new voices and reaching new audiences. This issue, our first of 2026, is reflective of that commitment, and it includes articles and research notes suggestive of the rich variety of work in the field of military history. In the pages that follow therefore, you can read critical reassessments of specific military units – including the Special Air Service, RAF Legal Officers, and the Women's Royal Army Corps – while elsewhere you'll find everything from a fascinating discussion of the Duke of Marlborough (as he featured in the words and thinking of Frederick the Great), to the experiences of Indian medical personnel in the First World War, to the D-Day archaeology of Studland Bay, and indeed more. Sadly, various issues have prevented us from including our normal range of book reviews but we expect them to return in future issues. Despite this lack, we hope you find this issue as absorbing as us!

This is also an eminently fitting issue with which to sign off – after two years at the helm, we have decided to step back from the co-editorship. It has been a real pleasure and privilege to work on the journal, and we have greatly appreciated the support of all those behind the scenes who make each issue possible. Special thanks must go to all our managing editors, and especially to George Wilton, Alasdair Urquhart, and Máire MacNeill. We look forward to seeing the journal grow and prosper in the years to come.

The British Commission for Military History, as the sponsors of the BJMH, have started the search for new Co-editors but suitably qualified scholars with sufficient time to take on the role are hard to find. Pending the appointment of the new team the BCMH have asked Alasdair Urquhart and George Wilton, two of our long standing Managing Editors whose support we acknowledge above, to act as interim Co-editors. We wish George and Alasdair well!

ANDREW SANDERS
De Montfort University, UK
SAM EDWARDS
Loughborough University, UK

* DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1964

Page intentionally left blank.

The Duke of Marlborough in the Writings of Frederick the Great

ADAM L STORRING*
King's College London, UK
Email: *alstorring@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT
The Duke of Marlborough was Britain's most celebrated soldier of the early eighteenth century and deeply connected to the wider European continent. However, the writings of Frederick the Great of Prussia highlight how Marlborough's memory has been neglected outside the Anglophone world. Frederick certainly respected Marlborough in general terms. However, the Prussian king almost completely ignored the details of Marlborough's military campaigns and portrayed him as being as much a politician as a soldier. This reflected a wider divergence in military literature following the War of the Spanish Succession, as Anglophone authors lionised Marlborough while continental Europeans focused on other figures.

Introduction

Recent scholarship has emphasised that the British army of the eighteenth century was influenced by a wider world that extended far beyond Britain itself. Huw Davies described Britain's soldiers in this period as 'a wandering army', whose military methods were strongly influenced by their experiences in America and India as well as by the examples of other European armies. Davies, Ira Gruber and J. A. Houlding described how defeats in the 1740-1748 War of the Austrian Succession galvanised British officers in the second half of the eighteenth century to seek out the best military

*Adam L. Storring is Visiting Research Fellow at King's College London and teaches at the University of Buckingham. His PhD, completed at the University of Cambridge, was awarded the André Corvisier Prize 2019 by the International Commission of Military History. The author would like to thank the editors and peer reviewers of the *British Journal for Military History*. He is also grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/L503897/1), the Bühler-Bolstorff-Stiftung Berlin, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, the Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte, the Lichtenberg-Kolleg / Göttingen Institute for Advanced Study, the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz and the Stiftung Preußischer Schlösser und Gärten for funding the research that made this article possible.
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1954

practice from other European states.[1] The development of the British staff system in the Napoleonic period was also substantially influenced by European examples.[2] These revelations naturally beg the question of how much the British army, in its turn, influenced military practice elsewhere in Europe.

This article discusses the degree to which Britain's most celebrated soldier of the early eighteenth century, John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722), influenced the famous Prussian military monarch Frederick II ('Frederick the Great', reigned 1740-1786). Frederick was not only one of the most notable commanders of the eighteenth century but also left prodigious writings, many of which were published in later source editions. This includes three volumes dedicated specifically to Frederick's military writings. These source editions have recently been digitised, allowing historians to search for mentions of particular words and topics across Frederick's writings, including his poetry, his history-writing and his correspondence.[3] This combination of military prominence and excellent primary source material makes Frederick II a key figure for historians seeking to understand the military ideas of the eighteenth century. While the Prussian king certainly respected Marlborough as a great hero, he scarcely mentioned the details of his military campaigns, and saw Marlborough as being as much a politician as a soldier. The example of Frederick thus highlights a wider divergence between Anglophone and continental European literature on Marlborough and on the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) more broadly.

Marlborough has been lionised by many Anglophone historians, not least his own descendant, Winston Churchill.[4] The American historian Russel Weigley called Marlborough 'truly an example of the earth-shaking hero in history'.[5] Commanding armies of British and allied troops, Marlborough collaborated above all with Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736) to win victories at Blenheim in 1704, Ramillies in 1706, Oudenaarde in 1708, and Malplaquet in 1709, driving the French out of southern Germany and then advancing across the southern Netherlands and into northern

[1]Huw J. Davies, *The Wandering Army: The Campaigns that Transformed the British Way of War, 1750-1850,* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2022); Ira D. Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution,* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 166-255.
[2]Davies, *The Wandering Army*, pp. 323-325.
[3]https://friedrich.uni-trier.de. Accessed 20 March 2026.
[4]Winston Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times,* (London: Harrap, 1933); Clément Oury, *Le duc de Marlborough. John Churchill: Le plus redoutable ennemi de Louis XIV,* (Paris: Perrin, 2022), pp. 13-14, pp. 19-26, pp. 382-387.
[5]Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo,* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 103.

France. David Chandler, one of Britain's leading military historians of the later twentieth century, called Marlborough 'probably the pre-eminent military figure in Western Europe between the eras of Turenne and Condé on the one hand and the period of the mature Frederick II of Prussia on the other'.[6] Only more recently have scholars like Jamel Ostwald, Clément Oury and Cathal Nolan gone beyond this chorus of adulation. Nolan noted the cost of Marlborough's battles, and Ostwald emphasised that his successes did not have quite such far-reaching effects as his admirers have claimed. There is also now a much greater understanding of the degree to which Marlborough depended on his allies and on able subordinates.[7]

In contrast to the praise of Marlborough in the Anglophone world, Oury noted that French military historians have generally neglected the British general, a trend that began in the eighteenth century. They have preferred instead to focus on his colleague Eugene of Savoy, perhaps because Eugene was originally from France.[8] Michael Hochedlinger similarly noted that German-language scholarship on Eugene has tended subtly to denigrate Marlborough, just as Anglophone studies of Marlborough have typically given their hero precedence over Eugene. In his 30-page final assessment of Marlborough as 'man and soldier', David Chandler devoted just three sentences to Eugene, whom he described as 'less successful in fighting the French than the Duke'. In contrast, Hochedlinger noted that 'Max Braubach … , Eugene's great German biographer, . . . disqualified the English general as a 'real hero''.[9] Frederick II of Prussia was a great admirer of French culture and was hugely influenced by French military methods.[10] He was also a German prince and had served under Eugene in person. It

[6]David Chandler, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Marlborough*, 2nd edn., (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1990), p. 9. See more broadly David Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, 3rd edn., (Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1989).

[7]Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars have been Won and Lost*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 121-138; Jamel Ostwald, 'The "decisive" battle of Ramillies, 1706: Prerequisites for decisiveness in early modern warfare', *The Journal of Military History*, 64 (2000), pp. 649-677; Jamel Ostwald, 'Marlborough and Siege Warfare', in John B. Hattendorf, Augustus J. Veenendaal Jr., Rolof van Hövell tot Westerflier (eds.), *Marlborough: Soldier and Diplomat,* (Rotterdam: Karwansaray, 2012), pp. 122-143; Clément Oury, *La guerre de succession d'Espagne: La fin tragique du grand siècle,* (Paris: Tallandier, 2020), pp. 205-218; Oury, *Marlborough*.

[8]Clément Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, pp. 211-215; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 16-17, pp. 387-389.

[9]Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, pp. 300-331 (quotations, p. 300, p. 329); Michael Hochedlinger, 'Friendship and Realpolitik: Marlborough and the Habsburg Monarchy', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, p. 251.

[10]Adam L. Storring, "The age of Louis XIV': Frederick the Great and French ways of war', *German History*, 38 (2020), pp. 24-46.

was thus not surprising that, as Jay Luvaas noted, Frederick 'was interested in Eugene, not Marlborough'.[11]

'The Great Smartness of Which the English Troops Gave the Example'

For the British army, Marlborough's influence was huge. His emphasis on infantry musket fire as a key tool for winning battles remained an important theme of British military practice. As the veterans of Marlborough's wars began to disappear, Lieutenant Colonel Humphrey Bland published his *Treatise of Military Discipline* in 1727 to codify the duke's military practice. Bland's book became essential reading for British officers until the 1760s. Brigadier General Richard Kane's work of military history, which was first published in 1745 and described Marlborough's campaigns in detail, was also very popular.[12] At the 1745 battle of Fontenoy, three decades after the War of the Spanish Succession, the British commander, the Duke of Cumberland, tried to break through the enemy centre just as Marlborough had so often done.[13]

The Prussian army was very much like the British one in developing a tradition that emphasised infantry firepower. Indeed, the focus on musketry in both armies developed in the same period: the Nine Years War (1688-1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession. In the later eighteenth century, the complex system of 'platoon fire' – whereby the different sub-divisions of a battalion fired in succession to maintain a continuous series of volleys – came to be considered a Prussian speciality. It had, however, originally been developed by the Dutch and Danish, before becoming firmly established in the British army under Marlborough.[14] Surveying the history of the Prussian army, Frederick II noted that 'discipline became stronger during the reign of [King] Frederick I [1688-1713]', as the Prussian troops fought in Flanders and Italy as part of the coalitions against Louis XIV. Frederick described how 'the officers who served in Flanders learned their trade ('*apprirent leur métier*') from the Dutch: they [the Dutch] were at the time our masters. We also imitated the great smartness ('*propreté*')

[11]Jay Luvaas (ed. and trans.), *Frederick the Great on the Art of War,* (New York and London: The Free Press, Collier-Macmillan, 1966), p. 26.

[12]Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, p. 13, p. 17, p. 19, pp. 30-32, p. 35, p. 39; Houlding, *Fit for Service*, pp. 173-185.

[13]Armstrong Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700-1789,* (Westport, CT, London: Praeger, 2003), pp.108-124.

[14]Alexander S. Burns, *Infantry in Battle, 1733-1783,* (Warwick: Helion & Company, 2025), pp. 142-143, pp. 145-147; Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, pp. 111-113, pp. 116-117, pp. 128-130, pp. 136-137; Curt Jany, *Geschichte der Königlich Preußischen Armee bis zum Jahre 1807*, 3 vols., (Berlin: Siegismund, 1928-9), vol. I, pp. 614-621; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 381-382.

of which the English troops gave the example.'[15] The military discipline that has been considered so archetypally Prussian, and the Prussian use of platoon fire, thus had roots in the practice of other armies. As Frederick's remarks made clear, these developments were not just about the personal influence of Marlborough. Rather, they reflected a broader evolution in tactics, as the widespread introduction of the flintlock musket and socket bayonet in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries led to a greater focus on firepower and the deployment of infantry in shallower line formations.[16] Full investigation of the broader origins of Prussian military discipline and firing drill sadly lies beyond the scope of this article, but it would certainly repay scholarly attention.

'Prince Eugene, Who I Saw'

When it came to examples of great generals to emulate, however, Frederick II focused much more on Eugene of Savoy rather than Marlborough. Eugene was the most celebrated soldier to emerge from the Holy Roman Empire during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and had already established a formidable military reputation even before his collaboration with Marlborough. Appointed commander of the Habsburg forces against the Turks in 1697, he defeated and almost annihilated an Ottoman army at Zenta in September that year, helping secure the Habsburgs an advantageous peace at Karlowitz in 1699. In the early years of the War of the Spanish Succession, Eugene led the Habsburg forces in Italy with enormous energy, ultimately executing a four hundred kilometre march in July and August 1706 to relieve Turin and defeat the French army besieging it. Clément Oury noted that Turin was an even more significant victory than Marlborough's success in the same year at Ramillies. Ramillies represented the culmination of a steady allied advance in the Netherlands over the previous years. In contrast, the French had had a strong position in Italy in summer 1706 and actually hoped that the war in that theatre would soon be decided in their favour. Instead, defeat at Turin drove the French and their allies out of northern Italy entirely. Eugene again commanded Habsburg forces against the Ottomans in 1716-1718, winning further victories and capturing Belgrade in 1717.[17]

The future Frederick II served under Eugene's command in 1734, when the ageing general led the Empire's troops against France in the War of the Polish Succession

[15] *Œuvres de Frédéric le Grand* (hereinafter *Œuvres*), J.D.E. Preuss (ed.), 30 vols., (Berlin: R. Decker, 1846-56), vol. I, p. 214. See also *Ibid*, pp. 215-216.

[16] Jeremy Black, *Warfare in the Eighteenth Century,* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 156-158; Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, pp. 136-137.

[17] Michael Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence: War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy 1683-1797,* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 164-196; Oury, *La guerre de succession d'Espagne*, pp. 190-191, pp. 193-195, pp. 200-203, pp. 208-217.

(1733-1735). On his father's instructions, Frederick, who was then Prussian crown prince, spent as much time as possible with Eugene, dining with him, and accompanying him to observe the progress of operations.[18] The young prince for instance described how Eugene often drilled the Hapsburg troops for three hours a day.[19] The campaign was, as Frederick put it, 'very sterile in laurels', as Eugene was unable seriously to trouble the French.[20] The imperial commander, then 70 years old, was 'only the shadow of the great Eugene'.[21] Nevertheless, when Frederick listed a series of generals, including Marlborough, as great men in a September 1739 letter to Voltaire, he referred to 'Prince Eugene, who I saw'.[22] The Prussian king discussed Eugene's campaigns repeatedly, with great enthusiasm, in his military writings, focusing above all on the Habsburg commander's 1702 attempt to surprise the French army in the Italian town of Cremona.[23]

Frederick certainly lauded Marlborough in general terms as a great man.[24] In his *Epistle on Chance*, Frederick referred to,

> Marlborough, . . .
> Who, fighting battles, won all of them,
> Who never besieged a place without taking it,
> Liberator of the Rhine, Conqueror of Flanders,
> Marlborough the hero . . . [25]

[18]Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereinafter GStA PK) BPH Rep. 47 Nr. 636, pp. 2v-3v, p. 4v, p. 5r, pp. 7r-7v; Reinhold Koser, 'Tagebuch des Kronprinzen Friedrich aus dem Rheinfeldzuge von 1734', *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Geschichte*, 4 (1891), pp. 219-222.
[19]*Œuvres*, vol. XXVII Pt. III, p. 202.
[20]*Œuvres*, vol. XVI, p. 142.
[21]Quotation, *Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 192. See more broadly Hochedlinger, *Austria's Wars of Emergence*, pp. 209-212.
[22]*Œuvres*, vol. XXI, p. 359.
[23]*Œuvres*, vol. VIII, pp. 170-171, p. 321; *Œuvres*, vol. IX, p. 219; *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 285; *Œuvres*, vol. XII, pp. 70-72; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 42, p. 72, p. 141, p. 146; *Œuvres*, vol. XXIX, pp. 88-89; *Politische Correspondenz Friedrich's des Großen* (hereinafter *Politische Correspondenz*), J. G. Droysen et al. (eds.), 46 vols., (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1879-1939), vol. IV, p. 217.
[24]*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. xi, p. xxi; *Œuvres*, vol. VII, pp. 81-82; *Œuvres*, vol. VIII, p. 20, p. 122, p. 150, p. 257, p. 297; *Œuvres*, vol. IX, p. 167, p. 263; *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 234; *Œuvres*, vol. XI, p. 265; *Œuvres*, vol. XIV, pp. 288-290, p, 295; *Œuvres*, vol. XXI, p. 359; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. XIV, p. 403; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. XV, p. 230.
[25]*Œuvres*, vol. XII, p. 72.

Frederick, however, almost never discussed the details of Marlborough's military tactics and strategy. The three published volumes of Frederick's military writings contain only one mention of the British general, and that single reference was a criticism of Marlborough and Eugene for not organising a more effective pursuit after the 1709 battle of Malplaquet.[26] Describing Ramillies, one of Marlborough's most notable victories, Frederick accurately criticised the mistakes of the French commander, the duc de Villeroi, in deploying his army, but he did not mention Marlborough by name or describe how the English general had taken advantage of his opponent's errors.[27] In his writings, the Prussian king said nothing at all about Marlborough's victory at the 1708 battle of Oudenaarde beyond noting the achievements of the Prussian units there and the battle's personal importance for King George II of Britain.[28] Frederick described the events of the 1704 battle of Blenheim and the campaign leading up to it three times in his published writings. However, only one of those descriptions mentioned Marlborough and his actions during the battle. Frederick's two other accounts of Blenheim referred only to Prince Eugene, reflecting the Habsburg general's greater importance for Frederick in comparison to Marlborough.[29]

'Obstinate', 'Bloody Theatres'

Frederick's comparative neglect of Marlborough may have reflected the fact that the Prussian king's battle tactics focused on outflanking an enemy army, whereas Marlborough's approach typically involved a breakthrough in the centre.[30] In his poem *The Art of War*, Frederick made a distinction between the kind of outflanking movements in battle that he particularly favoured and, on the other hand, 'those [battles] known under the name of regular affairs'. Frederick described these latter as 'obstinate', 'bloody theatres' where 'one sees . . . the murderous blade flash'.

> Thus the great Eugene, at that famous village [Blenheim, 1704]
> Where Tallard and Marsin [the French commanders] were so badly posted,
> With a general effort from all sides
> He broke through their centre, he split their army.[31]

[26] *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 136-137.
[27] *Œuvres*, vol. XXVI, p. 537; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 30, p. 86. Note in contrast the more balanced account in Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, 2 vols., (Berlin: C. F. Henning, 1751), vol. I, pp. 385-387.
[28] *Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 136, p. 191, p. 216; *Œuvres*, vol. III, p. 6; *Œuvres*, vol. XI, pp. 253-254; *Politische Correspondenz*, vol. VII, p. 398.
[29] *Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 128-129, *Œuvres*, vol. X, p. 314; *Œuvres*, vol. XXIX, pp. 88-89.
[30] Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 32-38. For a reassessment of Marlborough's tactics, see Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 383-384.
[31] *Œuvres*, vol. X, pp. 313-315 (quotations, pp. 313-314).

Frederick – who noticeably credited the victory at Blenheim only to Eugene, without any mention of Marlborough – thereby made a distinction between his own preferred outflanking movements and the tactics of breakthrough in the centre that were typical of Marlborough's battles.

Undoubtedly the most 'obstinate' of Marlborough's 'bloody theatres' was his Pyrrhic victory at the 11 September 1709 battle of Malplaquet. In that engagement, an allied army of 86,000 troops successfully gained the field, but suffered some 21,000 killed and wounded, whereas their 75,000-strong French opponents suffered 11,500 casualties or roughly half those of the nominal victors.[32] Contemporaries were shocked by the appalling bloodletting, as was Marlborough himself.[33] Even Richard Kane criticised the decision to fight at Malplaquet.[34] An account of the battle among the papers of Frederick's brother Prince Henry of Prussia noted how, in one allied attack, 'every single colonel, lieutenant colonel or major [involved] was killed or wounded'. At the end of the battle some battalions 'did not [even] have two or three officers left' uninjured. In one sector 'one did not see the slightest ground … which was not covered with dead bodies'.[35]

Frederick's writings showed good familiarity with the events of the battle of Malplaquet, including how the French left flank had eventually been turned by the allies because it was not protected by natural obstacles. The Prussian king remarked caustically that, if the allies had discovered this fact beforehand, 'this would have saved the lives of about fifteen thousand men' of their troops, who they first lost in bloody frontal attacks.[36] Indeed, Frederick argued that the Dutch never recovered from losing 'the flower of their troops' in this battle.[37] Malplaquet was certainly not an example that any later commander would want to emulate. Indeed, the heavy casualties suffered in Marlborough's battles were an important reason why, even within the allied army, he seems to have been less highly esteemed than Eugene.[38]

---

[32]John A. Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV 1667-1714,* (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 331-335.

[33]Chandler, *Art of Warfare*, p. 124; John B. Hattendorf, 'Courtier, Army Officer, Politician, and Diplomat: A Biographical Sketch of John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, pp. 90-91.

[34]Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, p. 38.

[35]GStA PK, BPH Rep. 56 II F Nr. 9, pp. 3r – 8r (quotations, p. 4r, p. 5v, p. 8r).

[36]*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 137, p. 216, pp. 221-222; *Œuvres*, vol. VI, p. 110; *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 38, p. 79, p. 137 (quotation, *Œuvres*, vol. XXVIII, p. 79).

[37]*Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 18.

[38]See Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 377, p. 381, pp. 385-386.

French Literature

However, Frederick's neglect of Marlborough's military methods may also have reflected the British general's broader place in the historiography of the War of the Spanish Succession. The conflict had a huge impact on those who lived through it and sparked numerous publications, above all in France, where the defeats suffered by French armies came as a profound shock. Jean-Charles, chevalier de Folard (1669-1752) argued that the French should in future focus on shock tactics and *élan*: a very different approach from Marlborough's emphasis on infantry firepower.[39] The Prussian army drilled rigorously to achieve rapid musket fire, but Frederick was also attracted to Folard's shock tactics, and he published an abridged version of the French thinker's work for distribution to his officers.[40]

Frederick's favourite military author, Antoine de Pas, marquis de Feuquières (1648-1711) was another veteran of the wars of Louis XIV, although the French king had refused to give him a command during the War of the Spanish Succession. Feuquières' *Memoires* were not only a profound discussion of the nature of contemporary warfare but also an opportunity for the sharp-tongued marquis to settle scores, as he fiercely criticised certain French generals and indeed the king himself.[41] Frederick was therefore very much following the spirit of Feuquières when he focused on the errors made by the French general Villeroi at the battle of Ramillies, rather than on the skill of Marlborough in taking advantage of them.[42] Indeed, there was a broader French tradition arguing that Marlborough's victories resulted from the failures of French commanders rather than Marlborough's own abilities.[43] Feuquières' ten-page description of the battle of Malplaquet did not mention the name of Marlborough once. Instead, he referred to the commander of the allied army throughout as 'Eugene'.[44]

One of Frederick's key sources for the events of the War of the Spanish Succession was the multivolume work of Charles de Sevin, marquis de Quincy (1660-1728):

[39]Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment*, pp. 34-37, pp. 52-53.
[40]Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 38-39.
[41]Jean-Pierre Bois, 'Le marquis de Feuquière, stratège au temps de Louis XIV', in Economica (ed.), *Combattre, Gouverner, Écrire: Études réunis en l'honneur de Jean Chagniot,* (Paris: Economica, 2003), pp. 147-160; Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 24-25, pp. 39-41, pp. 43-45.
[42]For Feuquières' criticism of Villeroi at Ramillies, see Antoine de Pas de Feuquières, *Mémoires*, new edn., (London: Pierre Dunoyer, 1736), p. 139, p. 260, p. 359-364.
[43]Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', pp. 195-200, p. 211.
[44]Feuquières, *Mémoires*, pp. 366-375.

essentially the French official history of the wars of Louis XIV.[45] Frederick's libraries were full of books describing the campaigns of French generals, whereas the works of Bland and Kane were absent.[46] Quincy and especially Voltaire, in his book *The Age of Louis XIV*, certainly wrote of Marlborough's military abilities with great respect.[47] Nevertheless, there was a notable division in the historiography of the War of the Spanish Succession. British officers focused on adulation of Marlborough. In the three decades following his campaigns, they did not show much interest in developments on the continent. In contrast, French authors paid far less attention to the British captain-general. Since French was the international language of the time and French-language books dominated military literature, this had significant implications for Marlborough's reputation.[48]

'The Ability of a Profound Politician'

Marlborough was in any case a controversial figure even in Britain. The target of fierce criticism from Tories, he went into voluntary exile between 1712 and 1714.[49] The French, in particular, saw Marlborough as conniving with Eugene and with the Dutch pensionary Anthonie Heinsius to prolong the War of the Spanish Succession unnecessarily in the service of their own 'personal interest'.[50] Voltaire described Marlborough as being motivated by the opportunity to gain not only 'glory' through 'the continuation of the war' but also 'an immense fortune, which he loved just as much'.[51]

---

[45]Hannelore Röhm and Sabine Scheidler, 'Die Bibliotheken Friedrichs des Großen', in Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten (ed.), *Friederisiko – Friedrich der Große. Die Ausstellung,* (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), p. 324, p. 327; Charles Sevin de Quincy, *Histoire militaire du règne de Louis le Grand, Roy de France*, 7 vols., (Paris: Denis Mariette, Jean-Baptiste Delespine, Jean-Baptiste Coignard, 1726).

[46]Bogdan Krieger, *Friedrich der Große und seine Bücher,* (Berlin and Leipzig: Giesecke & Debrient, 1914), pp. 140-146, pp. 173-174.

[47]Quincy, *Histoire militaire*, vol. V, pp. 495-501; Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol. I, pp. 385-387, pp. 409-413.

[48]Davies, *The Wandering Army*, pp. 4-6; Gruber, *Books and the British Army*, pp. 13-19.

[49]Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 17, pp. 21-22, pp. 357-361; Tobias Roeder, 'Scipio or Crassus? The contested heroic image of John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough, (1650-1722)', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 96 (2018), pp. 1-20.

[50]Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', pp. 206-211; *Mémoires du duc de Villars*, 3 vols., (The Hague: Pierre Gosse, 1734-6), vol. II, pp. 373-374 (quotation, p. 373).

[51]Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol. I, p. 420, p. 444 (quotation, p. 420). See also Feuquières, *Mémoires*, p. 25. On Marlborough's appetite for financial gain, see Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 366.

Frederick was happy to defend Marlborough's reputation when it suited his own rhetorical purposes.[52] In 1773, he wrote an imagined *Dialogue of the Dead*, in which the recently deceased Austrian soldier Prince Joseph Wenzel of Liechtenstein descended into the underworld and told Marlborough and Eugene how much things had changed since their time. This text was primarily intended to be an assertion of Frederick's authority vis-a-vis *philosophes* like Denis Diderot, editor of the *Encyclopédie*, who had snubbed an attempt by Frederick to invite him to Prussia. Responding to enlightened criticism of war, Frederick used the examples of Eugene and Marlborough to argue that military glory, such as he himself had won, was still worthy of praise. In such a context, the Prussian king naturally denounced scurrilous attacks on the reputation of a great general like Marlborough.[53]

However, Frederick had always depicted Marlborough as being as much a politician as a soldier. He praised the British general's '*coup d'œil*' in battle but also how 'politic' ('*politique*') he was.[54] In his *History of the House of Brandenburg*, Frederick described how Marlborough successfully negotiated to get Prussian troops sent to Italy in 1705, combining 'the flatteries of a courtier' with 'the merit of a great captain and … the ability of a profound politician'.[55]

In contrast to his almost total neglect of the details of Marlborough's generalship, Frederick repeatedly emphasised that the course of the War of the Spanish Succession had been altered by the fall from grace of Marlborough's wife, Sarah Churchill, whose position as Queen Anne's favourite had helped maintain royal support for Marlborough's prosecution of the war. Frederick repeated this again and again in his writings, starting with his *Refutation of the Prince of Machiavelli*, which was written even before he came to the throne. Indeed, Frederick's lavish praise of Marlborough in his *Epistle on Chance*, cited above, was written primarily to show that even such a successful military commander had been thwarted by the vicissitudes of political fortune.[56] Marlborough was thus important for Frederick primarily as an example of the interplay between war and politics.

---

[52]On the 'rhetorical function' of Frederick's writings, see Andreas Pečar, *Die Masken des Königs. Friedrich II. von Preußen als Schriftsteller,* (Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus, 2016) (quotation, p. 10).

[53]*Œuvres*, vol. XIV, pp. 284-297; Pečar, *Masken des Königs*, pp. 145-170; Storring, 'Age of Louis XIV', pp. 27-31.

[54]*Œuvres*, vol. VII, p. 100.

[55]*Œuvres*, vol. I, pp. 129-130 (quotations, p. 129).

[56]*Œuvres*, vol. I, p. 140; *Œuvres*, vol. V, pp. 185-186; *Œuvres*, vol. VIII, pp. 171-172, p. 322; *Œuvres*, vol. XII, p. 72; *Œuvres*, vol. XV, p. 73.

Indeed, Napoleon Bonaparte took a not dissimilar view, seeing Marlborough above all as an example of a general who was also a statesman. When Napoleon listed great commanders to learn from, he mentioned Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene and Frederick the Great, but not Marlborough. However, in 1806, Napoleon sponsored the publication of a biography of Marlborough, which emphasised that the British commander was not only an important general but also a diplomat. This implied a comparison with Napoleon himself, who also combined the roles of general and statesman. During his exile on the island of Saint Helena, Napoleon more than once praised Marlborough in these terms, calling him 'both captain and diplomat'. The French emperor was partly trying to diminish the reputation of his rival the Duke of Wellington, the other great British soldier of the long eighteenth century, through comparison with Marlborough. However, Napoleon also genuinely seems to have wanted to compare himself with the British captain-general, as two successful soldiers who also played an important role in politics.[57]

Conclusion

Marlborough was not only one of the ablest military commanders of the eighteenth century but also exemplified Britain's links to the wider European continent. He served part of his military apprenticeship in the French army and was made a colonel by Louis XIV. During the War of the Spanish Succession, it was above all Marlborough who kept the different states of the allied coalition together, maintaining close relationships with Eugene, Heinsius and many other key figures from across Europe. He was also for some time a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, much of the later criticism of Marlborough in England centred on suspicion of his close relations with foreigners.[58] This makes it all the more surprising that subsequent adulation of Marlborough has been mostly restricted to the Anglophone world.

However, while Marlborough repeatedly defeated the French on the battlefield, Francophone authors dominated the military literature of the eighteenth century. The three decades following the War of the Spanish Succession were a period of substantial divergence between the 'military literary world' in Britain and that on the continent, and this had implications for Marlborough's reputation.[59] While British writers lionised their hero, French authors focused on their own debates and

[57]Chandler, *Marlborough as Military Commander*, pp. x-xi; Alan J. Guy, 'John Churchill, Professional Soldiering, and the British Army, c. 1660-c.1760', in Hattendorf et al., *Marlborough*, p. 104; Oury, 'Marlborough as an Enemy', p. 212; Oury, *Marlborough*, p. 16, p. 20, pp. 387-388 (quotation, p. 388).

[58]Guy, 'John Churchill', pp. 110-111, p. 119; Hattendorf, 'Biographical Sketch', pp. 96-97; Hochedlinger, 'Marlborough and the Habsburg Monarchy', pp. 248-273; Oury, *Marlborough*, pp. 14-15, pp. 357-361, pp. 363-365, pp. 386-389.

[59]For the phrase 'military literary world', see Houlding, *Fit for Service*, p. 168.

preferred not to think too much about the English general who had beaten so many of their armies. The Prussian army's emphasis on infantry firepower was very much comparable with the British army's development under Marlborough's influence. However, the example of Frederick the Great exemplifies the dominance of French military culture during the long eighteenth century. The Prussian king read French authors like Feuquières and Folard, while almost completely neglecting the details of Marlborough's generalship. Frederick certainly expressed respect for Marlborough in general terms, seeing him as one of the great men of the age. However, the Prussian king considered the English captain-general to have been as much a politician as a soldier, and sought military inspiration far more from Eugene. Given Marlborough's success in holding together a pan-European coalition during the War of the Spanish Succession, it is deeply ironic that he should posthumously have been celebrated above all in the Anglophone world, while being less respected on the continent.

A Great Patriotic Duty: The Royal Victoria Patriotic Fund and the State's Responsibility to Care for Soldiers' Children, 1854-1890

JONATHAN SHIPE*
Virginia Military Institute, USA
Email: *shipejl@vmi.edu*

ABSTRACT
This article examines the creation of the Royal Victoria Patriotic Fund (RVPF) during the Crimean War to care for widows and orphaned children of soldiers. It further discusses how elite Commissioners used donations from throughout the British Empire to invest in imperial infrastructure projects, creating a fund to build an asylum for orphaned children of soldiers. The aim was to ensure that these children would supply the next generation of soldiers and domestic help, thereby furthering the Empire's expansion. This served as a primary mechanism for public/private charity in an era before the establishment of social welfare following the First World War.

Introduction

In 1854, amidst the Crimean War, Benjamin Oliveira claimed that 'surely the maintenance, education, and training of several thousands of Her Majesty's subjects, the children of her brave soldiers, cannot fail to enlist the sympathy, and command the support of the politician, the philanthropist, and the statesmen.'[1] The Crimean War caused a call to arms for British philanthropists, subjects, and citizens, unlike anything since the Napoleonic Wars earlier in the century.[2] The image of gallant

*Dr Jonathan Snipe is an instructor at the Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia, USA.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1955

[1]Royal Military Asylum, House of Commons. (04 May 1854) (132) cols. 1276-81. Andrew Rath, *The Crimean War in Imperial Context, 1854-1856,* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[2]Patricia Y.C.E. Lin, 'Citizenship, Military Families, and the Creation of a New Definition of 'Deserving Poor' in Britain, 1793–1815,' *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 7, 1, (Spring 2000): 5–46, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/7.1.5; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century: The*

soldiers dying in the Crimea while their wives and children starved in the streets of Colchester became one of the most striking contrasts that came out of the war.[3] However, the scale of the problem required more than private charity or government alone could provide under the terms of the Victorian concept of state provision and finance. The Victorian moral reformers, predominantly from the middle classes, argued that the state remained responsible for the welfare of these vulnerable children. The state strove to achieve this with financial prudence, a characteristic of the Victorian Liberal state.[4]

Civilian reformers concluded that promoting soldier marriage would improve the army's image after the Crimean War. However, this meant the state would incur higher costs for caring for soldiers' families. Many, but not all, reformers believed the moral benefits of a respectable army outweighed the financial concerns. Dominated by the economic considerations of the Liberal state and the Victorian ethos of self-help – popularised by Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859) – the government resisted expanding its obligations to soldiers' dependents, fearing that setting a precedent by providing too much aid to soldiers' families would be dangerous.[5] This served as the primary contradiction in managing the welfare of soldiers' families until the early twentieth century. The state's solution to this quandary was short-service reforms as part of the larger Cardwell Reforms of the 1870s, a series of policies that modernised the British army by restructuring deployment and recruitment; however, this served

---

Girl I Left Behind Me, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Patricia Y.C.E. Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families: British Soldiers' and Sailors' Families and the State, 1793-1815,' in *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820*, eds. Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Jane Rendall, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 99-117.

[3]'1857 Session I (102) Camp at Colchester. Copy of correspondence between the War Department and Major-General Gascoigne, in relation to the destitution amongst the families of soldiers at Colchester;' 'Soldiers' Wives in Camp,' *The United Service Gazette*, No. 1250, 26 February 1857, 4; issue no. 1265, 4 April 1857, p. 3.

[4]Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War: English Politics and Economics During the Crimean War,* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1967); Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Martin Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The Politics of Taxation in Britain, 1799-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

[5]Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (London: John Murray, 1859). Rebecca Richardson, *Material Ambitions: Self-Help and Victorian Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2021); Anne Baltz Rodrick, 'The Importance of Being an Earnest Improver: Class, Caste, and Self-Help in Mid-Victorian England,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, 1 (2001): pp. 39–50.

as an excuse to prevent further increases in marriage rates. While the state offered temporary relief, when necessary, such as increased rations and better housing, it refused to increase the number of allowed marriages, maintained at six per every one hundred men, with the commanding officer's permission, until the First World War.[6]

The New Poor Law of 1834 centralised relief and forced the destitute into harsh workhouses, exemplifying the Liberal approach to social welfare policy, but it also catalysed a child rescue movement that redefined childhood itself. As Swain and Hillel have shown, over the course of the nineteenth century, children shifted from being seen as parental property to being recognised as citizens or potential citizens with independent claims to protection.[7] Within this movement, parents – particularly working-class parents – were increasingly seen as the problem. Murdoch argues that by casting parents as villains and trying to 'imagine such children as orphans' that 'child rescuers were engaged in an act of duplicity, as part of a larger project, to deprive working-class parents of citizen rights.'[8] This dynamic would play out with particular force in the institutions the Patriotic Fund established, where surviving mothers were required to cede parental authority as a condition of their children's admission.
Soldiers' wives fought back against this type of discourse and its application to their families.[9] They claimed a right to welfare, given their husbands' service to the nation.

---

[6]Lynn MacKay, *Women and the British Army, 1815-1880,* (Martlesham, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2023); Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), see chapters 8-9; Ian F.W. Beckett, 'Women and Patronage in the Late Victorian Army,' *History* 85, 279 (2000): p. 463. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.00157 ; Paul Huddie, 'Victims or Survivors: army wives in Ireland during the Crimean War,' *Women's History Review* 27, 4 (2017): pp. 541-554, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1148502 .

[7]Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, nation, race and empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 3; Claudia Soares, *A Home from Home? Children and Social Care in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, 1870-1920,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Diane Warren and Laura Peters, *Rereading Orphanhood: Texts, Inheritance, Kin,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity, and the Poor Law in Victorian England,* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

[8]Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare and Contested Citizenship in London,* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 7; George K. Behlmer, *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians, 1850-1940,* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1998; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

[9]MacKay, *Women and the British Army, 1815-1880*; Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, see chapters 8-9; Ian F.W. Beckett, 'Women and Patronage in the Late Victorian

Because of their advocacy, the state saved them from the worst excesses of the Poor Law. Coercion persisted among military families, but to a lesser degree than among civilian working-class families. In a society where charity 'unmanned' the recipient because it made them contemptible, as women ratepayers, as voters for poor law guardians, might decide their fate, soldiers represented a unique problem. Their paltry pay meant that they would always remain poor, but these men, whom the elite press and politicians praised during times of war as intrepid heroes to encourage private charitable contributions, could not face the same disparagement as the civilian poor often experienced.[10] Scholars contest how far wartime sympathy extended – Spiers ties it to cyclical patterns of mobilisation, while Fulton shows that working-class perceptions were often negative or indifferent – but during crises like the Crimean War, charitable donations and press coverage suggest that public sympathy cut across class lines.[11]

The army developed a unique way of caring for soldiers' children and families. This involved a hierarchical structure in which parents cared for their children, supported by increasing military welfare throughout the nineteenth century. Children lived in barracks with their parents and managed on their fathers' meagre pay. The second level relied on regimental voluntary funds. These existed only when the commanding officer cared about his subordinates' families; thus, benefits lacked uniformity. The government did not sponsor or support these voluntary programmes. The War Office provided regimental day schools to educate soldiers' legitimate children if the soldier and his wife married 'on the strength' or with permission from the commanding officer. From 1850 to the 1880s, soldiers' children received a superior free education to civilian children.[12] In part, this ensured a future educated body for recruitment. This article focuses on the last level of the hierarchy. When soldiers served abroad or died

---

Army'; Paul Huddie, 'Victims or Survivors: army wives in Ireland during the Crimean War.'

[10]Edward Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army: 1868-1902,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Michael Brown, Anna Maria Barry, and Joanne Begiato, eds., *Martial Masculinities: Experiencing and Imagining the Military in the Long Nineteenth Century,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

[11] Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army*, p. 202; Richard Fulton, *Warrior Generation, 1865-1885: Militarism and British Working-Class Boys,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 18.

[12]Howard R. Clarke, *Redcoats in the Classroom: The British Army's Schools for Soldiers and their Children in the 19th Century,* (Warwick: Helion and Company, 2021). For newspaper coverage: 'Army School Regulations.' *Illustrated London News* [London, England] 15 July 1854: n.p. *Illustrated London News*; *Truth*, 11 October 1894, p. 815-816. For the Empire: The British Library (BL), IOR/L/MIL/7/9276, 'Military Collection 210: Army Schools in India: Files 1 to 18'

in service, several boarding schools arose to care for soldiers' children, most of which relied on private fundraising through subscriptions.

Civilian charity prompted the government to act through a massive outpouring of donated funds, which necessitated the establishment of a Select Committee to determine the most effective way to manage donations from a patriotic population to support soldiers and their disadvantaged families.[13] Within months of Britain's declaration of war against Russia, various organisations, primarily non-governmental, arose to fulfil the needs of soldiers' wives and to ensure adequate care and education for their children. The public's response to the call to aid soldiers' children in the mid-nineteenth century reflects an outpouring of patriotism, stemming from a patriotic sense of duty expressed in the sources as a moral calling to care for the children of soldiers who fought for their country and died on the battlefield for their Queen. Civilians and many in government viewed caring for soldiers' families as a moral and financial obligation of the state. However, this remained a point of controversy, with many arguing that private charity alone should suffice. A flyer for a charity theatre event to support the wives and children of soldiers killed in the Crimea serves as an example of the type of language used to spur fellow citizens to donate to various charitable organisations. After discussing the bravery of England's soldiers and promising to donate the proceeds from one night's performance, the theatre owner states, 'it is in a *good cause*, and will bear with it the *blessings* of the *bereaved* and *fatherless*, and we shall have the proud gratification of knowing we have performed a *good, just, and generous Christian act* towards our *suffering fellow creatures*.'[14] Newspapers carried advertisements with this type of humanitarian narrative discourse throughout the period.[15]

The creation and application of the Royal Victoria Patriotic Fund (RVPF) and the homes it established to care for the children of soldiers represent an early and overlooked stage in the development of the public/private mix of soldiers' benefits

[13]The UK National Archives (TNA) PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,' p. 11; Rebecca Gill, 'The Rational Administration of Compassion: The Origins of British Relief in War,' *Le Mouvement Social*, 227, (Apr.-Jun., 2009): pp. 9-26, https://doi.org/10.3917/lms.227.0009.

[14]TNA WO 143/40, 'Royal Military Asylum: MS Letters, 1853-1857,' 219, Italics are in the original document; Holly Furneaux, *Military Men of Feeling: Emotion, Touch, and Masculinity in the Crimean War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapters 3 and 4.

[15]Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Mourning, Pity, and the Work of the Narrative in the Making of 'Humanity,' in *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*, eds. Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 31-57.

that would eventually underpin the modern British welfare state.[16] Eliza Riedi has thoroughly documented the first official state pensions for soldiers' widows arising from the South African War, 1899-1902, and Susan Pedersen has shown that the inadequacy of charitable provision and the popular demand for state entitlement led to the creation of the Ministry of Pensions in 1917. This article demonstrates that the joined-up fundraising, imperial investment, and institutional care pioneered by the RVPF during the Crimean War established the template – and revealed the tensions – that these later developments inherited. Under the weight of mass mobilisation in the First World War, the state finally built a bureaucratic infrastructure to replace these voluntary structures.[17]

The Crimean War compelled the British public to confront the plight of soldiers' families on an unprecedented scale, leading to the creation of the RVPF. This article argues that the elite Commissioners who managed the Fund did far more than distribute charitable relief. By investing donations from across the British Empire in imperial infrastructure – railways, government securities, and colonial debentures – they generated the returns necessary to build and sustain institutions for the orphaned children of soldiers who had married with leave. Those institutions, in turn, were designed not simply as refuges, but as training grounds: boys for military service, girls for domestic labour, both feeding back into the imperial project that financed their

[16]Sarah Rodney, Julie-Marie Strange, and Bertrand Taithe, *The Charity Market and Humanitarianism: Britain from 1870 to the Present,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), chapter 6. Herbert Obinger, Klaus Petersen, and Peter Starke, eds., *Warfare and Welfare: Military Conflict and Welfare State Development in Western Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Paul Huddie and Amy Carney, 'Military Welfare History: What is it and why should it be considered?' *War & Society* 42, 4 (October 2023): pp. 305-316 and *Military Welfare History since the Eighteenth Century: War and Welfare* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2026). Mike Hally, 'Rights Not Charity: The Radical Roots of the British Legion,' (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 2022).

[17]Eliza Riedi, 'British Widows of the South African War and the Origins of War Widows' Pensions,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 29, 2 (2018): pp. 169-198. https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwx051 ; Eliza Riedi, "Our Soldiers' Widows': Charity, British War Widows, and the South African War (1899-1902),' *War in History*, 28, 1, (2021): pp. 46-70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344518818851 ; and Eliza Riedi, 'Assisting Mrs. Tommy Atkins," *The Historical Journal*, 60, 3 (September 2017): pp. 745-769. For the World War I context, see Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For the Ministry of Pensions, see '"Adapting the Machine": Welfare Policy after World War One and Covid-19,' *History and Policy*, https://historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/adapting-the-machine-welfare-policy-after-world-war-one-and-covid-19/ , accessed on 22 February 2026.

care. This circular relationship between imperial investment and institutional purpose reveals the RVPF as a primary mechanism of public/private welfare provision in an era before the state assumed direct responsibility for soldiers' families, a model whose limitations and precedents would shape the trajectory toward the welfare state, with all of its gender and class biases, that emerged after the First World War. [18]

The Patriotic Fund

The RVPF existed outside the bounds of other private charities driven by subscriptions from willing patrons. Throughout the period, various philanthropic organisations relied on subscription funds to raise money for charity. This remained the most common way to raise funds in Victorian Britain and its Empire during an era of free trade and limited state intervention. The Fund raised over £1 million in six months. For perspective, the Soldiers' Daughters' Home in Hampstead held an endowment of £14,000 in 1858.[19] According to the Royal Commissioners' report, donations to the Patriotic Fund crossed class boundaries, eliciting contributions from individuals in proportion to their income.[20] The call to action on behalf of soldiers' families appealed to Britons throughout the Empire, with donations to the fund from every colony, dominion, and dependency (see Figure 1).[21] It remained atypical to receive funds from such a broad range of colonies and territories for domestic charities.

[18]P.J. Cain and Anthony Hopkins, *British Imperialism: 1688-2000,* (London: Longman, 2002). Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860-1912,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Raymond Dumett, ed. *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1999); WO 143/33, 'Royal Military Asylum: Commandant's Letters, 1859-1886.'

[19]'The Soldiers' Daughters' Home,' *Coventry Standard*, 25 June 1858, p. 2; Denis Blomfield-Smith, *Heritage of Help: The Story of the Royal Patriotic Fund* (London: Robert Hale, Ltd., 1992).

[20]TNA PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Royal Commissioners,' p. 11; 'The Central Association for Soldiers' Wives, Widows, and Children,' *The Morning Chronicle*, 24 October 1854, Issue 27404.

[21]TNA PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Royal Commissioners,' p. 11.

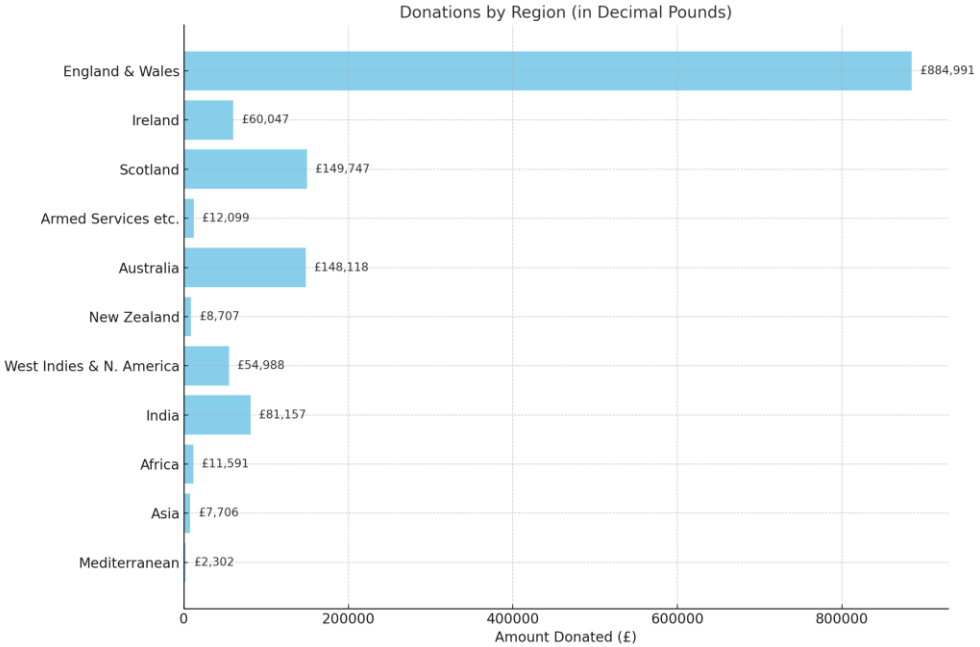

Figure 1: Donations by Region (in Decimal Pounds)

The Patriotic Fund and Imperial Investment

The British Empire reached such a great extent based on its ability to self-finance. Cain and Hopkins described this as 'Gentlemanly Capitalism,' which drove British investments from Argentina to New Zealand in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[22] The Patriotic Fund represents a remarkable example of how charities relied on investment in the empire to grow their endowments. At first, the Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund invested in conservative Exchequer Bills.[23] These embodied the most cautious form of investment in mid-Victorian Britain, and, in fact, the Commissioners were following legal and fiduciary conventions that required them to

[22]Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000*, pp. 646-647.
[23]TNA PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund, Appendix B,' p. 17.

invest in what were considered "safe" securities.[24] The Commissioners also invested in domestic railway expansion in the early 1860s (see Figure 2).[25]

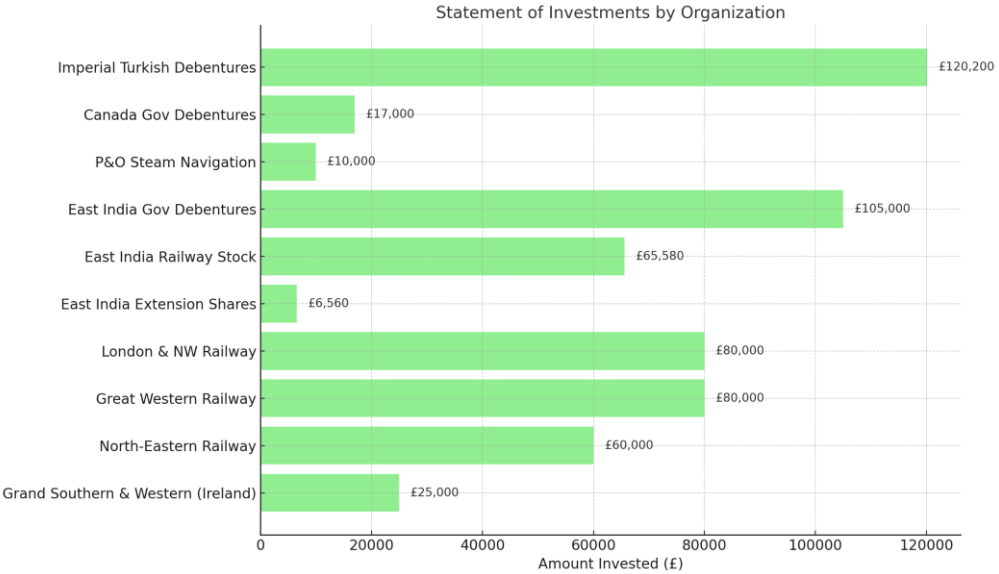

Figure 2: Statement of Investments by Organisation

While the domestic economy, especially railway debentures, absorbed most early investments, by 1861, the elite Commissioners of the RVPF began investing in the Empire. Approximately 57 percent of the portfolio was invested in securities tied to imperial territories, imperial allies (the Ottoman Empire, which Britain had just fought the Crimean War to defend), or imperial infrastructure (P&O, the primary steamship line connecting Britain to India and the Far East). This is a case of utilising investments in the Empire to fund schools for the children of soldiers who have been orphaned, with the hope that their sons might become future soldiers to defend and expand the Empire, and their daughters might become future wives to support the domestic responsibilities of the army or domestic servants for elite households at home or in

[24]Mary Poovey, *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Nancy Henry and Cannon Schmitt, eds., *Victorian Investments: New Perspectives on Finance and Culture,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Chantal Stebbings, *The Private Trustee in Victorian England,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[25]TNA PIN 96/1, Appendix II, 31 Dec. 1861.

the Empire.[26] This type of intimate relationship undergirded many of the Commissioners' decisions, yet it has received little attention in current historiography.[27]

The RVPF invested most of its portfolio in securities tied to the British Empire and its strategic allies, channelling charitable donations from the British public into the financial instruments that underwrote imperial governance, colonial railway construction, and the strategic stabilisation of allied states. This was not an incidental byproduct of trustee investment norms – though those norms conditioned it – but a portfolio heavily weighted toward imperial holdings. Commissioners likely chose these securities for their safety and yield characteristics (government-guaranteed Indian railway stock was considered among the safest investments available), perhaps not out of a conscious desire to finance the empire. The point is that the system was designed so that 'safety' and 'empire' were synonymous categories in Victorian investment, and the Patriotic Fund is a vivid illustration of how that equivalence worked in practice.[28]

The funds from these investments provided pensions to Crimean soldiers' widows and orphans, built the Royal Victoria Patriotic Asylum (RVPA) and the Boys' Temporary Home at Wandsworth (BHW), its most significant legacy, and trained the next

[26]'Evidence of His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge, Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief,' *Naval and Military Gazette and Weekly Chronicle of the United Service*, 23 February 1867, p. 125.

[27]Alan Ramsay Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859-1899*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), pp. 101-107.

[28]Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Christopher Clay, *Gold for the Sultan: Western Bankers and Ottoman Finance, 1856-1881*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Andrew Smith, 'Patriotism, Self-Interest and the "Empire Effect": Britishness and British Decisions to Invest in Canada, 1867–1914,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41,1 (2013): pp. 59–80; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A History of British Imperialism 1850 to the Present*, (London: Pearson, 2012), p. 63; Poovey, *The Financial System in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 213-214; Daniel Thorner, *Investment in Empire: British Railway and Steam Shipping Enterprise in India, 1825-1849*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950); Michael Satow and Ray Desmond, *Railways of the Raj*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1982); and Ian J. Kerr, *Building the Railways of the Raj, 1850-1900*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Dan Bogart and Latika Chaudhary, 'Engines of Growth: The Productivity Advance of Indian Railways, 1874-1912,' *Journal of Economic History* 73, 2 (2013): pp. 339-370; Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*, (London: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 184-185.

generation of soldiers and servants for the metropole and empire. The monies from the Fund also supported various other orphanages and schools throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland.[29] Without the returns on investment made possible through the Empire, the success of these institutions would not have been possible.

RVPF Distributions

The Patriotic Fund symbolises a unique blend of public and private, as well as imperial and domestic concerns. It existed as a typical Victorian method of financing charitable endeavours, albeit on a much larger scale than those of its contemporaries. The RVPA and the BHW stood as the most important legacies of the RVPF. By 1872, 725 children attended these boarding schools.[30] Throughout its history, the Fund supported the education of thousands of soldiers' children. However, the need consistently outpaced the space in these institutions. Once the Commissioners received the donations, they needed to decide how to distribute the assets. Women qualified for funds based on their husband's rank and the number of eligible, legitimate children. In deciding the rate of pensions, the Commissioners relied on actuaries, who concluded that the average lifespan for a widow would require nineteen years of payments, or on average, £9 10s per woman. The actuaries expected to care for orphans for at least 10 years at £6 per child per year. Children did not have to attend the RVPA or the BHW to receive these allowances.[31]

Not all women and children received these allowances. Women had to meet specific criteria to receive help. First, women needed to prove that they had attempted to receive parochial support through the Poor Law Guardians and that they did not earn pensions from other sources, such as the Central Association, another private charity supporting soldiers' families, or the government.[32] Second, the Commissioners required a valid marriage certificate and proof that the couple received permission to marry. The widows also needed to present baptism certificates to prove the legitimacy of their children seeking support. Each of these steps required tremendous effort on the part of women to obtain, and this often served as an obstacle in receiving aid, especially considering the mobility of soldiers' families. Without this documentation, the Committee denied support claims.

The pension might not be permanent. If a woman remarried, which was common among the working classes, she lost access to the pension. Likewise, if a woman 'by

[29]Paul Huddie, *The Crimean War and Irish Society*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).
[30] Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home,* 107.
[31]TNA PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,' 22.
[32]Ibid., 22.

profligate conduct dishonour the memory of her husband,' the pension might end.[33] Profligate conduct ranged from drunkenness to illicit sexual relationships, and these types of cases came before the Executive and Financial Committee for review at every meeting. For example, Mary Ann Waring lost her pension for 'drunken and irregular behaviour,' while Lucinda Hawkins faced accusations of 'keeping company with a married man who has gone from his wife.'[34] Criminal conduct resulted in removal from the pension list. Charlotte Figg lost her pension upon her conviction for 'uttering a counterfeit shilling.'[35] As these examples suggest, the Commissioners of the Fund used middle-class ideals of respectability to decide who was worthy of help and to police the behaviour of those who received aid. Commissioners used the promise of aid to reform aspects of working-class culture they viewed as problematic, without concern for the impact of pension removal on children outside their care.[36]

Criticisms of the RVPF

The RVPF itself came under criticism from multiple fronts throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The claims centred on allegations of financial mismanagement and alleged frivolous spending. From the beginning, people questioned the perceived high salaries of its administration, though the Fund's officers justified the expenditures as due to the heavy workload involved. An audit revealed embezzlement by a clerk, yet another example of the Commissioner's disconnection from the Fund's daily operations. By 1881, the Commissioners realised they stood deficient by £21,594.[37] They blamed the deficit on granting benefits to widows and orphans of the Ashanti War. The public called on the Patriotic Fund to support the widows of other colonial

[33]TNA PIN 96/7, 'Royal Commission Patriotic Fund: Executive and Finance Committee Minutes of Proceedings,' pp. 45 and 68. J. Burn and J. McDonald, 'An Investigation into the Rates of Re-Marriage and Mortality amongst Widows in receipt of relief from the Patriotic (Russian War) Fund, 1854-1900,' *Journal of the Institute of Actuaries (1886-1994)*, 38, 5, (July 1904): pp. 433-501.

[34]TNA PIN 96/8, 'Royal Commission Patriotic Fund: Executive and Finance Committee Minutes of Proceedings,' pp. 99, 104.

[35]Ibid., 97.

[36]Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1987) and Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1995).

[37]TNA PIN 96/1, 'First Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,'; 'Patriotic Fund—Audit of Accounts—Question,' House of Commons. (15 February 1875) (222) col. 310; 'Question,' House of Commons, (16 June 1863) (171) cols. 978-80; 'Question,' House of Commons, (16 March 1869) (194) col. 1465; 'Question,' House of Commons, (10 May 1869) (196) col. 469.

wars throughout the nineteenth century.[38] To recover and remain solvent, the Commissioners sold the BHW to the United Westminster School District for £32,000 and liquidated their property at Margate, which had been used for children recovering from tuberculosis.[39]

The Royal Victoria Patriotic Asylum for Girls

Donations to the Royal Victoria Patriotic Fund established the RVPA and the BHW. For much of their early history, the schools catered only to the sons and daughters of soldiers who served in the Crimea. The BHW would see 38 percent of its students, who attended between 1857 and 1867, join the army or navy, often in the same regiments as their fathers or other male relatives. Both schools never had enough space to meet the need, so they limited admission to the legitimate children of soldiers who had married with leave. Preference always went to 'total orphans' who had lost both parents, but they would also admit children who had lost their fathers. Frequently, soldiers' widows would send one or two of their children to the RVPA so they could better provide for the children who remained at home.

Construction of the RVPA began on 11 July 1857, when Queen Victoria laid the cornerstone. Two years later, on 1 July 1859, the first girls moved into the home.[40] By 1875, the asylum housed and educated 725 girls at a time, making it the largest home for soldiers' daughters by a significant margin. The RVPA existed to train soldiers' daughters for future careers as domestic servants, laundresses, or milliners. In fact, by 1867, 53 percent of the girls who entered the RVPA left as domestic servants.[41]

[38]TNA PIN 96/2, 'Twentieth Report of the Royal Commissioners,' 'Patriotic Fund: Reports of the Royal Commissioners;' 'Question,' House of Commons, (10 July 1879) (248) col. 15; 'The Patriotic Fund—Powers of Commissioners—Question,' House of Commons, (23 May 1879) (246) cols. 1136-7; TNA PIN 96/1, 'Ninth Report of Royal Commissioners,' pp. 23-26; TNA PIN 96/1, 'Patriotic Fund: Reports of the Royal Commissioners,' pp. 3-4; 'The Egyptian War Fund—Committee,' House of Commons, 22 November 1882 vol 274 cc1858-9.

[39]TNA PIN 96/2; '[Bill 240.] Second Reading,' House of Commons, 08 August 1881 vol 264 c1343; 'Second Reading,' House of Lords, 28 July 1881 vol 264 cc10-4; TNA PIN 96/2, 'Nineteenth Report of the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund to Her Majesty the Queen, 6 May 1881,' 6; TNA PIN 96/10, 'Royal Patriotic Fund Executive and Finance Committee minutes, Book 2, 01 January 1876 to 31 December 1879,'; TNA PIN 96/11, 'Royal Patriotic Fund Executive and Finance Committee minutes, Book 6, 01 January 1879 to 31 December 1885.'

[40]TNA PIN 96/1, '1861 Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,' p. 4.

[41]TNA PIN 96/1, 'Seventh Report of the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund, 4 December 1867,' p. 7.

Industrial education received the greatest attention from the Inspector of Schools during his annual inspections of schools receiving money from the Patriotic Fund.

The Inspector of Schools reported to the Executive and Financial Committees of the Patriotic Fund. He provided insight into both classical and industrial education, as well as into school management and the institution's health. These reports offer insight into students' daily lives, albeit from an official perspective. The Inspector had considerable authority within the asylums he visited, and the Executive Committee followed his recommendations. Reverend A.R. Grant served in this role for most of the period under examination. His reports were honest and critical about educational attainments in areas such as math and writing. He generally disparaged the administrative staff of both schools but also praised them when they did an excellent job. Grant visited every institution at least twice per year, spending a couple of days at each.[42]

Discipline at the RVPA

Discipline was a key focus in Grant's reports as the RVPA sought to instil middle-class notions of respectability among its charges. This was particularly important as nearly 53 percent of the girls housed in the RVPA would enter domestic service in elite homes after they aged out. By hiring from the RVPA, these elite families expected trustworthy and well-behaved servants. In 1864, Grant reported that the discipline in the senior school at the RVPA seemed 'harsh and unconciliatory,' while in the junior school it remained too relaxed. He suggested the schoolmistress did not have 'sufficient command over the Children.'[43]

The RVPA employed a similar system of discipline to that of both the military and the Royal Military Asylum at Chelsea, whereby girls received 'Good Conduct' stripes if they exhibited proper behaviour for a year. In 1862, 177 girls wore at least one badge. These badges came with certain rewards, but losing one also served as a standard form of punishment.

The Executive Committee reviewed the asylum's punishment books at each meeting. For one year, from March 1862 to March 1863, the punishment book recorded thirty punishments. Most of the infractions involved stealing more food. Of the thirty cases, eight involved corporal punishment, with the girls receiving between three and eight

[42]Ibid., pp. 22-25; Michael Mitterauer, *A History of Youth*, (Blackwell Publishers, 1992).
[43]TNA PIN 96/1, 'Fifth Report of the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund, 22 July 1864,' p. 26.

strikes on the hand.[44] Theft was a key preoccupation of the elite, particularly in domestic service, so it is unsurprising to see it listed as a key offense.

Punishment in the RVPA came under intense scrutiny after the death of 'Girl Bennett' in 1862, which occurred right in the middle of a national reckoning with corporal punishment. Two landmark cases had already mobilised British public opinion: the death of Private Frederick John White after military flogging in 1846, and the death of schoolboy Reginald Chancellor, beaten to death by his schoolmaster Thomas Hopley in 1860.[45] Bennett was placed in solitary confinement for rudeness to the laundress, and although she was the daughter of a soldier, she was not a pupil; she was too old for admission and was instead employed as an unpaid domestic servant. While trying to light a lantern with 'Lucifer matches,' which relied on elemental phosphorus for ignition and could sometimes be explosive, she caught herself on fire and perished from her injuries. The Lady Superintendent and Chaplain received a harsh rebuke from the Executive Committee, and when the committee refused to fire them, many members of the Ladies Committee resigned.[46]

Corporal punishment, understood at the time as direct physical violence to the body, received the most attention in the press and before the Executive Committee. Leadership preferred non-corporal punishments to keep strict control and respectability within the institution. The subordination of corporal punishments to other forms occurred alongside civilian and military discussions about the efficacy of flogging in schools, prisons, and the military.[47] Corporal punishment remained less

[44]Ibid., 25; TNA PIN 96/8, 129; 'Royal Patriotic Fund—Case of the Girl Bennett—Question,' House of Commons, 01 June 1863 vol 171 cc192-204; TNA PIN 96/1, Appendix 5: Coroner's Inquest.

[45]Jacob Middleton, 'Thomas Hopley and Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Corporal Punishment,' *History of Education* 34, 6 (November 2005): pp. 599–615; Diana Garrisi, 'On the Skin of a Soldier: The Story of Flogging,' *Clinics in Dermatology* 33, 6 (2015): pp. 693-696; Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*; and, Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-54*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[46]'1861 Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,' TNA PIN 96/1, 9. 'The Royal Victoria Patriotic Asylum—Question,' House of Commons, 11 June 1863 vol 171 cc703-5.

[47]Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth, 1889-1939*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); Myra C. Glenn, *Campaigns against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914,* (Cambridge: Cambridge

severe at the RVPA, where the Executive Committee ordered 'The use of the strap be discontinued [at Barnet Girl's School]. Three strikes on the hand with a cane/same as at Wandsworth/to be substituted. Care to be takin [sic] that the hand is not struck severely.'[48] While this appears less severe at first glance, it was still potentially dangerous. Dietary restrictions, such as a bread-and-water diet, were a preferred form of chastisement for the young women at the RVPA. However, while bread-and-water diets were not considered corporal punishment at the time, modern scholarship on adolescent development makes clear that such dietary restrictions were, in fact, bodily punishments that directly interfered with growth, pubertal development, brain maturation, and immune function. This is especially true for young women in their mid-to-late teens who have entered puberty and started menstruating, which requires greater caloric intake.[49]

Disciplining Parents

Surviving parents also came under the discipline of these institutions. This power manifested in both subtle and overt ways. One expression of this power was the banishment of parents from the property or the prohibition on children returning home for vacations.[50] The Committee forbade children from returning home during holidays because they returned to the institutions unclean, unwell, or in poor discipline. For example, the doctor said that because of the 'lousy state of their heads,' children could not return home for annual holidays for one year. These types of declarations appeared in the Medical Officer's reports.[51] The Committee also threatened to cease allowances if the mother continued to interfere in the charity's operations. Much like when Mary Ann Lawrence sought to interfere with her son's choice to join the army, the Commissioners of the RVPA did not hesitate to address

University Press, 1994); Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England, 1872-1989*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994).

[48]TNA PIN 96/7, p. 297.

[49]TNA PIN 96/8, pp. 226, 229-232. Michael Mitterauer, *A History of Youth;* Shane A. Norris, Edward A. Frongillo, Maureen M. Black, Yanhui Dong, Caroline Fall, Michelle Lampl, Angela D. Liese, et al. "Nutrition in Adolescent Growth and Development," *The Lancet* 399, 10320 (January 8, 2022): pp. 172–84, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01590-7 ; Delia Fuhrmann, Lisa J. Knoll, and Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, 'Adolescence as a Sensitive Period of Brain Development,' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 19, 10 (October 2015): pp. 558-66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.07.008 ; Ashraf T. Soliman, et. al., "Review Nutritional Interventions during Adolescence and Their Possible Effects," *Acta Biomedica* 93, 1 (2022): e2022087, https://doi.org/10.23750/abm.v93i1.12789 .

[50]TNA PIN 96/7, p. 371; TNA PIN 96/8, p. 20.

[51]TNA PIN 96/7, pp. 28 & pp. 50-51.

mothers who attempted to exert too much control over their children.[52] The Committee warned Elizabeth Grocott that if she continued to 'improperly interfere with or unsettle' her son, she would lose her allowance.[53] This represents coercion typical of the Patriotic Fund. Commissioners required surviving parents to abdicate their parental responsibilities and cede them to the schools' officers as a condition of admission. Countless women, such as Caroline Trotter, struggled with this precondition, often resulting in lost visitation rights for extended periods.[54]

Religious Controversies at the RVPA

While discipline received criticism and, at times, almost amounted to a scandal, it did not compare to the controversy surrounding religious education within the institution. The RVPA existed as a Protestant school under the Church of England, which did not accept children from Roman Catholic backgrounds. Disestablishment – the fierce public debate over whether to strip the Anglican Church of its privileged, state-sponsored status – remained a contentious issue in the mid-nineteenth century.[55] The British army, while many debate the religiosity of the men, contained a sizeable proportion of Irish soldiers who practiced Roman Catholicism.[56] It was therefore unsurprising that religious conflicts might arise over the education of soldiers' children. The controversy over education and religion began when the Duke of Norfolk demanded that the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund present to the House of Lords all records regarding the number of Roman Catholic widows and orphans that the Fund had aided. Norfolk's concern focused on Catholic children educated in Protestant schools, as he saw that the only outcome would be to destroy the child's faith, which he considered a great 'injustice.'[57] The Commissioners and members of

[52]TNA PIN 96/7, p. 228.
[53]TNA PIN 96/7, p. 222.
[54]TNA PIN 96/7, p. 226.
[55]Richard Helmstadter, ed., *Freedom and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1997); Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Pauline Adams, *English Catholic Converts and the Oxford Movement in Mid-19th Century England*, (Washington, D.C.: Academica Press, LLC, 2010).
[56]Byron Farwell, *Mr. Kipling's Army: All the Queen's Men*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), pp. 216-223; Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005); Paul Huddie, *The Crimean War and Irish Society*, see chapter 4-5.
[57]TNA PIN 96/2, 'Nineteenth Report of the Royal Commissioners of the Patriotic Fund to Her Majesty the Queen, 6 May 1881,' p. 6; TNA PIN 96/10, 'Royal Patriotic Fund Executive and Finance Committee minutes, Book 2, 01 January 1876 to 31 December 1879;' TNA PIN 96/11, 'Royal Patriotic Fund Executive and Finance Committee minutes, Book 6, 01 January 1879 to 31 December 1885;' Frank H. Wallis,

the Executive and Finance Committee assured the Lords that they did not plan to convert Catholic children or to discriminate against those institutions.[58]

Education was a particular point of tension during discussions of religion. This became more difficult when dealing with interfaith marriages, particularly when the husband died on the battlefield. Archbishop Cullen shows the emotional component involved in these discussions, stating,

> Would it not have been a source of bitter affliction to the Irish Catholic soldier dying on the shores of the Black Sea had he known that his children would be exposed to be robbed of that faith which he valued more than life?[59]

The most dramatic case involved Sergeant Kirley, who died in the Crimea after which a medical superintendent declared his wife a 'dangerous lunatic,' committed her to a mental asylum, and left her children's religious faith in question.[60] The case reached the Court of Queen's Bench, which ruled that whoever held 'natural guardianship' determined the children's religious education. The grandparents, as guardians, declared the children Protestants.[61] Margaret Kirley was later declared to be of 'sound mind and body,' and regained custody, continuing to raise as Protestants.[62] The religious controversies of the Kirley case revealed the same underlying tension that shaped every aspect of the Fund's operations. The RVPA's power to determine a child's religious education was, for Catholic families, simply another form of institutional coercion that required mothers to cede parental authority upon admission. The Duke of Norfolk and Archbishop Cullen understood this clearly: a system that could separate children from their parents could also separate them from their faith.

Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain, (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1993); John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Edward R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968); Eric G. Tenbus 'Defending the Faith through Education: The Catholic Case for Parental and Civil Rights in Victorian Britain,' *History of Education Quarterly* 48, 3 (February 2017): pp. 432-51.

[58]'Patriotic Fund - Correspondence Moved For,' House of Lords, 19 April 1858 vol 149 cc1255-63; TNA PIN 96/1, 'Second Report of the Executive and Finance Committee, Patriotic Fund,' pp. 2-6.

[59]Ibid., pp. 34, 36-38.

[60]Ibid., p. 56.

[61]Ibid., p. 56; Appendices 15-17, and 35-41.

[62]Ibid., p. 56.

Religion played a significant role in educating soldiers' children, and the Patriotic Fund Commissioners, responding to pressure by the Duke of Norfolk and Archbishop Cullen, agreed to allocate specific allowances for Catholic military orphans to be educated and housed in certified Catholic orphanages and convents, rather than being placed in the Anglican-run RVPA. As Paul Huddie has convincingly demonstrated, most enlisted men, and therefore wives and children, came from Ireland, and many remained devoted Roman Catholics.[63] J.R. Morell functioned as an inspector of schools for the Catholic orphanages. Morell made similar observations regarding the state of the buildings, students' health, and the educational rigor. Morell's reports held a harsher tone than Grant's. For example, he observed of the Norwood Catholic Orphanage, 'Many of the children seem sickly, chiefly with scrofulous tendency. The excellent ventilation must help greatly to counteract this evil. A little more bathing might be desirable.'[64] The inspector's reports determined whether the schools would continue to receive funding from the RVPF, so the tone and observations mattered.

Captain Fishbourne visited the Catholic orphanages in Ireland. He visited three schools in 1863-64: St. Clare's Orphanage at Harold's Cross, St. Vincent De Paul School, and The Convent of Sisters of Mercy at Bagot Street. His reports took a more critical tone than those of Grant and Morell, but they also provided additional details not found in other accounts. For example, Fishbourne commented on the clothing the children made in each school as part of their industrial training.[65] Fishbourne remained critical of the education children received at these institutions, arguing that it should have been more advanced than it was at the time of his visit. Despite the harsh tone of the reports, the schools continued to accept Roman Catholic children and received support from the RVPF. The tenor of the reports on Irish orphanages reflects the Anglo-Irish tensions of the mid-century.

Conclusion

The RVPF transformed a wartime outpouring of patriotic charity into a self-sustaining system of imperial investment and institutional training, but its benevolence was inseparable from its coercion. The Fund saved soldiers' families from the worst excesses of the Poor Law only on terms set by the elite Commissioners: exclusionary admission criteria that shut out families who had married without leave, behavioural policing that punished widows for perceived moral failures while their children bore the consequences, forced surrender of parental authority as a condition of admission, and disciplinary regimes – including corporal punishment and dietary restrictions – that constituted real bodily harm. The Fund did not simply care for soldiers' children;

[63]Paul Huddie, 'Victims or Survivors,' p. 542.
[64]TNA PIN 96/8, p. 35; 'Question,' House of Lords, 27 June 1865 vol 180 c859.
[65]TNA PIN 96/8, p. 37.

it shaped them according to the needs of the imperial state, training boys for military service and girls for domestic labour, while disciplining both into compliance with middle-class norms of respectability. The benevolence was real, but so was the coercion, and the two were inseparable.

Scholars such as Eliza Riedi and Susan Pedersen have rightly identified the South African War and the First World War as transformative moments in the development of state responsibility for soldiers' families. But the voluntary model that those later reforms replaced did not appear fully formed in 1899 or 1914. It was built, tested, and found wanting over the preceding half-century. The RVPF established the template: public donations managed by elite Commissioners, invested in imperial infrastructure, channelled into institutions that imposed conditions on the very families they claimed to serve. Each subsequent crisis – the Indian Revolt, the Zulu Wars, the South African War – exposed the inadequacy of this model while simultaneously reinforcing its logic. By the time of mass mobilisation in the First World War, which overwhelmed the capacity of voluntary structures, the state did not invent a new system so much as assume direct control of one whose outlines the Patriotic Fund had drawn decades earlier. Pushing the origins of military welfare back to the Crimean War reveals not only that the story begins much earlier than previously recognised, but that the tensions between patriotic generosity and institutional coercion that defined the RVPF persisted into the welfare state that succeeded it.

Tale of Two Narratives: Indian Medical Personnel in the First World War

SABYASACHI DASGUPTA*
Visva-Bharati University, India
Email: sabyasachidasg@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This paper interrogates two interconnected narratives – Sisir Sarbadhikari's Abhi Le Baghdad and the biography of Dr Kalyan Mukhopadhya which feature the travails of Bengali medical personnel serving with the British forces at the Mesopotamian front during the First World War. The central question that resonates throughout the article is one of representation, for both the narratives raise a host of issues, including the Bengali male's uneasy engagement with his masculinity, nationalism, pacifism, the futility of war and Pan-Asian cosmopolitanism. The relative lack of rancour towards the opposing Turkish forces, who were held as protagonists of both prisoners' narratives, leads us to the fundamental tenor of this article – are the assertions and absences, implicit and explicit, in these two narratives rooted in their specific contexts or could they be touted as widely representative of the Bengali 'bhadralok' mentality of the times?

Introduction

This paper interrogates and seeks to contextualise two interconnected First World War narratives featuring the travails of Bengali medical personnel serving with the British forces at the Mesopotamian front. The first narrative is Sisir Sarbadhikari's *Abhi Le Baghdad*, the autobiographical account of a Bengali detailing his experiences as a nurse with the Bengal Ambulance Corps in Mesopotamia. Sarbadhikari's account was written at the prompting of his daughter-in-law and almost forty years after his return from Mesopotamia.[1] The account gets its name from the utterances of a Muslim soldier on the retreat from Ctesiphon after the British defeat at the hands of the Turks where

*Sabyasachi Dasgupta is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, India.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1956

[1]Sisir Prasad Sarbadhikari, *Abhi Le Baghdad* (Kolkata: Naya Udyog, first published 1958, first reprinted Kolkata, Naya Udyog, 2014).

he stated mockingly 'Abhi le Baghdad' (Baghdad is there for the taking). Sarbadhikari wrote and hid his diary in his boots. Miraculously it survived the war.[2]

The other narrative explored here is a biography of Dr Kalyan Mukhopadhyay, an Indian Medical Service doctor who served at the Mesopotamian front around the same time and, as we shall see, partly in the same area as Sarbadhikari. The biography was skilfully written by his grandmother Makhoda Devi, who based it partly on the letters written by Mukhopadhyay to his mother when he was at the front. Tragically, Mukhopadhyay would not survive the war and would die of an outbreak of enteric fever in a Turkish prisoner-of-war camp, though not before curing many other prisoners of war in the camp of the same deadly disease.[3]

The partial overlap of their professional paths in Mesopotamia was one of the compelling reasons to compare and contrast these two specific narratives. The main protagonists in these two narratives, Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay, experienced the vicissitudes of war in the same theatre. It is as if their professional lives during their service in Mesopotamia were intertwined. Both went to Basra though they boarded ship from different ports in India. They were eventually posted to the same station, Kut, from the third week of November 1915. Their fates were interwoven for the next few months, starting with the march towards Ctesiphon to fight the Turkish forces in the third week of November and then the same Turkish prisoner camp at Russell Lines in May 1916. Thereafter their lives would take different twists and turns. While Sarbadhikari returned from the front, notwithstanding his time as a Turkish prisoner of war, Mukhopadhyay perished in a Turkish prisoner-of-war camp.

One seeks to contextualise these narratives and, at the same time, locate them in a broader setting. Therefore, the central question that resonates throughout is one of representation, for both the narratives raise a host of issues, the Bengali male's uneasy engagement with his masculinity, nationalism, pacifism, the futility of war, and Pan-Asian cosmopolitanism, to name but a few. The narratives also demonstrate a relative lack of rancour towards the opposing Turkish forces who held the protagonists of both narratives prisoner, albeit in contrasting modes. This again leads us to the fundamental tenor of this article, are the assertions and absences, implicit and explicit, in these two narratives rooted in their specific contexts or could they be touted as widely representative of the Bengali '*bhadralok*' (literally meaning decent folk) mentality of the times?

The term *bhadralok* was an appellation used for the predominantly Hindu Bengali middle classes who had from the later decades of the eighteenth century risen to

[2]Ibid, p. 29.
[3]Makhoda Devi, *Kalyan Pradeep,* (Kolkata: Self-Published, 1927), p. 334.

prominence in a particularly colonial context. Their economic interests were intrinsically tied to the colonial economy, mainly as dependent junior partners and agents of British business interests in Colonial India, or were beholden to the British for land grants. The *bhadrolak* has thus been described by some historians as someone who pursued a vocation which involved the pursuit of the mind and was far removed from manual labour. Another criteria was that they lived at least in a *pucca* or concrete house and earned a respectable income. The *bhadrolak* additionally and very crucially had to possess refined manners and tastes, and dressed, and conversed in a cultivated manner; in short they were men of culture and were a cultural elite, a status group to which all avowedly non-*bhadralok* classes aspired. They were also at the forefront of the Bengal Renaissance, a nineteenth century reformist phenomenon, which is ascribed to the Bengali *bhadralok's* tryst with Western education and civilization.[4]

The *bhadralok* has been depicted by some historians of the Bengal Renaissance, such as Ashok Sen, as a dependant bourgeoisie because their rise was attributed to their servile links with the colonial regime. Consequently Sen argues that the *bhadralok* as a class displayed a stubborn conservatism despite the presence of certain very progressive minds among their ranks.[5] The second half of the nineteenth century saw a marked increase in this conservative strand amongst them. Coupled with it was a growing disquiet and disgruntlement especially among the lower middle class sections of the *bhadralok* class with the policies and attitudes of the colonial regime.[6] The colonial establishment responded to this newfound hostility in multiple ways. One way was to dub the *bhadralok* as an effeminate *babu* as he was sometimes referred to or addressed as. Mrinalini Sinha argues that the *bhadralok* showed considerable anxiety at this affront to his avowed masculinity, a tension which is markedly evinced in the two narratives in question.[7]

This article will explore this manifest tension with regard to the masculinity displayed in the two narratives. The other apparently contrary theme is pacifism. Kalyan Mukhopadhyay becomes a pacifist who was appalled by the mayhem around him.[8] We seek to contextualise and complicate these emotions, tension, and anxieties and enquire whether this disquiet in Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay regarding their

[4]J.R Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal, University of California Press,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 13.
[5]Ashok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones,* (Calcutta: Riddhi-India: 1977).
[6]Sumit Sarkar, *Modern Times: India,1880-1950's*, *Environment, Economy and Culture* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014), pp. 318-321.
[7]Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman And the Effeminate Bengali*, *In the Late Nineteenth Century,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.14.
[8]See Makhoda Devi, "*Kalyan Pradeep*", (Kolkata: Self-Published, 1927), pp. 317-318.

masculinity and the pacifism exhibited by Mukhopadhyay were specific to their context or broadly representative of the *bhadralok* mentality of the times.

Literary Narrative as History

The source base for this article being two narratives, it is imperative that, at the very outset, to discuss what historians seek when they deal with narratives, either literary or, as in this case, a war memoir and a biography based partly on the protagonist's letters written to his family from a theatre of war. The two narratives in question could be classified as war literature, though not as war fiction, for they are built around events which have purportedly occurred. What opposes history and fiction does not have to do with the structuring activity invested in their narrative structures as such, rather it has to do with the 'truth-claim.' Paul Fussell makes the argument that war memoirs, though based essentially on the protagonist's personal experiences, often veer towards the fictional as the protagonists sometimes have a tendency to exaggerate their own role in the scheme of things and tend to invest their actions with a heroic halo.[9] Notwithstanding these traits, as Ricoeur suggests, ultimately the historical narrative is built around events which have actually occurred as opposed to the fiction within a literary narrative.[10] In Sarbadhikari's case, a war veteran, who attempts years later to recount in an autobiographical mode his experiences as a volunteer nurse, and in the process shedding his perspective on war, masculinity and a host of other issues. Dwelling on Mukhopadhyay, his grandmother writes a biography of her grandson drawing on her first-hand knowledge of, and experiences with him. The part dealing with Mukhopadhyay's experience of the war as a doctor is based on his letters to his mother. Again, Mukhopadhyay is seemingly narrating events that actually occurred in his letters. The letters are printed verbatim in his biography. They reveal a sensitive mind trying to grapple with the enormity of the destruction and mayhem around him, an issue we will take up in detail in this article.

If we look at these two narratives from a broader perspective, how would they compare with an all-time classic such as Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a classic that is seemingly based on the writer's own experiences? The protagonist, Paul Baumer, and his comrades in the regiment are supposedly modelled on the writer and his core group of friends and fellow soldiers. Yet the novel is only partly autobiographical, for here the autobiographical and the fictional are interwoven together. A large part of the action depicted in the book could not have been experienced by Remarque since he served in an engineering regiment in the German Army. Remarque was actually writing a largely fictional account where his own, albeit

[9]Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 355.

[10]Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. III, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 5.

limited experiences came in handy. The novel was an instant bestseller and is now considered an epic war novel.[11]

Despite the popularity of the novel, Remarque was roundly criticised by right, and far right critics for his depiction of a one-sided version of the war. He was pilloried for depicting a dark, negative picture and for discounting patriotism and idealism as incentives for fighting. Right-wing critics particularly were emphatic in their opinion that Baumer and his group of fellow soldiers could not speak for the experiences of all German soldiers at the front during First World War. Their experiences were very specific. Nevertheless, the book sold more than a million copies in Germany. So, there was something in the book to which millions who had either experienced the war first-hand or had been affected by the war could relate. The reality was that the life of every single German of that generation was irretrievably altered by the war.[12]

Nevertheless we cannot wish away the criticism that the trials and travails of Baumer and his fellow soldiers were not representative of the wider section of German fighting men. There were German combatant accounts that glorified the war. One could cite for instance Ernst Junger's account of the First World War, a notable contribution on the German side, which is in stark contrast to Remarque's account of the war. Junger glorified combat and war, practically depicting it as a sport with its own set of rules, which the protagonists were expected to observe. Junger rationalises the inconvenience of the trenches by typifying them as an unavoidable aspect of a glorious struggle that presented men with an opportunity to display their heroic sides. For Junger, war is an embodiment of all that was noble in mankind. War was consequently to be celebrated, something positive which was not to be depicted in bleak terms. Junger was thus taking a position which was at odds to that of Remarque.[13]

Such diversity of strands was to be expected given the fact that there was a gamut of European literature on World War1, both from the British and German standpoints. The war saw a considerable number of men of letters enlist, especially from the British side, notable among them being Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, and Sigfried Sassoon.[14] There are also stark, raw accounts from combatants without a literary background in the form of letters, field-notes and personal items, and they have been aptly analysed

[11]Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).
[12]Harold Bloom, *Interpretations*: *Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front*, (New York: Infobase Publishing House, 2009).
[13]Ernst Junger, *The Storm of Steel From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1996).
[14]Spencer Jones, *World War1 Poetry: A Collection of Haunting Verses From The Great War,* London,(Arcturus Publishing Limited,2017), pp.13-14.

by scholars such as Paul Fussel. The sheer intensity and directness exhibited by these accounts have a distinct flavour of their own which conversely could not be found in the more sophisticated accounts by combatants who were also men of letters.[15]

In general, British combatants writing on the war were more circumspect in their views, apart from possibly the early soldier-poets such as Rupert Brooke who were yet to be confronted with the full extent of the mayhem of the war would bring in its wake.[16] Both prose and verse accounts of the war reflected an anxiety and difficulty in grasping a war which was unprecedented in its scope, magnitude, nature and brutality, and which conflicted with the British public-school notions of war as a manly and honourable vocation. Trenches, for example, were usually described in all their nastiness. This was, though, interspersed with accounts which, for example, celebrated the beauty of a sunrise viewed from the trenches.[17]

Contrarily, the wartime accounts of Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay, rooted as they are in their colonial context, offer a study in contrast. To state the obvious, this was a different war, in a different theatre, where the vicissitudes of war were of a different tenor, although the Western Front had seen numerous Indian men in combatant roles braving the odds as has been memorably etched by Mulk Raj Anand.[18] Moreover, both Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay were non-combatants hailing from avowedly colonial non-martial communities. War for these men was a novel and unique experience though they would both experience it as non-combatants. This, though, by no means inured them to the dangers and horrors of war, and they sought to turn the situation to their advantage by executing their duties bravely in the face of mortal danger. This lends a different tone to their writings. They reveal a different kind of anxiety, as for these men it was about the honour of their community, not necessarily of their motherland. For instance, the unease of both Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay over slurs on Bengali male's purported effeminacy. Both seek to combat such allegations by executing their roles, albeit non-combatant in nature, bravely and admirably in the face of mortal danger. Notwithstanding these differences, ultimately both narratives, for all their contextual dissimilarities, celebrate comradeship, humaneness, fortitude, and indomitability in the face of adversity and unimaginable odds. They represent at the end of the day a triumph of the human spirit and the resilience of human values in the most trying of circumstances.

This brings us back to the central question. What do we as historians seek in literary works or, in this case, these narratives? Do we read such narratives because we believe

---

[16] Jones, *World War I Poetry*, p. 13
[17] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 55–58.
[18] Mulakraj Anand, *Across the Black Waters*, (London: Shalimar Books, 2014).

they provide a more nuanced understanding of a society's aspirations, fears, hopes, and grievances? Do literary works, and also narratives in the autobiographical or semi-autobiographical mould, perform a better job of grasping the multitudes of emotions and travails people undergo during extraordinary times? For instance, one may well claim that literature on the sub-continent's partition in 1947 does a better job of capturing the agony and trauma borne out of the unprecedented violence, the killings, the agony and trauma of displacement, abduction, of witnessing family members killed and violated.[19]

Nevertheless, the issue of representation remains. Can the genre of the narrative, in its multiple facets, capture the entirety of emotions experienced by a people during the course of extraordinary events? How do we categorize the experiences of Mukhopadhyay or Sarbadhikari at the front? Are the emotions they express, their reactions to the events around them, and the world view that they provide, representative of a wider Bengali mentality of those times? Should we conceptualise the reactions, opinions, mentality, ethos, and values they espouse as specific to their context?

The Question of Bengali Masculinity

To begin with, we seek to find answers to these questions by dwelling on one of the major underlying themes of both narratives, namely the issue of Bengali masculinity. The urge to negate the charge of cowardice, the ostensible absence of manliness in the Bengali bhadralok, in particular, was intense. A brief account of the two narratives and the circumstances in which they were composed provides us with a glimpse of the centrality of the question of masculinity or the avowed lack of it for the Bengali bhadralok, a tension which was more marked in the case of Sarbadhikari. The protagonist of *Abhi Le Baghdad*, Sarbadhikari, served as a volunteer with the Bengal Ambulance Corps, a part of 16 Brigade of 6 Poona Division of the British Expeditionary Forces to Mesopotamia. He hailed from an illustrious family that had produced eminent doctors and educationists, and on the eve of the war, Sarbadhikari had recently passed his Bachelor of Arts examinations and was wondering about his future course of action. His attention was drawn to the concerted efforts of the colonial government to recruit Bengali men into combat roles and auxiliary services for the various theatres of the First World War. The unprecedented demand for manpower had forced the British to temporarily cast aside their reliance on their 'martial race theory' for recruitment, a policy where only men from certain select communities dubbed as martial were recruited.[20]

[19]Aloke Bhalla, ed., *Stories About the Partition of India*, Vol. I-IV, (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2012).

[20]Sarbadhikari, *Abhi Le Baghdad*.

The entreaties of the British were reciprocated by the Bengali elite and *bhadralok* politicians who saw in the war an opportunity for men from their community to be drafted into the army, a recruitment avenue that had been denied to them before on the grounds that Bengali men lacked physical prowess and were effeminate. Consequently, their efforts were also underlined by the thought process that this was a chance for Bengalis to prove that they could perform as well as anyone on the battlefield:

> দেশী লোককে শিক্ষা ও সুযাগ দিয়া দেশীয় শিল্প বলিষ্ঠ ও উন্নত করিয়া তোলা গভর্নমেন্টের কর্তব্য। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে দেশীয় সকল প্রদেশের লোককে সৈনবিভাগে গ্রহণ করিয়া ও সেনাপতি পর্যন্ত হইবার অধিকার দিয়া দেশের আন্তরিক বল বৃদ্ধি করিয়া তোলা উচিত।[21]
>
> *It is the duty of the government to establish industries with firm footings and develop them by providing education and opportunities to natives. Simultaneously, by recruiting soldiers from every province of the state and giving them the opportunity to be a commander, the country should enhance its internal strength.*

A series of meetings and camps for the war effort were organized, with people such as the Maharaja of Burdwan and the nationalist politician Bipan Chandra Pal both actively involved in the process. Sarbadhikari heard of the proposal to set up a Bengal Ambulance Corps. Ultimately, the untiring efforts of the Maharaja of Burdwan and Dr S. P. Sarbadhikari ensured the establishment of the Bengal Ambulance Corps and its volunteers hailing predominantly from the Bengali *bhadralok* class. Sarbadhikari was one such volunteer, he a stretcher bearer.[22]

The volunteers of the Bengal Ambulance Corps, after some initial training at the Alipur infantry lines in Calcutta and subsequently at the naval barracks in Bombay, were told that they were to sail for Mesopotamia and would be attached to 16 Brigade of the 6 Poona Division of the British Expeditionary Force serving at the Mesopotamian front. Sarbadhikari's account informs us that the Bengal Ambulance Corps set sail from the Bombay docks on 1 July 1915 and, after a trying journey involving the changing of two ships, landed at Basra Port in Mesopotamia on 12 July 1915.[23] From Basra, they travelled by steamer to Amarah and reached their destination on 15 July 1915. After arriving at Amarah, they immediately went about setting up a field hospital, which was up and running by 17 July 1915. They then experienced two uneventful months, leading

[21]From the Bengali literary magazine *Prabasi*, 1322 Bongabdo *Kartika* 15 (Oct/Nov 1916), Part 2 (1): 6.
[22]Ibid, p. 34.
[23]Ibid, p. 41.

them to occasionally complain that this was not why they had enrolled. They pined for some battlefield action.[24]

This desire for action could not be categorised as simply the normal reactions of men who had volunteered for the war in the hope of encountering action, only for the realisation to dawn that there was a tedious side to war involving painstaking planning and the setting up of infrastructure for future engagements with the enemy. Sarbadhikari's craving for the chance to distinguish himself on the battlefield was fuelled by the latent insecurity regarding his masculinity, an anxiety that was ubiquitous in nature and pervaded the psyche of every Bengali male. The Bengali *babu* had long been labelled as effeminate and cowardly and purportedly incapable of exhibiting physical skills and daring. The alleged lack of masculinity in the Bengali male was, therefore, a sensitive issue for the bhadralok. While it is unclear when and how this notion gained ground, the stereotyping of the Bengali male as cowardly, effeminate, and so on was already prevalent in early eighteenth and nineteenth century British accounts, a feature which Mrinalini Sinha, who is primarily concerned with the British depiction of the Bengali *babu* post the second half of the nineteenth century, neglects to dwell upon except for a cursory mention of Robert Orme's portrayal of the Bengali as a cowardly being.[25] Bishop Heber, in his account of his tour of Bengal, writes in the 1830s that the Bengalis were a cowardly and non-martial race, incapable of physical prowess. There are, nevertheless, discourses pre-dating Bishop Heber's account where the Bengali male is essentialised as feminine and, by implication, cowardly. These early generalisations, though, did not discriminate on indices of caste or religion. The word Bengali was used as a broad ethnic term transcending barriers of caste, class, and religion. The view that Bengalis were inimical to situations that demanded physical prowess and valour was, thus, entrenched by the middle of the eighteenth century. It led to the pre-1857 Bengal Army specifically debarring Bengalis from the ranks of native recruits from that army's inception in 1757. The Bengal Army, therefore, concentrated on recruiting upper-caste Hindu men from present-day Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Purbaiyas). Most of them hailed from a rural middle-peasantry background. Men of this ilk were supposed to be brave, loyal, and virile and reportedly made the best soldiers, and thus constituted the bulk of the infantry units of the Bengal Army, with the notable exception of the presence of a limited number of Ahirs or Yadavs.[26]

This trend registered a partial break from the 1830s onward when certain fresh communities, such as the Gorkhas and the Sikhs, were dubbed martial and were

[24]Ibid, p. 43–45.
[25]Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity,* p.15.
[26]Report of the Enquiry Committee of the Barrackpore Mutiny, 1824, Military (Misc), Vol.11, National Archives of India, Delhi.p.479.

recruited into the Bengal Army in considerable numbers, although the overall dominance of the Purbaiyas remained intact.[27] Thus, the Bengali male had no place in this early pre-1857 version of the martial race theory, for he was decidedly and incontrovertibly effeminate. This seemingly hard truth was an entrenched part of colonial discourse vis-à-vis the Bengali male, though the trope about them being meek and timid would acquire certain shades of class and religion going into the second half of the nineteenth century.[28]

This powerful discourse directed at the Bengali male, emphasising their physical weakness and lack of courage, possibly affected their self-perception and their perception by men of other communities. Durgadas Bandyopadhyay, a clerk who joined the pre-1857 Bengal Army in the 1850s, wrote his memoirs at the behest of the editor of a Bengali journal named *Bangabasi*. Bandyopadhyay probably started writing his memoirs around 1889, and an early version of it appeared in the Bengali journal *Janambhoomi* in 1891. The memoir informs us that Bandyopadhyay joined the Bengal Army as a clerk entrusted with keeping the accounts of a regiment posted to Hansi, which lies in the Haryana province of modern-day India. Joining the army as a clerk was the only option for a Bengali such as Bandyopadhyay to serve in the colonial armies when Bengalis were not inducted as combatants.[29]

One could cite this passage in Bandyopadhyay's autobiography where certain Purbaiya soldiers express wonderment at the stout physique of Bandyopadhyay, who was tall and powerfully built, "Tum Bangali hoke itna balwan kaise?" (*How are you so strong despite being a Bengali?*) Durgadas replied to the effect that there were many Bengalis who were endowed with fine physiques and he knew certain Bengalis who could take on ten of them, that is, Purbaiya soldiers, single-handedly. Thus, two not completely interrelated factors are at play. On the one hand, there is this strong assertion by the Bengali regarding the supposed illegitimacy of the view that the Bengali male was a weakling. The other interesting side we see here is that it seemed that the native communities categorised as martial by the British also shared their perception of the alleged effeminacy of the Bengali male.[30]

Heather Streets, in her study of the notion of martial races across the British Empire, argues that communities who were conferred with the martial tag were also burdened

---

[27]G.W Forrest, *Selections from the Letters, Dispatches and Other State Papers Preserved In the Military Department of the Government of India,1857-58, Vol 1,*Calcutta,1893,p.45.
[28]Sinha, *Colonial masculinity: The Manly Englishman And the Effeminate Bengali In The Late Nineteenth Century*, pp.1-3.
[29]Durgadas Bandyopadhyay*, Vidrohe Bangali Or Amar Iivana-Charit*, (Calcutta: Ananya Publishers, 1924), p. 52.
[30]Ibid, p.50.

with the onus of acting in certain ways, for the martial races were bestowed with certain characteristics and mannerisms that they might not actually have possessed. Part of this baggage, the avowedly martial communities imbibed, was the tendency to share with their colonial masters a commonality as far as the mapping of native communities into martial and non-martial was concerned. This trait was no different for the subcontinent, and evidently influenced the categorising of communities into martial and non-martial.[31]

Post-1857, things did not change much for the Bengali male. He was still regarded as an enfeebled male. While the old Bengal Army and, as a consequence, its recruitment policy, was completely done away with and a balanced recruitment policy, which cast its net over a wider range of communities, was adopted, Bengalis still had no place in this new scheme of things. They were, after all, the original antithesis of all that was manly as far as the colonial discourse on manliness was concerned. And things would only get worse for the Bengali as far as the masculinity index was concerned. The rise of the martial race theory in the 1880s would further seal the fate of the Bengali male, and he would be entrapped in his image as a cowardly and effeminate person.

The theory initially captured by Fredrick Roberts stated that only a few select communities, such as the Sikhs, Gorkhas, Dogras, Punjabis, Mussalmans, Pathans, and a few others on the subcontinent, were dubbed martial and were capable of fighting bravely and effectively. The reasons behind a community possessing martial qualities, according to the ideologues of the martial race theory, were manifold, and the only point of agreement among the proponents of the martial race theory was that wheat-eating and less literate peasants from the rural areas made the best fighters. Some of the proponents of the martial race theory ascribed martial qualities to the presence of advantageous genes, while there were others who stressed their environment, or historical and political factors. For instance, Roberts believed that long years of peace in the Madras Presidency had enervated the Madras sepoy and had made him unmartial.[32] George MacMunn, another important proponent of the martial race theory, believed that the Aryans had enslaved the original inhabitants and deprived them of the right to bear arms. Therefore, only the communities of Aryan origin were capable of being martial. MacMunn also believed that the tenets of certain religions, such as Sikhism, made them martial. MacMunn, though, did not stress much on climatic

[31]Heather Streets, *The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), Chapter 1.
[32]Frederick Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1898) p. 499, p. 530, pp. 532-534.

factors, unlike Roberts, who believed that people from colder areas proved to be better fighters.[33]

Again, the point is that the Bengali did not figure anywhere in the scheme of things and was probably, as mentioned before, further marginalised. Moreover, class and religion were now added as categories to qualify the notion of the unmanly Bengali. The reason was that the Bengali Hindu, largely upper caste *bhadralok*, had emerged as a vocal opponent of the Raj. The middle classes hoped that the colonial Raj would, in the course of time, introduce democratic reforms in the colonies. Their hopes were gradually belied, and disillusionment with the British set in. This disenchantment became marked over the European reactions to the Ilbert Bill in 1883, which sought to empower Indian judges to try Europeans. Further provocation was offered by the provisions of the Arms Act, which effectively barred Indians from bearing arms.

There were a host of other trying issues, too, which Mrinalini Sinha ably highlighted. Sinha argues that colonial discourses were not fixed or homogenous categories. They were heterogeneous and evolved in specific contexts. She argues that the labelling of the Bengali *babu* as effeminate was the product of a specific material and social context, and so was the Bengali *babu's* desperate attempt to change this perception of himself as timid and cowardly. Sinha succinctly depicts the Bengali's obsession with attaining physical fitness and the opening of *akhara*s, *byam samiti*s, and so on.[34] There were also the efforts of Bengali elite women, such as Sarala Devi, who established the Volunteer Movement in the 1880s. An intelligence officer, J.C. Ker, wrote about the objectives of Sarala Devi, which were:

> …apparently political, as she was known to be a supporter of the nationalist movement; her declared intention was to remove the historical reproach, perpetuated by Macaulay, that the Bengalis were a race of cowards, and she was avowedly influenced by the success of the Japanese in the war with Russia.[35]

All these frenzied efforts, as Sinha points out, underscored the tension and unease within the Bengali *babu* over the categorization of his physical identity. She argues that the Bengali bhadralok had been feeling insecure since the 1860s when certain pro-tenancy measures introduced by the British in the wake of peasant revolts threatened

[33]G.F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India 1911,* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers,1991), pp. 129-131.

[34] Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity,* pp. 14–16. An akhara could be described as an arena where budding and established wrestlers practiced under the watchful eyes of a guru. Byam-Samitis roughly correspond to gymnasiums.

[35] James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907–1917,* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1973), p. 7.

the dominance of the Bengali *babu* over the peasant whom he was a landlord, for most Bengali *babus* had some investment in land to a greater or lesser degree. To add to their woes, the Bengali *babu* gradually grew disillusioned with the British. Therefore, his desperation to shed the tag of unmanly was accorded a double-layered assertion, both to assert his dominance as the unchallenged spokesman of his community and as an act of defiance against the Raj.[36]

This tension in the Bengali bhadralok male was manifest in Sarbadhikari's and Mukhopadhyay's writing. Both emphasised that the war gave Bengali men a chance to prove they were second to none in courage and manliness. Sarbadhikari says that he and his fellow volunteers were eager to prove themselves in hazardous field conditions as that would lay low the charge that Bengali men were incapable of displaying courage and physical prowess. He wrote in Bengali:

> আমাদের মতো শিক্ষিত বাঙালি যুবক যদি এই সময়ে সামরিক বিভাগে গিয়ে (সে হোক না কেনো এম্বুলেন্স-এ, কেনো রকমে পা রাখবার জায়গা পেলেই হলো ।) ভালোভাবে কাজ করে বাংলাদেশের হয়ে সুনাম অর্জন করতে পারি, তবেই ভবিষ্যতে বাঙালীর মিলিটারিতে পাকাপাকি ভাবে স্থান হবার সম্ভবনা। ভালোভাবে আমরা কাজ করেছিলাম কিনা, তা আপনারা আমার এই কাহিনী থেকে কতটা বুঝতে পারবেন। আর, যদি ভালোভাবে কাজ না করে থাকি, তা হলে কি ব্রিটিশ গভর্নমেন্ট বেঙ্গল ডবল কম্পানি ও ফর্টিনাইনথ বেঙ্গলি রেজিমেন্ট গঠন করতে রাজি হতেন? বাঙ্গালী কে যাতে মিলিটারি তে জায়গা দিতে না হয়, তার জন্যে কোনো একটা ছুতো পেলে, তাঁরা কি সেটা ছেড়ে দিতেন? এই সমস্ত কারনে আমাদের মনে যদি এমন একটা ধারণা হয়ে থাকে, যে বেঙ্গল এম্বুলেন্স-এর কাজ মোটের উপর ভালই হয়েছিল, সে গর্বটুকু নেহাত ভিত্তিহীন নয় ও সেজন্যে মার্জনীয়।[37]
>
> *If educated young Bengalis like us in this time of distress attained appreciation for Bengal through working in military forces [though the work is in an ambulance, what matters is to gain an opportunity], then only in the future will Bengalis accrue a permanent place in the military. Since we had served well, to what extent will you understand that from my story. If not done well, would the British government have agreed to form the Bengal Dabul Company and 49th Bengali Regiment? Will they leave any opportunity to exclude Bengalis from military services? Because of these reasons, if we consider that the work of Bengal ambulance in the field was good enough, that would not be a baseless claim and would be forgivable.*

In a similar vein, Mukhopadhyay concurs in his letters that the fear of being labelled as a cowardly Bengali served to motivate him whenever he was on the verge of wavering in his professional duties:

[36] Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*.
[37] Sarbadhikari, *Abhi Le Baghdad*, pp. 32–33.

> এখন আর সে কাপুরুষের রাস্তা লওয়া চলে না—তাহা হইলে জন-সমাজে আমি আর মুখ দেখাইতে পারিব না। আমি এখন কুণো হইয়া ঘরে লুকাইয়া বসিয়া থাকিলে সমস্ত বাঙ্গালা জাতিকে অপমান সহ্য করিতে হইবে। আমার দ্বারা ওরূপ নেমক-হারামী কাজ হইতে পারে না। যখন বাঙ্গালী হইয়াও স্পর্ধা করিয়া ইংরাজদের হাত হইতে সম্মানের বা লড়াই করিবার অস্ত্র শস্ত্র, তরোয়াল, বন্দুক পাইয়াছি—যখন আমি লড়ায়ে রাজ-আজ্ঞা পালন করিব বলিয়া শপথ করিয়াছি তখন—আমি পেছ-পা হইয়া, কুণো হইয়া কাজ ছাড়িয়া লুকাইয়া বসিয়া থাকিতে পারিব না। আর আমার একট প্রাণের জন্য সমস্ত বাঙ্গালী জাতিকে, ভীরু কাপুরুষ নেমক-হারামের বদনাম খাওয়াইতে পারিব না। আমাদের জাতের সে বদনাম ত আছেই - তবু সেটা কাটিয়ে আমরাও যাতে বীরজাতির ভিতর গণ্য হইতে পারি, আমার সেদিকেও ত দৃষ্টি রাখা দরকার । তোমরা কি বলছ ? একট প্রাণের জন্য আমার ইজ্জত খোয়াইব ? তাহলে ত আমার গলায় দড়ি দিয়ে এখনি কড়িকাঠে ঝুলে পড়া উচিত।
> ছি! ছি![38]
>
> *It is not the time to take a cowardly path, then I will never be able to show my face to society. If I become fearful and take refuge in the safety of my home, then Bengali society will be shamed. I can't do this kind of betrayal. Even though being a Bengali, from the English government, I have gained honour and weapons, sword and rifle, when I have taken the oath to follow the orders of high command during wartime, will not be able to step back and give up my duty. And only for one life, I will not intend for the whole Bengali community to be marked as cowardly betrayers. Since we have these things attributed to us, we should prove them wrong and be upheld as a valiant community. What are you saying? Only for one life should we lose our prestige? Better than that is to hang myself to death.*

Thus, both men display palpable tension and anxiety over their masculinity. Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari may also have been representative of a wider cross-section of the Bengali bhadralok. The tension of the Bengali *babu* over the slight to his alleged lack of masculinity was acute. They had internalised the slurs on their manhood emanating from colonial discourses, which had also affected the gaze of other native communities vis-à-vis the question of the physical inefficacy of the Bengali male. It had affected their self-esteem. It was important for them to repudiate this stereotype of the Bengali babu being a cowardly, effeminate person lacking physical prowess.

Trailokyanath Chakraborty, a famous Bengali revolutionary of the early twentieth century, says:

[38]Devi, *Kalyan Pradeep*, 206.

> Banglar biplobi ra "viru Bangali" ei opobad bivido karma anushtan dara dur koriachilo, artachari setango karmachari o police hotta koria abong shastra sangram koria proman korilo, bangali viru noi, banagali lorai korite jane, pran dite jane, tahara prithibir j kono swadhin jatir bir sainikder samokkoho.[39]
>
> *Through their various activities, Bengali revolutionaries alleviated the idea of the "coward Bengali". By assassinating police and white skin economic exploiters, they proved that Bengalis are not cowards. Bengalis know to fight, they are prepared to sacrifice their lives, they are equal to the brave soldiers of any other free community.*

The dubbing of the Bengali male as non-martial sat heavily on the shoulders of Bengali men, and Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari were no exception. For them, the First World War provided the opportunity where they would prove their manhood and the falsity of the assumptions about the lack of masculinity in the Bengali male. There was though a catch to the situation, the First World War had, on the face of it, brought a ray of hope for supposedly non-martial communities such as the Bengalis as far as recruitment was concerned. The unprecedented scale of demand for manpower forced the army to look beyond the avowedly martial communities. So, they launched recruiting drives among the so-called non-martial communities. Yet the prejudice against the ostensible non-martial races ran so deep that recruits from such backgrounds were mostly assigned to auxiliary units posted far away from the frontlines. The combat roles were still assigned to units composed of men from the martial races.[40]

In the case of the Bengalis, there was actually a regiment formed of Bengali recruits, that is, the 49 Bengali Regiment which served in Mesopotamia in 1915. There, large sections of the regiment mutinied, in all probability because of mismanagement by the British officers, something that was emblematic of the larger British campaign in Mesopotamia in the initial years of the war. However, the stigma of mutiny was hard to wish away, especially when it involved recruits from a community specifically dubbed as non-martial and thus unmanly by the Raj. It was as if their mutiny vindicated all the stereotypes regarding the masculinity of the Bengali male or, rather, the lack of it. The 49 Regiment was hastily disbanded.[41]

For Bengali men, such as Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari, the option, therefore, was to join the war effort in auxiliary roles. Nevertheless, these men rationalised the

[39] Trailokyonath Chakraborty, *30 Years Imprisonment and Freedom Movement of Pakistan and India* (Calcutta: Radical Impression, 2015), p. 46.
[40] Steven L. Wilkinson, *Army and Nation: The Military and Indian Democracy Since Independence,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 50.
[41] Ibid, p. 50.

situation by affirming that the successful execution of their auxiliary roles on the battlefield, and in this case that of a nurse and doctor, who faced mortal danger, was proof that the Bengali male could be as brave and heroic as anybody. Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay indeed displayed a cool bravery when faced with indomitable odds and risks on the battlefield.

Sarbadhikari and his fellow volunteers were presented with an opportunity in late September to showcase their bravery when orders came that they were to move to a station further up the river called Kut, where fierce action was taking place between the British and the Turks. They also learnt that they were to be attached as an Ambulance unit to the 6 Brigade of the 6 Poona Division. On 27 September, the steamer arrived from Basra to take them to Kut, and on the way, they learnt that Kut had fallen to the British. They finally arrived in Kut on 3 October 1915.[42] The British had captured it from the Turks barely a few days before and now intended to use it as a springboard for a decisive push towards Baghdad, which they believed to be within their grasp. They did advance resolutely towards Baghdad, and the troops were often made to march at a punishing pace. Sarbadhikari and his fellow volunteers had barely two days to rest before they were asked to march to their first destination, Aziziyah, seventy miles away. For Sarbadhikari and his fellow volunteers, it was a baptism by fire into the rigours of military life. Their officers set for them a punishing pace and the distance of seventy miles was covered in three days flat. It must be said, though, in their favour, that the men of the Ambulance Corps largely handled themselves well on the march, barring a few exceptions, and their conduct was considered worthy enough for them to be mentioned in official dispatches.[43]

Sarbadhikari and his fellow volunteers now had a much-needed respite for nearly two weeks before orders to advance again came on 24 October.[44] A period of desultory fighting marked by light resistance from the Turks followed until the British troops reached the vicinity of Ctesiphon. The Turkish troops, despite their retreat from Kut and their subsequent light resistance, had not been sitting idle and had decided to make a stand at Ctesiphon, ninety miles from Baghdad. Ctesiphon was very well fortified and was ideal for a defensive rearguard action, as the British troops soon found out to their discomfort. The lack of Turkish resistance prior to Ctesiphon had lulled the British commanders into believing that Baghdad was theirs for the taking and that the Turks would, at best, offer light resistance. Those hopes were soon belied when they received disconcerting news that the Turks had brought in crack reinforcements and had entrenched themselves in very strong positions at Ctesiphon.

[42]Sarbadhikari, *Abhi Le Baghdad*, pp. 45–47.
[43]Ibid, p. 49.
[44]Ibid, p. 50

The British realised that a tough battle was at hand, and they tried their utmost to steel themselves for the imminent trial.[45]

Fighting began in earnest on 22 November 1916 and soon developed into a slugfest where neither side was willing to give quarter. For the volunteers of the Bengal Ambulance Corps, their long-cherished desire to experience battlefield action had been answered, and it was now up to them to make the best of the situation. To give them their due they rose to the challenge and plunged into the thick of the action to extricate the wounded to safety. Sarbadhikari tended the wounded, loading them on to stretchers and moving them to the relative safety of the British camp, away from the centres action, all the while under artillery and gunfire from the Turkish forces. While sceptics may argue that we only have Sarbadhikari's words as proof of his avowed heroism, it must be said in his defence that his account is confirmed in dispatches by British commanders at Ctesiphon, where the bravery of the volunteers of the Bengal Ambulance Corps is cited prominently.[46]

After three days of intense fighting, the casualties were high on both sides, and in effect they had fought each other to a standstill. Sarbadhikari's account is replete with descriptions of the agony of the wounded and the terribly trying circumstances in which he and his colleagues had to perform their duties. The situation was grave for the British who had failed to dislodge the Turks from their positions.[47] Presently, the British decided to withdraw and fall back to a secure base. Sarbadhikari and his colleagues now had the onerous task of retreating in good order along with the rest of the British forces and against the backdrop of an imminent attack by the pursuing Turkish forces. The British forces, against all odds, reached their first intended destination, Aziziyah.[48]

Sarbadhikari and his colleagues were specifically praised in the dispatches for having successfully completed the arduous march despite the privations they had to endure. Interestingly, during the march, Sarbadhikari met Mukhopadhyay, and Mukhopadhyay's close friend and colleague, Dr. Puri. Sarbadhikari reminisces that Dr. Puri was very appreciative of the efforts of the Bengal Ambulance Corps, though Mukhopadhyay seemingly thought otherwise. In his letters to his mother, Mukhopadhyay mentioned meeting the volunteers of the Bengal Ambulance Corps during the retreat to Aziziyah, and he observed that the volunteers seemed to be out of their depth. They had now realised what they had let themselves in for and that war was no laughing matter. This

[45]Ibid, p. 35.
[46]Ibid, p. 67.
[47]Ibid, pp. 51–57.
[48]Ibid, p. 69.

was, in reality, the disdain of the professional for amateurs who had volunteered for the job.[49]

The British forces were in a precarious position and difficult choices had to be made. Ironically, as Sarbadhikari informs us, the British decided to fall back on Kut and dig in there. It was now the turn of the British to be besieged by the pursuing Turkish troops who soon arrived and surrounded the British fortifications at Kut. Thus began a protracted siege which ultimately ended in the surrender of the British garrison. Unable to receive any supplies their food supply ran down forcing the troops to depend on horse meat before the commander, Major General Townshend, was told that the prospects of a relief force reaching Kut were bleak or non-existent. Without food supplies and any hope of relief, Townshend surrendered on 29 April 1916. The entire force passed into captivity.[50]

While disaster befell the British, Sarbadhikari and his associates had made their point that they, or Bengalis, were capable of executing their duties in the face of mortal danger to their lives and were more than capable of standing up to the rigours of military life. The anxiety about being dubbed cowardly hung heavy in a similar vein on Mukhopadhyay's shoulders. Mukhopadhyay's biography was written by his maternal grandmother, Makhoda Devi and with only a part of it describing Mukhopadhyay's wartime experiences in the period before his death from enteric fever in 1916. A large part of the biography deals with Mukhopadhyay's childhood, family background and issues, which seemingly are completely unrelated and meaningless to his short tenure as a doctor with the Allied Forces in Mesopotamia. Devi reveals an obsession with Hindu–Muslim relations and the alleged atrocities to which Hindus had been subjected during Muslim rule. Mukhopadhyay's maternal and paternal families were heavily involved with the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist sect which arose in early nineteenth century Bengal.[51]

Devi, after devoting two-thirds of the biography to issues that have supposedly no connection with Mukhopadhyay and his war experiences, finally arrives at the core issue and follows a two-pronged strategy here. On the one hand, she uses Mukhopadhyay's wartime letters to his mother to narrate a moving account of Mukhopadhyay's tryst with the war, an experience that was doomed to end in tragedy. Simultaneously, she also tries to render a history of the war in Mesopotamia based on official dispatches, newspaper reports and first-hand accounts. Her objective is to contextualise the wartime experiences of Mukhopadhyay and his unit within the

[49]Ibid.
[50]Ibid, 98.
[51]Devi, *Kalyan Pradeep*.

broader patterns of the war in Mesopotamia. Devi was a skilful writer and produced an absorbing account of the war.[52]

Devi's account tells us that Mukhopadhyay, after passing his MBBS, briefly served as a doctor with a raja who sent him abroad for further studies, though it is not clear what the exact nature of the qualifications is that he acquired in England. Mukhopadhyay joined the Indian Medical Service on the eve of First World War and, after serving elsewhere in India, was posted to Mesopotamian in 1915. Mukhopadhyay set forth from Karachi around the same time as Sarbadhikari did to Basra. After landing at Basra, he was eventually posted to Kut in November 1915 and was present also at the battle at Ctesiphon. Mukhopadhyay, along with the rest of the British forces at Kut passed into Turkish captivity, although his status as a doctor meant he was accorded extra privileges. Mukhopadhyay, though, had no choice but undertake a long and tough march into captivity alongside the rest of the prisoners. The fates of Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari were thus bound together, though Mukhopadhyay was accorded superior treatment on account of his rank as an officer and more so due to his being a doctor. It was, therefore, ironic that Mukhopadhyay did not survive the war while Sarbadhikari, despite his tribulations, returned to India hale and hearty.[53]

Mukhopadhyay's letters survive and provide a fascinating first-hand account of the war. The letters, among the finest specimens of war writing by an Indian in the twentieth century, reveal, among other things, a tension regarding his masculinity. Mukhopadhyay writes to his mother that the fear of being branded a cowardly Bengali motivated him to work extra hard whenever he felt himself wavering in his resolve. It was as if the reputation of the Bengali bhadralok community rested on the shoulders of men like Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari performing their duties diligently in the face of mortal danger. He was also waging a battle on the personal front as he lost his infant daughter and mother in quick succession. He, too, tragically lost his life in Mesopotamia, though not on the battlefield. His fight was as a doctor against an outbreak of enteric fever in a Turkish prisoner-of-war camp where he successfully saved others before falling victim himself. In doing so Mukhopadhyay did live up to his lofty ideals.[54]

Pacifism and the Bengali Male

While Mukhopadhyay's letters evidently reveal a latent tension at the prospect of being labelled a cowardly Bengali if found wanting in the execution of his duties, the letters stand out for their searing anti-war rhetoric. They show him becoming a pacifist after seeing the carnage around him. He also makes a strong case against the kind of nationalism that makes people and nations hate and kill each other without mercy. For

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, p. 334.

him, the carnage was meaningless, and people blinded by hatred and a virulent form of nationalism were behaving insanely. The pacifism that the war bred in him also led him to strongly condemn the modus operandi of the revolutionary terrorists in Bengal. They were, according to him, motivated by the same blind hatred towards the British, and the kind of deep antipathy which was leading to men killing each other without mercy during the war. To quote him,

> … স্বদেশ প্রেম স্বজাতি প্রেম — এই সব কথা ওজর করে — লোকে লোকের গলা কাটার উদ্যোগ করবে। স্বদেশ প্রেমের মত সংকীর্ণ অধমরিপু জগতে আর নেই। ধম্মের নাম করে যত রক্তপাত নিষ্ঠুরতা হয়েছে, স্বদেশ প্রেমের নাম করে তার চেয়ে লক্ষগুণ বেশি হয়েছে। আর এদানি সব যুদ্ধেই পয়সা-ওয়ালা লর্ড ইত্যাদির পয়সা-রোজকারের জন্যে বোকা প্রজাদের দেশের নামে, স্বদেশ প্রেমের নামে ভুলিয়ে জীবন দিতে প্রস্তুত করেছে। "প্যাট্রিয়টিসম" (বা "স্বদেশ-প্রেম") কথাটা ইউরোপীয় অভিধানে না থাকলে অনেক রক্তপাত কম হত ।
> আমাদের দেশেও "প্যাট্রিয়টিস্ম" এর নাম করে অনেক নেতারা ছোট ছোট স্কুলের ছেলেদের খুন করতে শিখিয়েছে। যে হত্যা মহাপাতক, প্যাট্রিয়টিস্মের দোহাই দিলেই তা মহাপুণ্য। একজন মানুষ আর একজনের বিষয় ছলে বলে কেড়ে নিলে, তা ডাকাতি বা চুরী— ও মহা পাপ। আর একটা জাতি, আর একটা জাতির জমী জবাই করে কেড়ে নিলে— তাহা মহা বাহাদুরের সাম্রাজ্য স্থাপন।[55]
>
> *…By propagating the ideas of love for the homeland, love for their own community, people will try to cut the heads of other people. There is no more narrow vile sense in the world than patriotism. The amount of bloodshed in the name of patriotism has been a lakh of tons higher than that has happened in the name of religion. In recent times in every war wealthy lords have influenced the idiot subjects to give his life in the name of patriotism. If the word patriotism had been absent from European dictionaries, the amount of bloodshed would have been lesser.*
>
> *In our country too, in the name of patriotism several leaders (political leaders) have motivated innocent school children to kill (people).*
>
> *Murder which is a great sin, in the name of patriotism has transformed into an act of great virtue. If a person through inappropriate means takes away others' subject that is a sin — great sin. On the other hand, slaughtering a community and taking away their homeland is considered to be — a brave act— the establishment of an empire.*

In another letter to his mother, Mukhopadhyay further wrote,

[55] Ibid, pp. 317-18.

> … সব প্যাট্রিয়টিসম — পরের দেশ কেড়ে নিচ্ছে। তাহলে প্যাট্রিয়টিসম — এমপায়ার, সাম্রাজ্য, তৈয়ার করচে। হাজার হাজার লোককে মেরে এক টুকরা জমী কেড়ে নিয়ে স্বদেশ প্রেম, স্বজাতি, দেখানও ত ইংরাজই শিখিয়েছে। আমাদের দেশের ছোকরারা আবার তাই দেখে এই জঘন্য রূপ স্বদেশ প্রেমের চর্চ্চা করতে আরম্ভ করেছে। ফলে গোটা কতক লোক খুন, নির্দোসী বড়লাটকে বোমা মারা এই সব ভয়াবহ কীর্তি আরম্ভ করেছে। স্বদেশ প্রেমের মুখে ঝাটা। যতদিন পৃথিবীতে ঐ সংকীর্ণতা না ঘুচবে ততদিন প্যাট্রিয়টিসমের নামে রক্তপাত থামবেনা। তা একজন লোকে ছাত থেকে বোমা ছুরুক আর ৫০ জন লোকে কামানের গোলা ছুরুক — এই রক্তপাতের, এই পাগলামীর মূল কারণ একই।
>
> … "Selfish nationalism: a most inhuman sentiment" অর্থাৎ সংকীর্ণ স্বার্থপর স্বজাতি প্রেমের ভাবটা — সমগ্র মানব-সমাজের পক্ষে অন্তরায়, অহিতকর, শত্রুসদৃশ; ইহাই এই যুদ্ধে প্রমাণ হয়েছে।[56]

> *…Patriotism is snatching away other countries. That means, patriotism is creating empires—sāmrāya. Even, to show patriotism by killing thousands of people to create empires is the learning that England has taught.*
>
> *Youngsters of our country by observing all these have started to practice this vulgar patriotism. Because of which, dangerous acts like killing by targeting people, and bombing innocent borolāta (viceroy) have started. Sneer to the face of patriotism. Up until in the world this narrow mindless would not be demolished till then bloodshed in the name of patriotism wouldn't stop. Whether, 50 people threw cannon balls or only one threw a bomb from the terrace, there is only one reason for this madness, this bloodshed.*
>
> *…Selfish nationalism: a most inhuman sentiment is hindrance, harmful, and enemy to humankind has been proven by this war.*[57]

Sarbadhikari in his account, too, takes a distinct anti-war stance, although in a distinctive mode of his own. There are these passages in Sarbadhikari's narrative where he recounts his conversations with Turkish soldiers wounded during the war. The Turkish soldiers believed the Indians and the Turks had no enmity towards each other, they were embroiled in a fight that was essentially European in origin. The Turks and the Indians were merely being used as pawns in this conflict by the warring European powers, namely the British and the Germans. Sarbadhikari seems to concur with the sentiments of the wounded Turkish soldiers and espouses what Santanu Das

[56] Ibid, pp. 334-335.
[57] Devi, *Kalyan Pradeep*, pp. 292–293, pp. 317–318, pp. 330–336.

describes as Pan-Asian cosmopolitanism.[58] While he is not explicit about his anti-war stance, the tenor of his conversation with the wounded Turkish soldiers implies that Sarbadhikari, too, was appalled by the mayhem, though one cannot go as far as to call him an outright pacifist in the mould of Mukhopadhyay.

Now, the point is, how do we dub the anti-war views of Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari? Could it represent a wider worldview among the Bengali youth of those times? Is there any guarantee that other Bengali men in their place would have undergone a similar metamorphosis and become anti-war pacifists? Many Bengali men had enrolled for the Allied cause as volunteer nurses, doctors, and for example as combatants in the 49 Bengal Regiment, which ironically saw action in Mesopotamia and was disbanded for its alleged poor performance.[59] The problem is that they and their families did not write autobiographical or similar accounts. Consequently, we do not have documentation of the effect the war had on the minds of these impressionable young men. Notwithstanding such issues, it would not appear presumptuous to argue that the reactions of Mukhopadhyay and Sarbadhikari to the mayhem unleashed by the war may have been representative of at least a section of the Bengali middle class.

The notion of pacifism though may not have been as pervasive among the Bengali middle class of those times when compared to the tension in the Bengali bhadralok regarding his masculinity. This brings us to the problem of narratives and our expectations of it. Literary narratives possibly serve partly as a window to the multitude of emotions that are woven around extraordinary events. Or we could say that literary texts, in general, serve as an indicator of the value system of a society, its ethos and so on. That is possibly why mythology is often taken as indicative of the cultural essence of the times it is written. While myths are not meant for factual corroboration, their nature possibly serves to illuminate the historical context in which they are written. We could possibly hazard a guess about the ethos pervading a society from the structure of their myths.

Nevertheless, the problem of representation remains. How do we gauge that the sentiments and mentality evinced in a literary text have wider ramifications? One possible tracker could be the connection of the text with the populace. If a text has a wide appeal, it is obvious that it strikes a chord somewhere with the reader. To take the case of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, while Paul Baumer and his fellow group of soldiers may not have been representative of the First World War's wider German soldiery, the underlying theme of the work that the war had irrevocably destroyed

[58]Santanu Das, *India, Empire and First World War Culture: Writings, Images and Songs,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2018), Chapter 6.

[59]

their lives might have endeared the novel to millions, for this was an inconvertible fact of German society. Yet the problem of representation remains, notwithstanding this line of argument.

Conclusion

Sarbadhikari's and Mukhopadhyay's accounts supply several fascinating insights. They describe the experiences of two Bengali men from broadly similar backgrounds negotiating the war's unique challenges. The strategies for coping with these novel experiences were myriad and complex. Both men were exceedingly sensitive and their reactions to the mayhem of war provides a striking perspective. The literary quality and eloquence of their observations aside, the important question is whether their experiences were contextual to their own unique situation or their opinions, when their mentality and attitudes might have been representative of the wider cross-section of Bengali middle-class men. As is evident, there is no single affirmative or non-affirmative response to this question, the contentious notion of Bengali masculinity apart.

The issue of representation aside, these accounts can be read for their literary and human fibre. The accounts are also tales of young Bengali middle-class men in unfamiliar and trying circumstances, and trying their best to face the multi-fold challenges before them. Amidst death, destruction, deprivation and sheer savagery and mayhem, men form bonds and friendships and find ways to survive and cope with the carnage. Indeed, the small pleasures of life, such as close friends chatting, drinking and eating, do go on in the midst of the killing fields. Some of the more sensitive minds among these men, such as Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay, penned accounts of the war in Mesopotamia, which would rank favourably with the finest specimens of war writing in the world. To put it in a nutshell, the accounts of Sarbadhikari and Mukhopadhyay are alive to multiple possibilities and interpretations.

1923-2023: The Royal Air Force and 100 years of Legal Officers – a developing role in a century of change

ISABELLE WESTBURY*
Independent Scholar, UK
Email: isabelle.westbury@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Five years after the Royal Air Force (RAF) celebrated its centennial, its Legal Services marked the same milestone in 2023. While the RAF has had a constant need for uniformed lawyers since, how it has employed them in the past and how it will in the present and future has changed considerably. This paper will demonstrate the evolving role of the RAF's Legal Officers, how unfolding conflicts and the development of international law and domestic policy have impacted that role, and the overarching challenges faced by the RAF's Legal Officers today and in the future.

Introduction

On 28 June 1923, Air Ministry Order No 400 was released by the UK Government. Sandwiched between Order 399, which related to bread and bacon cutting machines, and Order 401, on the duties of civilian medical practitioners, this Order determined the appointments, conditions and duties of RAF Legal Officers. Five years after the founding of the RAF, its Legal Branch was inaugurated and with it the first Terms of Reference for the RAF's Legal Officers, or Legal Advisers.[1] Some duties of those first Legal Officers are retained by those in the role today, but their initial purpose was very different. Contemporary Legal Officers are geared for operations, their

*Squadron Leader Isabelle Westbury is the Royal Air Force's Exchange Legal Officer at the Pentagon, USA.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1957

[1]As part of RAF internal reorganisation in April 2022, the RAF Legal Branch became the RAF Legal Profession, also known as RAF Legal Services. However, for the purposes of this article, reference to the RAF Legal Branch, as it was first inaugurated, shall be taken to include the RAF Legal Profession or Services; United Kingdom (UK) Air Ministry Weekly Order (AMWO), 400/1923, *Appointment, Conditions of Service and Duties of Legal Officers*, 1923.

commission into the uniformed services allowing them to perform roles at a proximity to the military chain of command that a civilian counterpart cannot. The RAF Legal Branch's mission at the time of writing is to deliver 'high quality, effective and operationally focussed legal services to the Royal Air Force and Defence.'[2] However, at its founding and for the first few decades of the Branch's existence, the focus was on the discipline of Service personnel; Air Order 400 fell under the heading of 'Personnel – Pay, services etc.'[3]

Because of their absence from operational decision-making for much of their existence, documented histories of the role of Legal Officers in the RAF, or any other of the UK's uniformed military services is limited. Factual registers and indexes chart the role of Legal Officers in military justice and wider service and administrative law. The RAF's Air Historical Branch keeps a venerable depository of historical resources and documents on the wider RAF's operational history, which includes references to the limited role of then Judge Advocates. However, leveraging off the excellent historical account of the RAF's Legal Branch privately published and distributed internally in 2013 by a former Director of Legal Services, Air Vice-Marshall Geoffrey Carleton, on its ninetieth anniversary this paper will demonstrate how and when that marked shift towards a unique, operations-focused role arose, and from the perspective of a serving Legal Officer who was enticed into service because of that focus. The paper concludes by noting that, while the *raison d'être* of today's RAF Legal Officers is to always be on hand for that core operational law advice, the rising requirement for policy advice and the interpretation and application of the relevant laws by other nations and their armed forces makes the role as varied as ever, and one which will continue to evolve just as much as it has done over the past century.

Before 1923, those RAF Legal Officers which did exist were part of other branches co-opted to the department of the Judge Advocate General (JAG), the office responsible for service justice and the courts-martial system. This mirrored the practice of their counterparts in the other single Services, both throughout the First

[2]DLS (RAF) Diversity and Inclusion Statement https://www.raf.mod.uk/documents/pdf/dls-diversity-and-inclusion-statement/ Accessed 18 February 2025.

[3]Air Vice-Marshall Geoffrey Carleton, '90 Years of Legal Service', *The Royal Air Force Legal Branch History,* (2013, internally distributed to RAF Legal Officers), p. 6.

World War and since its conclusion.[4] While the Air Order created a separate branch, with a separate pay structure for Legal Officers, it remained under the auspices of the JAG's Office, whose remit was a wide one. As a result, the duties of its personnel did not change, nor would they for roughly the next half century. These duties were to provide disciplinary advice to RAF Police reports, advise and prosecute RAF cases at courts-martial, advise the Boards of Inquiry in Service inquiries and investigations, provide legal assistance to RAF personnel with personal matters, and administer Air Force Law – as it was at the time.[5]

Absent from this list of duties was advising on military operations during armed conflict. In fact, the concept of the operational Legal Adviser was still many decades away, not just in the RAF but universally across the UK's armed forces. Throughout most of the twentieth century, including in the two world wars that would define British military action therein, the role of military lawyers in wartime was to provide the same assistance as during peacetime, which was typically limited to the prosecution of crimes. While huge numbers of civilian lawyers enlisted into the military during the Second World War, commensurate with the rest of the population, for most their wartime service was in roles wholly unrelated to their civilian practice. For example, a future Director of Legal Services, Air Vice-Marshal Peter Furniss, was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in December 1944 for his role as a fighter pilot during the war.[6] For those lawyers who did transfer directly into the JAG's Office, the Second World War didn't stretch their capacity for operational reasons but because the number of service trials rose dramatically, a direct result of the huge increase in numbers within the RAF's ranks. The number of RAF courts-martial reached a peak of 3,800 between September 1944, when RAF strength topped at 1,006,080 personnel, and August 1945, compared to just 219 in the year leading into August 1939.[7] Military

[4]Judge Advocate General, *Courts and Tribunals Judiciary*, https://www.judiciary.uk/about-the-judiciary/who-are-the-judiciary/judges/judge-advocate-general. Accessed 10 March 2025.

[5]Prior to 31 October 2009, when the Armed Forces Act 2006 came into force, the Air Force Act 1917, and its future iterations, was the separate, single Service discipline Act for the RAF. *See* Sally Dray, *Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2021*, House of Lords Library, 2021, https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/armed-forces-act-continuation-order-2021. Accessed 25 March 2025.

[6]The London Gazette (Supplement), No. 36863, 26 December 1944, p. 5954.

[7]Wilfred Lewis, *Report of the Army and Air Force Courts Martial Committee 1946*, 16 (London: HMSO, 1948) [hereinafter the Lewis Committee] https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/llmlp/Vol-V-British-report/Vol-V-British-report.pdf. Accessed 8 March 2026.

lawyers were also involved in the War Crimes Trials both at Nuremberg and Tokyo that followed the end of the Second World War[8] As with during the war, however, prosecuting war crimes was simply an extension of one of the Legal Officers' traditional roles: the administration of military justice.[9] Therefore, the absence of the operational lawyer in armed conflict until the latter stages of the Vietnam War meant that how law applied to the RAF's practices during conflict was neither advised upon nor applied by lawyers but by military commanders themselves.[10] In some respects, this delineation remains, in that each serving member of the UK's armed forces is responsible for their own actions; individual criminal responsibility, as well as individual civil liability, is a key tenet of both customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and those international treaties which govern armed conflict, as well as states' own domestic criminal laws.[11] For those leading others in conflict, formally or otherwise, command responsibility is a duty similarly bestowed upon them.[12]

A post-war review

The prospect of engaging RAF Legal Officers to advise on the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) might be traced back to when its Legal Branch separated completely from the

[8]United States (U.S.) Army Judge Advocate General's Corps, *The Army Lawyer: A History of the Judge Advocate General's Corps, 1775-1975*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 181-184.

[9]Michael F. Lohr & Steve Gallotta, 'Legal Support in War: The Role of Military Lawyers', *Chicago J. Int'L L.*, 4 (2003), p. 465, p. 470 https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1223&context=cjil. Accessed 8 March 2026.

[10]Major Mark S. Martins, 'Rules of Engagement for Land Forces: A Matter of Training, Not Lawyering', *MIL. L. REV.,* 143, 1 (1994), pp. 27-46.

[11]International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Customary IHL (CIHL), Rule 102; Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 12 August 1949, art 33, first paragraph [hereinafter Geneva Convention IV]; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977 art. 75(4)(b) [hereinafter Additional Protocol I or AP I]; Protocol Additional (II) to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 8 June 1977, art. 6(2)(b) [hereinafter Additional Protocol II or AP II]; Armed Forces Act, 2006, § 42, c. 52, Acts of Parliament, 2006 (United Kingdom); and Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 17 July1998, art. 75(2) [hereinafter the Rome Statute].

[12]See Rome Statute, art. 28; Additional Protocol I, arts. 86(2) and 87; and CIHL Rules 152 and 153.

JAG's Office a few years after the end of the Second World War, in 1948.[13] This separation created a new Directorate of Legal Services, and designated as DLS (RAF), something which had first been proposed on the Branch's conception, a quarter of a century earlier. Legal Officers had previously held judicial responsibility for the administration of courts-martial, i.e. summoning and supervising the court, as well as their prosecutions. A report on the matter (known as the 'Lewis Committee') recommended that a separate DLS should carry out prosecuting functions with a '… complete separation of the judicial and prosecuting sides of the Judge Advocate General's work (a reform which we consider is long overdue) …'. [14] The report concluded with the observation that: 'It will be a matter of consideration and decision by others whether the … new legal department[s] above recommended should perform other legal work for …the Royal Air Force in addition to work in connection with courts-martial.' Those comments provided an insight into the wider role of the operationally focused Legal Branch in existence today.

In a November 1948 Cabinet Meeting, and reflected in Cabinet Papers published shortly thereafter, the sitting British Prime Minister Clement Attlee observed that: 'It is very desirable that we should make full use of the experience of the Law Officers on the legal aspects of policy questions. I have not here in mind the long-established and valuable practice of referring difficult legal issues to the Law Officers for a formal Opinion, but rather the general assistance which they can give to their Ministerial colleagues on the legal questions which arise in the formulation and administration of policy.'[15] Attlee's assessment applied to public sector lawyers more widely but included those in the military, recognising 'the value of securing the attendance of one of the Law Officers at any meeting at which legal issues are likely to arise.'[16] As a key driver of the expansion of the welfare state and with first-hand military experience accrued during the First World War, Attlee believed firmly in the rule of law and the rights established by law as having the ability to guide every citizen's day-to-day lives, as well as to govern states' use of force.[17] That such dynamic, in-the-room legal advice

[13]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 4.
[14]Lewis, *supra* note 7, at p. 25; and The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) CAB 129/31/30, at 25, William Jowitt, Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor, Cabinet Memorandum on the Lewis Report, 13 December 1948.
[15]TNA CAB 181/2, Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Note by the Prime Minister, Assistance of the Law Officers, p. 2, 16 November 1948.
[16]Ibid., at p. 2.
[17]See Labour Party Annual Conference Report, at 173, 1935; and Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Address at the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly, 12 January 1946.

might apply as much to the civil service as it did the military demonstrated the direction towards which political thinking was steering at the time.

Nevertheless, as far as the RAF was concerned, while there may have been an early intention to use RAF Legal Officers on matters of law and policy in conflict, in the immediate post-war period the demands of administration took precedence. The occupation of the defeated Germany and Austria was administered under Four Power Control. This meant that the work of the new DLS (RAF) in the UK and overseas would continue to consist mainly of disciplinary, prosecution and police advisory work, as well as providing legal advice to more junior ranks under the RAF Legal Assistance Scheme.[18] In practice, the concept of the operational lawyer, working contemporaneously alongside units on operations, was still some way off.

In the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the focus of the work of the RAF's Legal Branch remained disciplinary, in particular duties relating to courts-martial and the administration of Service law in military establishments overseas. Largely this was in the newly incorporated Federal Republic of Germany, where there were reportedly around 25,000 RAF Service personnel stationed, as well as 15,000 wives and families.[19] Further afield, this period also saw the RAF involved in the Malayan Emergency, from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, with RAF Legal Officers largely involved in disciplinary matters relating to Service personnel stationed in both Singapore and North Borneo. Therefore, it wasn't until the second half of the twentieth century that the range of work of RAF Legal Officers started to expand beyond those 1923 Terms of Reference. One of the catalysts for this change were global, multilateral agreements, most notably the surrounding conferences and eventual signing and ratification of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and, sometime later, its Additional Protocols. The 1949 Conventions included specific provisions requiring governments to ensure their armed forces comply with LOAC. There had been previous efforts seeking to limit or otherwise shape the conduct of warfare; this included both the 1863 Lieber Code, which arose during the U.S. Civil War, and the 1907 Hague Conventions, as well as other, less

[18]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 15.

[19]See the Agreement Between the Parties to the North Atlantic Treaty Regarding the Status of Their Forces, 23 August 1953 [hereinafter the NATO SOFA 1953]; the NATO SOFA Supplementary Agreement, 3 August 1959, art. 22, which provided for most civil offences not involving German citizens nor property to be dealt with by the Service authorities; and Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 18, which cites this as having been according to a 1953 account by one of the RAF's National Service Sergeant Solicitors, Jack Newton.

formal examples.[20] However, while a state's armed forces may have long been guided by such codes and conventions, any regulation or audit of their compliance was scarce. The ratification of the four Geneva Conventions in 1949 provided a baseline legal framework within which to conduct armed conflict, acting beyond which would constitute a crime. They also provided a mechanism of redress where states did not comply. In practice, however, it would require something more bespoke for states to be able to operate within the LOAC framework and hold its practitioners to account.

This would materialise through the development of states' own Rules of Engagement (ROE). Not to be confused with the applicable law, ROE are 'directions for operational commands that set out the circumstances and limitations under which armed force may be applied', and in the case of the UK, 'to achieve military objectives for the furtherance of UK government policy.'[21] While breaking state ROE do not have the same consequences as breaking international law, they have proven just as important in shaping the conduct of armed conflict in the second half of the twentieth century. Belligerent parties to a conflict have been guided by informal policy constraints for centuries; evidence of the use of restrictions on armed forces' practice can be traced back to the Middle Ages and the chivalrous conduct expected of medieval knights in the fourteenth century.[22] However, the first formal ROE, or at least the use of the term, likely first arose in 1954.[23] In November of that year, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) issued an 'Intercept and Engagement Instruction', following dogfights between American and Soviet aircraft; the instructions were swiftly, but informally, termed 'Rules of Engagement' by those in the U.S. military administering them, and the term was born.[24] Shortly thereafter, the term was formally adopted by the JCS; ROE would become normalised in every U.S. intervention since.[25] By having such a broad, arguably permissive, legal basis upon which to act when engaged in conflict (*jus in bello*, enshrined by the Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols), it therefore leaves much room for governments to place more specific restrictions in the forms of

[20]Michael F. Lohr & Steve Gallotta, *supra* note 9, at 466.
[21]UK Ministry of Defence Joint Service Publication (JSP) 383, Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict, p. 53, 1 July 2004.
[22]New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), Directorate of Legal Services, NZDF Operational Law Companion, 11.0 Rules of Engagement 11-1, 1999.
[23]Theodor Meron, 'Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws, Perspective on the Law of War in the Later Middle Ages', (Oxford: OUP, 1993), pp. 91-93.
[24]See Martins, *supra* note 10, at p. 36.
[25]Christopher D. Amore, 'Rules of Engagement: Balancing The (Inherent) Right and Obligation of Self-Defense with the Prevention of Civilian Casualties', *1 Natl. Secur. Law J.*, 39 (2013), p. 51.

those military directives, namely a state's ROE. Policy, rather than law, would become the decisive factor in how conflicts would unfold.

From training providers to operational lawyers

The 1949 Conventions did not have any explicit requirement for Legal Advisers to be constantly on hand for commanding officers; this would have to wait until 1977 and the introduction of the Conventions' Additional Protocols. That such a provision came about at this stage was no coincidence; their development mirrored the direction that state practice and policy was also heading. By the early 1970s, just as the Additional Protocols were starting to be drafted, RAF Legal Officers were taking their first steps towards a more pragmatic, operational role.[26] In 1972, RAF Legal Officers attended a preliminary meeting in Whitehall to discuss the practical shortcomings of the existing system.[27] The extant LOAC training for the RAF's Service personnel had comprised of one short lecture by members of the RAF Directing Staff, who were not Legal Officers, given to RAF Officers at the Officer Training Unit. This practice alone, lacking any continuous or even any further supplement, was deemed ineffective in equipping the RAF's personnel for armed conflict.

Instead, what ensued was a programme of lectures and instruction to cover not only initial training at both the enlisted and officer training establishments, but also on-going training. Drafting work also started on the first Tri Service Manual of Armed Conflict Law, which would ultimately take thirty years to complete, eventually being published in 2004.[28] The RAF Legal Branch, along with its single Service equivalents, was integral to its completion. One outcome for the RAF specifically was to set up a new senior post to oversee and develop a more comprehensive, and ongoing, delivery of LOAC training and guidance, a practice which remains today.[29] Such developments reflected those in other nations; in 1974, the U.S. armed forces established a uniform Law of War programme across its Services, with the Army JAG Corps as the penholder for

[26]See Research Guide, Drafting history of the 1977 Additional Protocols, 16 October 2019 https://blogs.icrc.org/cross-files/drafting-history-1977-additional-protocols. Accessed 25 March 2025.
[27]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 29.
[28]JSP 383, *supra* note 21, at p. viii.
[29]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 34. By this stage, DLS (RAF) was divided into four areas of responsibility: Legal Services 1 advised on police reports and prosecuting courts-martial; Legal Services 2 administered the RAF Legal Assistance Scheme overseas; Legal Services 3 focused on the recruitment and management of Legal Officers, as well as other administrative matters; while Legal Services 4 was concerned with advisory work, policy development and now also LOAC.

the programme's implementation.[30] However, while the LOAC training being instilled in armed forces' Service personnel was improving, there remained no requirement for the *in situ* Legal Adviser during times of conflict and operations.

This changed three years later, when the ratification of Additional Protocol I of the 1949 Geneva Conventions provided written direction for Legal Advisers to be available, when necessary, to military commanders during conflict to ensure the appropriate application of IHL.[31] In the UK, the first operational lawyers were soon deployed as part of the Army Legal Services during the 1982 Falklands War.[32] Meanwhile in the U.S., which had signed but not ratified AP I, its existence nevertheless similarly catalysed the involvement of U.S. judge advocates in the development and review of operational plans, to ensure compliance with the law of war. By 1983, under Operation Urgent Fury, the United States' invasion of Grenada, it was deemed that a 'contingency-oriented U.S. Army' would routinely require judge advocates 'adept at handling more than traditional peacetime legal missions.' This, in effect, was the birth of operational lawyers 'in the room', on operations.[33] Fast forward to today and for many states the most restrictive constraints upon their use of force, in aerial warfare or otherwise, are their ROE as they apply to any given operation. While the basis upon which many states' ROE have been drafted are informed by LOAC, and those laws now enshrined in AP I, it is therefore domestic policy, rather than formal laws, which govern the practice of aerial targeting. It is also worth noting that while most states the world over have ratified the Geneva Conventions, there are notable absentees from their Additional Protocols, such as the U.S., Israel, Iran and India from APs I and II, for example.[34] This only cements the assertion that while LOAC compels a state and its armed forces to consider whether a target is lawful, and therefore whether they 'could' prosecute a target, it is their ROE which will add another layer and inform whether it is within policy to do so – whether they 'should' prosecute a target.

---

[30]U.S. Dep't of Defense, Directive No. 5100.77, DoD Program for The Implementation of The Law of War, 5 November 1974.

[31]Additional Protocol I, art. 82; and Jean de Preux, *Commentary,* Additional Protocol I, art. 82, at p. 3344 https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977/article-82/commentary/1987.

[32]Army Legal Services, 'ALS History' https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/adjutant-generals-corps/army-legal-services/. Accessed 10 February 2024.

[33]Frederic L. Borch, 'Judge Advocates in Combat: Army Lawyers in Military Operations from Vietnam to Haiti', *Mil. L. Rev.,* 174, (2001), p. 180, p. 186.

[34]See States parties and signatories to the Additional Protocol I.

By the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, RAF Legal Officers were now regularly providing training to Service personnel soon to be deployed on operations. They were also heavily involved in the drafting of policy and routinely participated in tri-Service exercises involving the application of LOAC. However, it wasn't until the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1990, and the involvement of the UK under Operation Granby, the codename for British military operations during the Second Gulf War, that the first RAF Legal Officers were deployed. Two RAF Legal Officers were sent out to HQ British Forces Middle East in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.[35] The first of these, a then Wing Commander Richard Anthony Charles, would later become the RAF's Director of Legal Services, a post he held as Air Vice-Marshal.[36] While the first Army Legal Officers had seen operational duty during the Falklands War some years earlier, the first Gulf War was the first international armed conflict in which air assets played the lead role in military operations – the first in what might be termed a 'decade of air power'. Uniformed lawyers embedded with other RAF personnel on operations was the logical next step.

By the 1990s, therefore, the RAF had a Legal Officer acting as the *in situ* and personal Legal Adviser to the UK's Joint Force Commander on all things related to aerial targeting. This meant that for the first time, RAF Legal Officers, alongside their single Service counterparts, were directly involved in advising commanders on all of ROE, targeting and prisoner of war handling, as well as host nation issues and more familiar disciplinary cases. The experiences of these Legal Officers, including the physical realities of being within the theatre of operations during a very kinetic time, led to a re-alignment of the RAF Legal Branch; there was an increased emphasis on Legal Officers' participation in, and training for, operations.[37] The establishment of a Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) of the UK armed forces in 1996 soon saw the RAF create a Legal Officer position there too. Its role was to provide strategic level legal support to operations, while the developing conflicts in Bosnia and Iraq saw RAF

[35]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 43.
[36]Group Captain David Garratt, *The Gulf War 1990-91 in International and English Law (1st ed.)* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 116; and The London Gazette (Supplement), No. 56668, 20 August 2002, p. 10042.
[37]For definitions of 'theatre of operations' see *Theatre*, Cambridge Dictionary, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/theatre, meaning 'an area or place in which important military events happen' and *Theater of operations*, Collins Dictionary, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/theater-of-operations, meaning 'the part of the theater of war, including a combat zone and a communications zone, that is engaged in military operations and their support'; and Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 35.

Legal Officers deployed at the operational and tactical level in those locations as well. RAF Legal Officers on operations was now the norm; these roles spanned from single Service operational deployments in posts in Combined Air Operations Centres (CAOCs) alongside international allies, to detachments to the United Nations (UN), which involved, for example, the conduct of judicial inquiries into suspected ceasefire agreement breaches.[38] The demand for Legal Officers on operations would only increase at the turn of the millennium. By now, their role specifically involved providing legal advice both in-theatre and at the strategic level on the law of targeting and the UK's ROE. The new norm was here.

In contemporary conflict, the prospect of nation states operating without Legal Advisers, and increasingly Policy Advisers, is unthinkable in modern warfare. 'I cannot stress that enough. I would not go anywhere now on any operation without a lawyer by my side ,' recalled Brigadier Ginn, the then Chief of Staff of the UK Joint Standing Committee in 2020.[39] The sentiment was one similarly shared by Colonel Dunlap, of the U.S. Air Force (USAF), who observed at the height of Operation Enduring Freedom in the early 2000s that, '… savvy American commanders seldom go to war without their attorneys.'[40] Of the academics, Michael Ignatieff expanded on this rationale when he articulated that lawyers,

> provide harried decision-makers with a critical guarantee of legal coverage, turning complex issues of morality into technical issues of legality, so that whatever moral or operational doubts a commander may have, he can at least be sure he will not face legal consequences. In effect, lawyers determined the legal barriers so that the 'harried' commander on the ground did not have to. This was, and remains, caveated by the principle of individual responsibility, regardless of what legal advice a commander does, or doesn't, receive.[41]

The former Chief of the Air Staff to the RAF, Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Pulford, went one step further when he observed in 2013, shortly after British operations had ended in Iraq, under Operation Telic, and were coming to an end in Afghanistan,

[38]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 37.
[39]Catherine Baksi, 'Military Mettle', *The Law Society Gazette*, p. 3, 22 June 2020 https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/analysis/military-mettle/5104689.article. Accessed 25 March 25.
[40]Colonel Charles J. Dunlap, 'Law and Military Interventions: Preserving Humanitarian Values in 21st Conflicts', prepared for the Humanitarian Challenges in Military Intervention Conference, p. 6, 2001 https://people.duke.edu/~pfeaver/dunlap.pdf.
[41]Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War* (New York: Metropolitan Books 2000), p. 199.

Operation Herrick, that, 'the nature of modern air operations, usually conducted in the glare of the world's media, requires the closest of attention to legal principles', and that there were 'no indications that the thirst for such air-minded legal advice is likely to diminish in the future.'[42] He was right, in particular with his acknowledgement of an increasingly public sphere in which the world's military operations now unfold, something which has only grown in scrutiny, speed and detail since. In 2013, it was indeed the 'world's media', or at least a mainstream media which was scrutinising the way in which military operations unfold, restricted as they were by finite resource, location and technological capability. More than a decade on and the advent of social media in particular means that open source intelligence (OSINT) reporting can frequently outpace any secure intelligence when it comes to updating both belligerents and the wider public on an unfolding conflict.[43]

The complex, rapidly evolving nature of both international armed conflict (IAC) and increasingly non-international armed conflict (NIAC) now throw up all sorts of legal, and policy, challenges. These are faced both by those RAF Legal Officers deployed in theatre at the operational and tactical level, as well as those stationed in air, joint or international headquarters, where the planning and strategic stages unfold. RAF Legal Officers acting as direct, contemporaneous operational lawyers is now the norm. Indeed, the mission statement of RAF Legal Services 'to deliver high quality, effective and operationally focussed legal services' reflect that; RAF Legal Officers are there in the first instance to contribute to the RAF's operational output. Everything else – the disciplinary, policy and administrative advice – comes secondary to that ability to be on hand, and ready, should an armed conflict arise.[44]

Another interesting development in the context of the advice received by operational commanders in armed conflict is the growing importance of Policy Advisers alongside their uniformed legal counterparts. While we know that Legal Advisers also dispense policy advice insofar as they advise on their nation's ROE, it is now also UK policy for an expert Policy Adviser to equally be 'available to operational commanders and their targeting staff in person or through reach-back, at all levels of command' and specifically that their advice 'should be sought if there is a risk that targeting could pose reputational issues for the UK'. It is therefore the responsibility of a Policy

[42]Carleton, *supra* note 3, at p. 3.
[43]Richard Baffa, 'The Ukraine-Russia War Confirms the Value of OSINT', *Babel Street*, 2022 https://www.babelstreet.com/blog/the-ukraine-russia-war-confirms-the-value-of-osint. Accessed 8 March 2026.
[44]Director of Legal Services (RAF), *supra* note 3.

Adviser to 'advise a commander on prevailing political sensitivities.'[45] Just as the laws, and the legal advice provided by Legal Advisers might inform military commanders as to whether they 'could' use lethal force under the law and a state's ROE, a Policy Adviser would therefore fulfil the role of advising whether they 'should' do so under those 'prevailing political sensitivities'. At present, the UK deploys civil servant Policy Advisers from its Ministry of Defence across its operational centres, where they form part of the UK military's Target Clearance Board for the prosecution of lethal force through deliberate targeting.[46] This is a practice seemingly unique to the UK, with other countries relying instead on formal policy advice through reach-back to Policy Advisers outside any given theatre of operations.[47] Whether this will evolve to see more nations deploying Policy Advisers to advise military commanders *in situ* remains to be seen; in a world where the prevailing political sensitivities are changing at a rate beyond which can only be imagined just years ago, this step may well transpire.[48]

Present and future operational law challenges

Reviewing the past can inform the trends apparent in more recent and ongoing conflicts and operations over the last couple of decades, as well as the challenges that operational Legal (and Policy) Advisers might face in the future. If we consider the conflicts or operations in which the UK has been involved over this period in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and now more recently Yemen, there have been pretty much continuous operations at varying tempos since 2000.[49] In all such operations, the UK has deployed Legal Officers alongside its commanding officers. Each are also conflicts which have thrown up all sorts of challenges to the lawyers in theatre as they try to apply the relevant laws and policy to the practice of aerial warfare.[50]

---

[45]UNESCO National report on the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention and its two (1954 and 1999) Protocols, four-year cycle 2017-2020, questionnaire: United Kingdom, at pp. 38, 52, 2021.

[46]InsideAIR, *LEGAD and POLAD on Ops – Targeting's Check and Balance* (Royal Air Force, 2024), 3:45.

[47]UNESCO Digital Library, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/permalink/P-af6754c3-aef0-41e8-9e9e-b0b431f5808e. Accessed 11 March 2025.

[48] UNESCO National report, *supra* note 45, at p. 56.

[49]Ministry of Defence, UK armed forces Deaths: Operational deaths post World War II, UK Government Official Statistic Report, p. 3, 5 March 2021 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6059cefa8fa8f545d995f161/20210325_UK_armed_forces_Operational_deaths_post_World_War_II-O.pdf. Accessed 8 March 2026.

[50]Notes from correspondence with Squadron Leader Lucy Jordan, UK Exchange Legal Officer, U.S. Air Force, 30 May – 9 September 2023.

Firstly, there's the challenge of asymmetric warfare. While counter-insurgency operations can be incredibly demanding, generally these conflicts have allowed the UK and its allies to operate in environments with little air threat, limited logistical risk and no air deep battle. For example, at the height of Operation Herrick in Afghanistan, in January 2012, there were 50 Troop Contributing Nations within an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) total strength exceeding 130,000.[51] However, a joint coalition environment brings its own set of challenges. A prime one is trying to successfully operate under different ROE, continuously varying IHL interpretations, national caveats and varying intelligence sharing policies. To be effective, not only must a Legal Adviser know their own doctrine, policy constraints and legal interpretations, but they must also understand the policy variations between coalition nations in order to turn those constraints into freedoms, or at least to prevent them hindering operations.[52] That understanding must extend to cases when the armed forces from one nation may be able to act in self-defence of others, or only in certain, limited circumstances but those from another may not. Or when a commander might have to be advised that they are unable to aid a particular attack, due to differing treaty or policy obligations. Another challenge is understanding a state's risk appetite, and how it might evolve. Early on in any campaign, significant risk might be tolerated. However, that has often changed if the strategic impact of casualties manifests at the political level, which it did during Operation Herrick. With this comes increasing political pressure to maintain an expectation of limited, even zero, civilian casualties and zero collateral damage. This in turn can impose quite heavy ROE restrictions far beyond those required by LOAC, resulting in a requirement for precision-delivered effects to be applied to all engagements.

Further, while the absolute number of war deaths has been declining since 1946, the number of conflicts is on the rise.[53] There are currently more than 100 armed conflicts

[51]North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 'ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014)', *NATO* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm. Accessed 13 February 2024.

[52]Dr Gloria Gaggioli, 'Soldier Self-Defense Symposium: Self-Defense in Armed Conflicts–The Babel Tower Phenomenon', *OpinioJuris*, 3 May 2019. https://opiniojuris.org/2019/05/03/soldier-self-defense-symposium-self-defense-in-armed-conflicts-the-babel-tower-phenomenon/. Accessed 8 March 2026; and E.L. Gaston, 'When Looks Could Kill: Emerging State Practice on Self-Defence and Hostile Intent', *Global Public Policy Institute*, (2017), p. 22.

[53]Bastian Herre, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, Max Roser, Joe Hasell & Bobbie Macdonald, 'War and Peace', *Our World in Data*, 2023 https://ourworldindata.org/war-and-peace. Accessed 8 March 2026.

in the world; since 2000 the number of NIACs has tripled, with more sides involved.[54] According to the ICRC, as of 2020 there were more than 60 states and 100-non-State armed groups involved in conflicts.[55] It perhaps follows, therefore, that the conflicts that are taking place are tending to be more fragmented, as armed groups split into factions. These are also far more complex to operate in, as well as being more protracted. The civil, and then increasingly proxy, and more recently again civil war unfolding in Syria is a prime example.[56] This has also manifested in developing role of civilians – both as victims and as belligerents. The multi-faceted nature of civilian involvement has raised difficult targeting questions in relation to objects as well as people. It has also posed issues for those acting in joint coalitions in terms of the interpretation of LOAC. For example, the legality of targeting 'war-sustaining' objects is interpreted differently by different nations often working in tandem, like the U.S. and UK.[57] The modern interpretation of one man's freedom fighter is another's terrorist might now be that one man's notion of a civilian is another's combatant. One recent example of this challenge is the question of whether Ukraine's 'IT army', a network of cyber volunteers recruited to target adversary websites and networks and formed at the behest of Ukraine's Minister of Digital Transformation, have become Direct Participants in Hostility (DPH).[58] This has opened dangerous questions for persons who might otherwise consider themselves civilians. Ukraine's Legal Advisers might argue, after having considered factors such as their status and what exactly their actions are targeting, that such persons remain civilians. However, their Russian counterparts may advise the equal and opposite, and suddenly the advice to Russia's

[54]Geneva Academy, 'Today's Armed Conflicts', *Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights* https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts. Accessed 13 February 2024; and International Committee of the Red Cross, The Roots of Restraint in War, *ICRC Report*, (2018), p. 13.

[55]Report of the General Secretary, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, *United Nations Security Council* S/2022/381, (2022), p. 13, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2022_381.pdf. Accessed 8 March 2026.

[56]International Committee of the Red Cross, *supra* note 54 at p. 46.

[57]10 U.S.C. § 950p(a)(1) (2009), which defines the term 'military objective' as 'combatants and those objects during hostilities which, by their nature, location, purpose, or use, effectively contribute to the war-fighting or war-sustaining capability…'; and Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Department of Defense, Law of War Manual § 5.6.6.2 *Make an Effective Contribution to Military Action* (updated ed. July 2023).

[58]Ann Väljataga, 'Cyber vigilantism in support of Ukraine: a legal analysis', *CCD COE*, 1, (March 2022), p. 2 https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/rkbxaa-p6qlc/003-CCDCOE-Cyber-vigilantism-in-support-of-Ukraine-a-legal-analysis-March-2022.pdf. Accessed 2 March 2025.

military commanders might be that these are legitimate military targets. Similarly, there has been much discussion around the interpretation of 'protected persons' in territory that has been invaded but not strictly occupied.[59]

This article has considered the current and recent trends and challenges facing RAF Legal Advisers in the operational context, but what comes next?[60] Technological development continues at pace. Technology has helped develop weapons and in so doing it has also improved the accuracy of targeting in aerial warfare. This in turn has helped inform the genesis of any given ROE. For example, the continual evolution of technological capabilities has enabled the setting of low, or even zero, civilian casualty limits. Technology is also important in terms of media awareness, and therefore wider public awareness and scrutiny of operations, which again can impact the ROE. For example, in the Cuban Missile Crisis there was over a week between the missiles first being detected by an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft and the press conference where John F. Kennedy went public.[61] In contrast, within the last decade, news organisations have been able to break news of attacks within an hour of them occurring while data analysis firms, which do not require the verification of sources to the degree that news outlets do, have broken such news within a matter of minutes.[62] Commercial providers now routinely supply the intelligence to media outlets, to break the news of what's happening in the moment that it is. It is not so much a matter of minutes as it is contemporaneous; the impact of aerial strikes is posted to social media before states' armed forces have even announced they've occurred. Often the perpetrating aircraft won't even have returned to base.[63]

The means and methods of warfare also increasingly rely on ever more complex technology. Such technological advances can be hugely positive but also raise questions

[59]Kubo Mačák & Mikhail Orkin, *'Who is Protected by The Fourth Geneva Convention? The Case of Civilians in Invaded Territory'*, *Lieber Institute Articles of War* (15 August 2022), https://lieber.westpoint.edu/who-is-protected-civilians-invaded-territory. Accessed 2 March 2025.

[60]Jordan, *supra* note 50.

[61]U.S. Office of the Historian, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis, October 1962', *The Office of the Historian* https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis. Accessed 13 February 2024.

[62]Sean P. Larkin, 'The Age of Transparency: International Relations Without Secrets,' *Foreign Affairs*, 95(3) (2016), pp. 136, 143.

[63]On 2 February 2024, the U.S. launched airstrikes against Iranian targets in Iraq and Syria. Within hours of the strikes, U.S. Central Command had confirmed the strikes, and that it had included 'long-range bombers flown from United States'. It would be almost 20 hours between the release of the statement and the time that the B-1 bombers flown in this mission would return to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

about how existing laws should be applied and interpreted, and whether new laws are required.[64] While it is relatively settled, at least in a Western context, that existing laws do indeed apply to new domains, this doesn't necessarily manifest as such in practice.[65] Once again, no two campaigns are the same. Therefore, while the academic argument may be a straightforward one, in theatre this concept is constantly being tested, and at times exploited. Technology therefore is always hovering in the background as a threat, or at the very least an excuse for certain actions, even those amounting to a use of force, that we must anticipate. The space domain provides another challenge but also raises many possibilities. For example, in a domain where intent is very hard to determine, how does that balance with the law in relation to self-defence?[66] When it comes to targeting, can a nation target hundreds of satellites in different orbits; is it even capable of doing so? Would it require force that might become hugely escalatory? What is the risk of targeting such objects?[67] Indeed, the commercialisation of space raises its own problems. Since the turn of the century, it has consistently been estimated that around 95%, if not more, of satellites on orbit are dual-use compatible, which raises the legitimate question of whether these can be targeted?[68] Similarly, can collateral damage estimates and proportionality advice be done accurately in the context of a kinetic attack in space? Can the impact on civilian life be estimated should an attack occur from space, and what about the debris created

---

[64]Yahli Shereshevsky, 'International humanitarian law-making and new military technologies,' *Int. Rev. Red Cross*, 104, 920-921(2022), pp. 2131, 2151 https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/reviews-pdf/2022-11/international-humanitarian-law-making-and-new-military-technologies-920.pdf. Accessed 13 February 2024.

[65]Dan Efrony & Yuval Shany, 'A Rule Book on the Shelf? Tallinn Manual 2.0 on Cyberoperations and Subsequent State Practice', 1 *AJIL*, 12 (4) (2018), pp. 583, 585.

[66]Dr Anne-Sophie Martin, 'State's Right to Self-Defence in Outer Space: A New Challenge for NATO's Deterrence', JPACC Journal, 30 (2020), pp. 30, 32; Brian Weeden & Victoria Samson, 'Self-defense in Space: A Summary of Discussions', *Secure World Foundation* (2015) https://swfound.org/media/205345/self-defense_space_summary_dec2015.pdf.

[67]International Committee of the Red Cross Report, *see* International humanitarian law and cyber operations during armed conflicts, *Int. Rev. Red Cross*, 102, 481-492, pp. 481, 484 (2020), https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/reviews-pdf/2021-03/ihl-and-cyber-operations-during-armed-conflicts-913.pdf. Accessed 14 February 2024.

[68]*See*, for example, Joan Johnson-Freese, *Space as a Strategic Asset* (Columbia University Press, 2013) p. 30; Roger Cliff, *The Military Potential of China's Commercial Technology* (RAND Corporation 2001), p. 27; and NATO's overarching Space Policy https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_190862.htm. Accessed 14 February 2024.

and the impact that this has? There are a lot of hypotheticals in there; there is also a lot to consider that is not outside the realms of possibility.

Another issue brought into sharp focus by both the Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Hamas conflicts is large-scale combat operations. This has once again brought into sharp focus the questions of whether legal advice should be provided on every targeting decision, even though the law does not strictly require it. And if targeting decisions increasingly become multi-national, prosecuted through alliances such as NATO or similar, questions area se arise?? of whose nation state prevails? How will the risk appetite, of your nation state and that of your allies, change over the course of a conflict? How will a conflict's evolving geography impact this? What might this do to minimising civilian harm? And where will legal advice be provided from – does it need to be physically in theatre, or can it be completely remote? Ultimately, these questions will only continue to evolve in complexity and urgency as the nature of conflicts become in themselves more complex, more fragmented and likely more protracted. Policies will also diverge, as each state seeks to answer these questions for themselves.

The nature of armed conflict and the tasks and challenges that RAF Legal Officers have had to contend with over the last one hundred years have changed dramatically. Contemporaneous, on-hand legal and policy advice is now a requirement rather than an aspiration, as military commanders contend with conflicts which are unfolding more quickly and unpredictably than ever before, and often involving a wider set of actors. In a world of increasing uncertainty, the next one hundred years will undoubtedly invite widespread change in the role of RAF Legal Officers, but it is reasonable to assert that its operational focus will remain, in one way or another.

Fort Henry: Canadian and British Assault Training at Studland for Operation Overlord, 1943-1944

DANTE DUNBABIN*
Independent Scholar, UK
Email: *ddunbabin_history@outlook.com*

ABSTRACT
Fort Henry at Studland in Dorset is an observation post constructed to observe Canadian and British amphibious training exercises for Operation Overlord. It is an important and visible remnant of training exercises which is frequently misunderstood. This article draws on a wide range of sources from archives in the UK, Canada and United States to provide a comprehensive account of how and why the building was constructed, the origin of its name and how the building was utilised during its short, but eventful lifetime.

Introduction

During September 1943, construction work started on a large observation post overlooking Studland Bay in Dorset. This building, later given the name Fort Henry, was subsequently used to observe a series of combined operations exercises conducted by 3 Canadian Infantry Division (3 CID) and 50 (Northumbrian) Infantry Division (50 NID) during late 1943 and 1944. Despite efforts from the landowner to have the building removed postwar, Fort Henry has survived, and in 2012 became a Grade II listed building.[1] This unique structure has since become a focal point for interest in amphibious training at Studland Bay yet, despite significant popular attention, it has received limited academic recognition. Only two studies in the historiography focus directly on Studland's Second World War past. In 2020 Thomas

*Dante Dunbabin is an independent historian and archaeologist who specialises in the British and Canadian armies in the United Kingdom, 1939-1945.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1958

[1]Dorset History Centre (hereinafter DHC) D-BKL/E/Q/90, Letter from Dem-Ex to F.O. Rhodes, 30 October 1946; DHC D-BKL/E/Q/126, Letter from Major General Walsh to Miss Bankes and Mrs Breckwith, 11 August 1950; Historic England, 1411809 Gun Emplacement and Fort Henry, https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1411809?section=official-list-entry. Accessed 8 August 2025.

Cousins et al. published an article investigating the Valentine Duplex Drive tanks lost during Exercise Smash 1 at Studland in April 1944, while William Foot conducted a study of surviving Second World War archaeology in 2006.[2] Wider studies of the British and Canadian contribution to Operation Overlord also frequently refer to Fort Henry in passing.[3]

Figure 1: Fort Henry Exterior – 2025.[4]

[2]Thomas Cousins, Thomas Harrison, and Dave Parham, 'The Maritime Archaeology of Duplex Drive Tanks in the United Kingdom', In Jennifer A. Rodrigues and Arianna Traviglia (ed.), IKUWA6, (Fremantle: Western Australian Maritime Museum, 2020), pp. 649–656; William Foot, *Beaches, Fields, Streets, and Hills: The Anti-Invasion Landscape of England, 1940,* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2006), pp. 65-74.

[3]C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945,* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1960), p. 12 & p. 36; Andrew Holborn, *The D-Day landing on Gold Beach: 6 June 1944,* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), pp. 103-104.

[4]Photographed by the author 2025 – scale 50cm.

Yet none of these publications has attempted to investigate in detail what actually happened at Studland, and this has led to a number of misconceptions about Fort Henry's original purpose and use. This lack of academic interest is surprising as the building represents a significant visible archaeological reminder of training exercises for Operation Overlord, and the often challenging progress made towards developing an effective amphibious force. The purpose of this article is to investigate Fort Henry beyond what has currently been published and in doing so to answer three main questions. It will examine why Studland was chosen as an assault training area for Overlord to gain an understanding of the building's location. It will then consider why and how Fort Henry was built, looking at both the practical and possible political motivations for its construction in 1943. Finaly, it will investigate how the building was used by both Canadian, and later British forces as it matured into 1944.

Studland as an Assault Training Area

The large, depopulated area of heathland and close proximity to naval facilities at Portland, Poole and Portsmouth made Studland Bay a practical location for amphibious training exercises. The first known combined exercise was held in 1927, with a much larger landing by 3 Infantry Division in 1936. No live firing was conducted, and as such there was no requirement for a hardened observation post.[5] Even after the outbreak of war, Studland's importance as a training area remained limited with the area only utilised for local training.[6]

In April 1942 the Commander in Chief (CinC) Home Forces, General Barnard Paget, considered the British Army needed 'realistic formation battle practice' in areas where they could use 'their weapons in the most life-like battle conditions.'[7] Paget submitted a report to the War Office asking for a list of land in the UK to be requisitioned to create battle training areas. This list included the heathland 'south of Poole Harbour', selected due to the small population and suitable expanse of heath and forest for training.[8] After limited local objections, War Office approval was given on 2 July 1942 and 450 people were subsequently evacuated. On 10 August 1942, the War Office formally took control of 24 square miles of land under Defence Regulation 51 (DR51)

[5]Special Correspondent of *The Times*, 'General Service Notes', *RUSI Journal*, Vol.72, Iss.488 (1927), pp. 886-887; The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) AIR 2/1924, Report on Combined Operations Exercise 1936, 18 September 1936; Robert Tuke, 'The Amphibious Manoeuvres', *The Fighting Forces,* Vol. XIII, No.4 (1936), pp. 302-308.
[6]TNA WO 166/4283, 5 East Yorkshire Regiment War Diary, 10 July 1940; TNA WO 166/909, 7 Guards Brigade War Diary, 26 February 1941.
[7]TNA HO 207/1186, HF.12065/3/17/G(Trg) Report by CinC Home Forces, 23 April 1942.
[8]Ibid.

creating the Studland Battle Training Area (SBTA).[9] Over the following year the SBTA became hugely popular as a military training area for British Army formations within Southern Command (SOUTCO).[10]

By June 1943, the role of Studland as a training area was about to change again. Lieutenant General Frederick Morgan, recently appointed Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (designate) (COSSAC), summited a report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) requesting the formation of new assault training areas to exercise the forces that had been allocated to Operation Overlord. Morgan considered that 'among the most important parts of the training of such forces is to give them practice with live ammunition in supporting the landing.'[11] This was a key lesson of the Dieppe Raid and Morgan requested that two training areas were required between The Needles and Portland. In his memorandum he outlined key requirements including a sea frontage of two to three nautical miles; a firing area extending at least 5,000 and preferably 8,000 yards inland; and a sparse population to allow straightforward evacuation.[12]

Morgan's proposals were immediately agreed to in principle and a three service subcommittee called the Assault Training Areas Selection Committee (ATASC) was formed to handle the initial interpretation of reconnaissance reports.[13] After reconnaissance was conducted in Portsmouth Command, the findings were presented at a meeting of the ATASC on 22 July 1943. Studland had two main advantages; the bay and heathland met the size requirements as laid down by COSSAC, and the area was already requisitioned for the SBTA. There were also notable drawbacks including that some parts of Studland Bay were too shallow to allow the access of large ships, parts of Studland Heath were boggy, and there were few exits from the beach. Brigadier Harrold Pyman, Brigadier General Staff (Training) (BGS(Trg)) 21st Army

[9]DHC D-BKL/E/Q/150, Godlingston Heath Requisition Agreement, 12 November 1942; Ibid., Preston & Redman Solicitors to F.O. Rhodes, 22 October 1942.
[10]Range allocation tables for this time are not known to have survived. References to exercises conducted on the SBTA can be found in individual unit War Diaries for formations located in SOUTCO.
[11]TNA CAB 80/70/44, COS(43)324(O) Operation Overlord Combined Training of Naval Assault Forces, 19 June 1943.
[12]Ibid.; Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p. 7.
[13]TNA CAB 80/71/5, COS(43)335(O) Combined Training of Naval Assault Forces, Memo by Ismay, 23 June 1943; TNA CAB 79/62/3, COS(43)335(O) Operation Overlord Combined Training of Naval Assault Forces, 24 June 1943; TNA ADM 179/341, M.053736/43 Secretary of the Admiralty to all commands, 7 July 1943.

Group complained that Studland would be too small for large scale assault landing, yet the ATASC still recommended that Studland should be selected.[14]

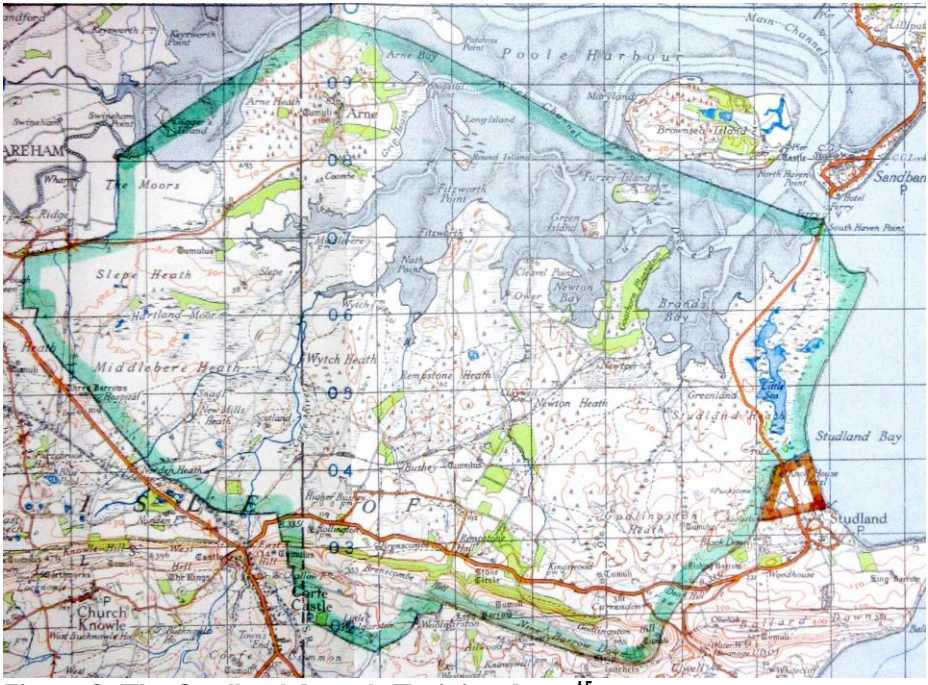

Figure 2: The Studland Assault Training Area.[15]

The original SBTA is shown by the green boundary and the new requisitions for the SATA are in red.

The extent to which Morgan consulted with 21st Army Group before issuing the specifications for the new training areas is open to further investigation. Yet this would appear to have been limited, as on 27 July, Pyman wrote to Paget stating that 'the Studland Bay area is by no means ideal for training in assault landing with firing. It is boggy, small and bears no resemblance to the French Coast.'[16] Morgan comments in his postwar book *Overture to Overlord* about the 'perennial difficulty in finding training areas…in Britian' implying that he may have kept the specification minimal in the hope

[14]TNA WO 205/1089, M.053736/43./A.T.A.S.C – Minutes of ATASC meeting held on 22 July 1943.
[15]TNA WO 205/1089.
[16]TNA WO 205/1089, HF.00/56/G(Trg) 21 Army Group BGS to CGS, 27 July 1943.

of being able to successfully acquire land.[17] Perhaps the best summary of the situation was by Major General Rod Keller, General Officer Commanding (GOC) 3 CID, who stated in November 1943 that, 'the Studland Bay Area had been requisitioned…. not from choice as a suitable ground but as one of the few available pieces of ground.'[18] Finally on the 7 August 1943 Studland Bay was put before the COSC and they formally agreed to convert the SBTA together with additional requisitions.[19] The SBTA was formally succeeded on 8 September 1943, creating the Studland Assault Training Area (SATA).[20]

3 CID, Force J, and Exercise Pirate

The SATA had been created primarily for the use of Naval Assault Force J and 3 CID. Force J had originally been formed as Force Jubilee for the Dieppe Raid before being kept as a permanent force and 3 CID was nominated in early July 1943 to train as an assault division, a role it had not previously undertaken.[21] Control of the 3 CID's training program was vested in 1 Canadian Corps under the command of Lieutenant General H.D.G 'Harry' Crerar, who would subsequently command the First Canadian Army in Normandy.[22] Crerar and his planning staff immediately started creating a multi stage training program for the next ten months to prepare 3 CID for a major amphibious operation against a defended coastline, and in August, work started on the first full scale combined exercise. At a conference on 23 August 1943, the first plan for this exercise was laid out. Titled Exercise Magnum the main aim was to exercise the landing of an assault brigade and to exercise Force J.[23] At the end of August, for reasons which remain unclear, Magnum was renamed Exercise Pirate.[24] This exercise would include the use of new equipment and methods recently developed to support the assaulting troops. After the failure of the Dieppe Raid, the Canadian forces had

[17]Frederick Morgan, *Overture to Overlord,* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), pp. 239-240.

[18]Library and Archives Canada (hereinafter LAC) RG24-C-3, Vol. 14286, File 1044, 27 Armoured Regiment War Diary, 24 November 1943.

[19]TNA CAB 79/63/12, COS(43)44(O) Cross Channal Operations Combined Training of Naval Assault Forces, 7 August 1943.

[20]TNA WO 205/1089, 21 A.Gp/00/56/2/G(Trg) 21 Army Group to First Canadian Army, 30 August 1943.

[21]Richard Hopton, *A Reluctant Hero: The Life of Captain Robert Ryder VC*, (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2011), p. 176; Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p. 9, p. 34.

[22]Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p. 34.

[23]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 13685, File 1/GS, Conference on Magnum held at 1st Cdn Corps HQ on Monday 23 August 1943.

[24]Directorate of History and Heritage, Ottawa CA (hereinafter DHH), CMHQ Report No.128, 20 November 1944, Appendix 3, Principles to be followed in the organisation of fire support for an assault landing (Exercise Pirate), 30 August 1943.

concluded that there was a 'need for overwhelming fire support, including close support, during the initial stages of the attack.'[25] A substantial amount of work had been done since 1942 to reach this goal, and by both British and Canadian forces, with some of the new methods and equipment being tested at Studland during the summer and early autumn of 1943 such as Landing Craft Tank (Rocket) (LCT(R)). Exercise Pirate was important because it would be the first time that a large-scale live fire exercise had taken place in the UK which included multiple aspects of what would become the assault plan for Overlord. Over the following weeks extensive planning was conducted and the final plan called for a division level landing operation with extensive naval logistics support, RAF tactical air support, and even the planned construction of an airfield in the bridgehead, although this aspect was later dropped.[26] For 1 Canadian Corps and 3 CID to embark on such an advanced scheme as their first large exercise, now scheduled for the middle of October 1943, would be highly ambitious.

Constructing Fort Henry

On 22 August 1943, the General Staff (GS) branch of 1 Canadian Corps informed their Chief Engineer (CE), Brigadier A. B. Connelly that 'they require a German defensive position to be constructed along the coast of Studland Bay near Poole for assault training.'[27] 1 Canadian Corps engineers were assigned to conduct the majority of construction, and the following day the Corps Commander Royal Canadian Engineers (CRE), Lieutenant-Colonel Bascom Darwin, was summoned to Connelly's Sussex HQ to discuss the arrangements. After being briefed of the required work, Darwin departed to conduct a reconnaissance of Studland. The exact details of the task he had been given is not recorded at this time, but over the next week it would appear that Darwin formed a plan to construct defences. This appears to have been changed after a meeting with Crerar, as it was noted afterwards that Darwin 'had changed the original plan' and that two officers visited Studland 'to submit a report on positions and location of enemy defences for the forthcoming ex[ercise].'[28]

A deadline for work to be completed at Studland was set for 15 October 1943, and on 24 August Darwin visited 12 Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE) where he informed Major George Wade that his company had been assigned the

[25]Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p. 7.
[26]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14659, File 1150, CE First Canadian Army War Diary, 2 September 1943.
[27]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14680, File 1B, CE 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 22 August 1943.
[28]Ibid., 4-5 September 1943.

majority of work.[29] Darwin also arrived at the HQ of 9 Field Park Company RCE on 1 September and promptly ordered them to send a detachment to Studland to establish and 'operate a dump of field defence stores.'[30] On 6 September 12 Field Company departed their billets in Northanger and moved their HQ and 248 men to the Knoll House Hotel at Studland.[31] The adjusted construction plan which awaited the Canadian engineers was ambitious to say the least as they were instructed to build mock German positions based on weekly allied intelligence briefings prepared by the Theatre Intelligence Service – which were called *Martian Reports.* This would include constructing four 'German' pillboxes, anti-tank ditches, road exits from the beach, a Todt Organization style anti-tank wall, a mock Tobruk post and even mock tank concentrations.[32] The 1941 era Beach Scaffolding was not a feature of German defences, and this would have to be removed along with minefields.[33]

Work started on 7 September 1943 with platoons removing scaffolding and clearing minefields. Progress was made by hand until 9 September when two D4 tracked bulldozers arrived together with a dragline and two cement mixers.[34] On 10 September 1943, ground work is recorded as commencing for an observation post at Redend Point.[35] This is the first documentary reference to what would become Fort Henry and from this date it can be concluded that construction was most likely ordered by Crerar during a meeting with Darwin on 4 September. On 12 September, Darwin, his Field Engineer 1 Captain J.W. Thomas, and Adjutant Captain A.J.E. Smith, prepared a design for the building at their Surrey HQ.[36] The following day at a meeting with Darwin, Connelly, and Crerar, the design appears to have been approved.[37] Assuming no further changes were made before construction, Darwin, Thomas and Smith's design called for a concrete shelter which could accommodate 40 spectators.

[29]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14683, File 85, CRE 1st Canadian Corps Troops War Diary, 24 August 1943.
[30]LAC, RG24-C-3, Vol. 14787, File 87, 9th Field Park Company RCE War Diary, 1-2 September 1943.
[31]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 6 September 1943.
[32]Ibid., Progress Report - Studland, c. October 1943.
[33]TNA ADM 179/341, Commander Force J to CinC Southern Command, 1 September 1943.
[34]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 9-11 September 1943.
[35]Ibid., 10 September 1943.
[36]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14683, File 85, CRE 1st Canadian Corps Troops War Diary, 12 September 1943.
[37]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14680, File 1B, CE 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 13 September 1943.

At nearly thirty metres long, and over three metres wide, and split into three separate compartments, this building was large and would take all of No.1 Platoon to construct.[38]

Detailed sources relating to the construction of Fort Henry are limited and the majority of information presented here is taken from three War Diaries, those of 12 Field Company RCE, HQ CRE 1 Canadian Corps, and HQ CE 1 Canadian Corps. Although these sources provide some material, information such as exactly what was discussed at meetings between Darwin and Crerar is not recorded and limited additional sources have been traced to rectify this deficiency. This leaves shortfalls in both what can be learned about the construction process and Crerar's motivations for wanting to build such an observation post. At least in the latter case from the information available a reasonable conclusion can be reached.

Exercise Pirate was the first large scale UK demonstration of an assault fire support plan which brought together a wide range of weapons and tactics; these had been developed across the British and Canadian armed forces following the Dieppe Raid of the year before. As will be explored, this attracted an array of senior spectators which Crerar wanted to accommodate. Redend Point is approximately 700 metres south of the firing area and this poses a justifiable danger to spectators where many still experimental weapons systems were being used. During Pirate a rocket from an LCT(R) fell short and hit a Landing Craft Support (Large) killing two crew members and injuring more which demonstrates just how real the danger was.[39] It is also worth considering that Crerar may have had political motivations for wanting to encourage spectators to attend Pirate. Since July 1943 he had taken a keen interest in combined operations tactics, holding a corps study week and distributing a paper on fire support tactics.[40] As his biographer Paul Dickson refers, Crerar took a 'cathartic pride' in Exercise Pirate.[41] The extent to which Crerar wanted to use Exercise Pirate to demonstrate his own ability as a possible commander in Normandy to as many superiors as possible is open to debate and largely beyond the scope of this article.

---

[38]LAC RG24-G-3-1-a, Vol. 10741, File 219C1.009 (D303), 21 A Gp/2150/15/G(Trg) Exercise Pirate Spectators, 28 September 1943.

[39]TNA ADM 267/123, J. Gordon Lockhart Flotilla Officer 310th LCS(L) Flotilla Report on LCS(L) 255 Incident, 19 October 1943.

[40]DHH CMHQ Report No.128, 20 November 1944, Appendix 4, Summing Up by Comd 1 Cdn Corps Combined Operations Study Period, 31 July 1943; TNA WO 106/4283, Principles to be followed in the organisation of fire support for an assault landing (Exercise Pirate), 30 August 1943.

[41]Paul Douglas Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 210.

Construction progressed over the following days with No.1 Platoon working on the foundations for the observation post. Visitors came to Studland on a daily basis and included everyone from Darwin and Thomas to Crerar who came to observe progress, or were just 'hanging around' as 12 Field Company's diarist noted.[42] Access to Studland beach and much of the heathland was restricted due to naval firing. Construction at Redend Point was not affected by this problem as it was outside the range firing area, yet for the majority of tasks, work had to stop to allow firing to take place as Crerar insisted that the training of LCT crews and artillery field regiments using the range should take priority over construction. Major Wade attempted to counter this problem by moving the working hours of the day to early in the morning and late into the night with truck headlights even being used to provide illumination.[43] This arrangement did not proceed without problems as on 13 September it was reported that an LCT(R) 'forgot to stop and almost hit some of our men who returned a little prematurely.'[44]

By 14 September it was reported that Wade and Darwin 'spent their time in planning the work which lasted until far into the night. Still very short of supplies. Everyone is keeping busy on the job. Supplies had better hurry up and come.'[45] Cement arrived on 15 September and was followed the next day by aggregate, more cement and some timber.[46] However, this was still not enough to finish the concrete works under construction and the following day in a meeting with Major McConnell of the CE's office, Captain Thomas stated that 'everything is under control,' but he was 'anxious about reinforcing steel' which was required for the pillboxes and observation post.[47] The next day 31 railway wagons of supplies finally arrived at Corfe Castle station allowing construction to proceed. Yet this was not the end of the problem as it appears steel reinforcing bar was still in short supply. Although it remains unclear if Fort Henry was built using improvised reinforcement, surviving rubble at the probable location of the mock German pillbox contains large quantities of re-used Admiralty Beach Scaffolding, demonstrating just how short of supplies the Canadian engineers were.[48]

[42]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 4 October 1943.
[43]Ibid., 29 September 1943.
[44]Ibid., 13 September 1943.
[45]Ibid., 14 September 1943.
[46]Ibid., 12-17 September 1943.
[47]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14680, File 1B, CE 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 16 September 1943.
[48]Authors site visit, 22 January 2025. Concrete remains can be found at SZ 03244 84617, SZ 03291 84582 and SZ 03270 84572.

The limited time made available held back construction and on 22 September when Brigadier Connelly visited Studland, Wade reported to him that he was 'very worried about the completion of the job since the range was to be in continual use' as this had left 'him only two days for daylight work in two weeks.'[49] Ultimately all plans for further concrete pillboxes were scrapped on 24 September, and only one was actually completed.[50] Over the following days additional work parties from 3 CID engineers arrived to finish clearing the scaffolding and surround the mock defences and foreshore with barbed wire.[51] Detailed progress reports for the day-to-day advancement of Fort Herny do not survive, but all accounts suggest there were further delays. An example is on 26 September when 12 Field Company was forced to move into Studland village as the Knoll House Hotel was too close to where 25-pounders were being fired from LCTs in Studland Bay.[52] Further distraction was created on 28 September by the holding of 21st Army Group Exercise Crab at Studland which was intended to test vehicles' beach terrain crossing abilities and included Paget and Major General Percy Hobart as spectators.[53] As 12 Field Company's unnamed War Diarist stated, 'it proved very interesting, but the vehicles cluttered up the road to such an extent that our own vehicles couldn't get though.'[54]

Finally, after Crab, the obstructions to completing tasks at Studland started to decrease. Combined with a reduced number of defences to be constructed, Major McConnel found on 1 October that 'Major Wade was confident that the whole job would be finished by the 14 Oct[ober].'[55] To save timber which was in in short supply, shuttering at Redend Point was constructed using metal modular shuttering provided by London based contractor Blaw Knox.[56] Construction of the concrete structures

[49]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14680, File 1B, CE 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 22 September 1943.
[50]Ibid., 20-24 September 1943.
[51]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14721, File 716, 6th Field Company RCE War Diary, 24-26 September 1943; LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14745, File 717, 18th Field Company RCE War Diary, 7-10 October 1943.
[52]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14464, File 706, 13th Field Regiment War Diary, 20-30 September 1943.
[53]TNA WO 199/185, HF.00/414/G(Trg) Spectators Crab, 22 September 1943; TNA WO 205/508, 21 AGp/1462/5/G(SD) Spectator Instructions Crab, 25 September 1943.
[54]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 28 September 1943.
[55]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14680, File 1B, CE 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 30 September 1943.
[56]LAC RG24-G-3-1-a, Vol. 10741, File 219C1.009 (D301), 0/10/0/1/CE Major W.W.K. McConnell to G Branch 1st Canadian Corps, 2 September 1943.

neared completion by 6 October when 9 Field Park Company asked for 70 tons of cement to be moved by road transport from Swanscombe to Studland by the next day. Despite the short notice, 24 three ton lorries were arranged and arrived at Studland by 2100 hours the following day.[57] On 9 October, both No.1 and No.2 Platoons finished pouring their concrete, completing the structural elements of both the pillbox and observation post.[58]

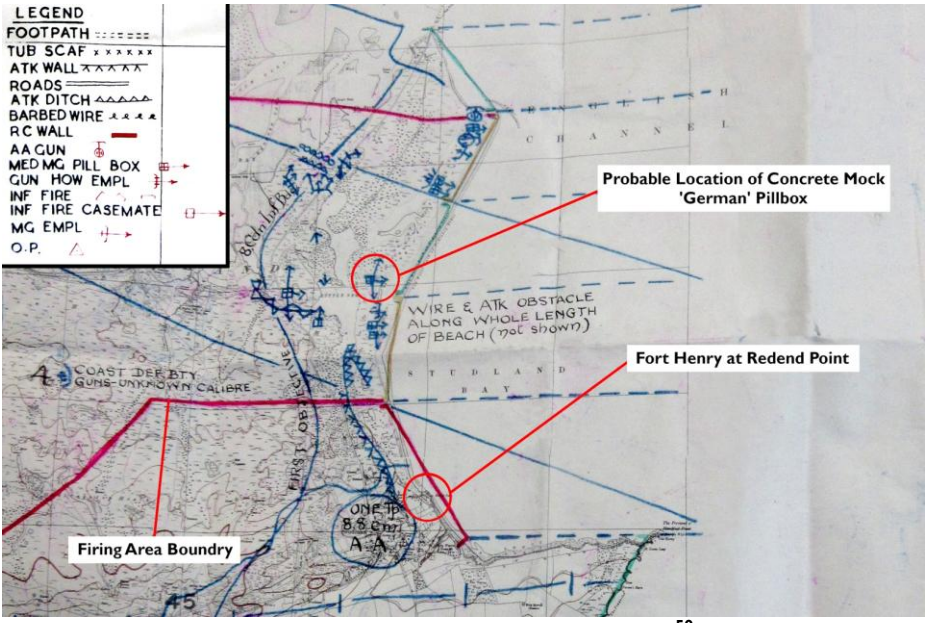

Figure 3: The defences constructed for Exercise Pirate.[59] Apart from the single new concrete pillbox the remaining pillboxes marked were either re-used 1940 era buildings or scaffolding and cloth dummies.

It is important to note that throughout the construction of the building at Redend Point, it is always referred to as the 'observation post' or 'O.P.' However, from mid-November onwards the name Fort Henry appears for the first time in reference to this structure. A notable example is Brigadier Clarence Mann's commentary and

[57]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14683, File 85, CRE 1st Canadian Corps Troops War Diary, 7 October 1943.
[58]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 10 October 1943.
[59]Source TNA WO 199/2303.

spectator instructions on Exercise Vidi, an exercise similar to Pirate, from 25 November 1943 which twice refers to Fort Henry by name and does not introduce the structure, indicating that the invited spectators were already familiar with the name and that it had been introduced before this date.[60]

It remains debatable who first established this name for the observation post as no source specifically comments on this aspect. William Foot stated in *Beaches, Fields, Streets, and Hills* that the name derives from 'the home base of the Canadian Royal Engineers who built it [sic].'[61] The Canadian Fort Henry is a large nineteenth century defensive fort in Kingston, Ontario. However, 12 Field Company was formed at Winnipeg in Manitoba which appears to dismiss this idea.[62] It is likely that the name Fort Henry still derives from the Kingston fort as this complex is located opposite Canada's Royal Military College (RMC), an officer training facility then having a similar remit to Sandhurst. Students regularly visited Fort Henry, including Darwin who when attending the RMC in 1931, took several photographs of Fort Henry.[63] It is thus reasonable to assume that most Canadian officers at Studland were familiar with the Kingston Fort Henry, yet without further evidence, it is impossible to conclude who exactly first thought of using this name for the observation post at Studland. Interestingly, several maps from September and October 1943 mark Fort Henry, yet all appear to be in pencil or pen ink indicating that this name was added at a later date, possibly for a training exercise such as Vidi.[64] As all engineer records only refer to an observation post, and as it is implied spectators were already familiar with the name by Vidi, it is most likely that the name came into use during Exercise Pirate, perhaps when spectators were gathered in the building and a fitting name was considered desirable.

On 11 October 1943, No.1 Platoon removed the Blaw Knox shuttering from Fort Henry, and this was subsequently taken back to London on 20 3-ton lorries. Crerar visited Studland on the same day and commented on the observation post that he was 'very pleased with the result.'[65] As 12 Field Company's War Diarist noted on 12

[60]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14126, File 730, Exercise Vidi, Commentary on 8 Canadian Infantry Brigade Plans, 25 November 1943.
[61]Foot, *Beaches, Fields, Streets, and Hills* p. 67.
[62]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14729, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, September 1939.
[63]University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, MS Coll 00645 Bascom H. Darwin Collection of Photographs, 1930-1945.
[64]For example, the map attached to US Air Force Historical Research Agency A5140/ 505.89-12, 21 AGp/1520/5/G(SD) Etna, 21 September 1943.
[65]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14732, File 86, 12th Field Company RCE War Diary, 11 October 1943.

October, 'the work is pretty well wound up.'[66] The final task completed was the camouflage scheme being directed by the corps camouflage officer, Captain Pilot. All work was finished by 14 October, and news was received the same day that 12 Field Company would have to depart Studland the following day for Godalming. It had proved to be a hard six week's work, yet the construction jobs for Exercise Pirate were finally complete.[67]

Fort Henry 1943-1944, Spectators and Controversy

From October 1943 to April 1944, eight major amphibious exercises were held at Studland and one notable demonstration which made significant use of Fort Henry. All these schemes deserve considerable attention in their own right as they demonstrate in detail how the 3 CID and 50 NID with supporting naval forces prepared for Overlord. The information below focuses on how and who used Fort Henry during this time. Concentrating on spectators could be considered perhaps trivial in contrast to the achievements and failures of the combined exercises, but as will be considered further, the use of Fort Henry has been misunderstood in several instances, and it is important to explore this in order to properly understand this building.

Exercise Pirate drew onlookers from across Britain, and even Canada with 320 spaces allocated for spectators across three categories: A, B, and C. The A list included the 40 officers and officials who would watch the exercise from Fort Henry, while the B list included 200 less senior officers who would be watching from Ballard Down to the south. The 80 'C' spectators would be aboard naval craft and consisted mostly of junior officers. Accommodation was provided at the Grosvenor Hotel in Swanage for 'A' spectators and at the Royal Bath Hotel in Bournemouth for 'B' spectators before everyone was taken by bus to Studland on the morning of the exercise.[68] A complete list of all those who attended Pirate as spectators has not been located, and a similar predicament is evident for most other exercises held at Studland. However, by examination of the War Diaries of formations who likely sent spectators and private diaries, it is possible to put together a list of most individuals at Fort Henry on 17 October. The most senior officer present was Paget as CinC 21st Army Group, along with Crerar. Civilian visitors included C.D. Howe, the Canadian Minister for Munitions and Supply. Other officers were present from across the British Armed Forces including Lieutenant-General John Crocker, GOC 1 Corps, with four of his 'G' Branch staff officers and his Corps Commander Royal Artillery (CCRA), Brigadier L.C.

[66]Ibid., 12 October 1943.
[67]Ibid., 11-15 October 1943.
[68]LAC RG24-G-3-1-a, Vol. 10741, File 219C1.009(D303), 21 AGp/2150/15/G(Trg), 21 Army Group Exercise Pirate Spectators, 28 September 1943.

Manners-Smith.[69] SOUTCO's GOC Lieutenant-General Charles Loyd was due to attend with Brigadier-General Omar Bradley of the United States Army. However, Pirate was delayed 24 hours from 16 to 17 October due to poor weather and Bradley's diary indicates he was unable to reschedule.[70]

The exercises which followed Pirate shared many similarities in terms of spectator arrangements and also some notable differences. The 'C' list was abandoned shortly after Pirate due to a lack of space aboard naval craft and at the end of October 1943, HQ 1 Canadian Corps were dispatched to Italy. This meant that Crerar, Fort Henry's principal advocate, did not influence any further schemes at Studland. 3 CID was attached to British 1 Corps, with Crocker, his BGS Phillip Balfour, and CCRA Manners-Smith all becoming regular visitors to Studland and Fort Henry. The next major exercise, titled Vidi, was held on 28 November and consisted of an assault landing with fire support. Brigadier Clarence Mann of 7 Canadian Infantry Brigade delivered a commentary over a recently installed speaker system at Fort Henry with the aid of a model located in a tent behind the observation post.[71] Paget was the most senior spectator at Fort Henry that day, and it is interesting to note that the GHQ Liaison Regiment (Phantom) are recorded as duplicating Mann's commentary for him.[72] Keller, Crocker, and Balfour all boarded a Landing Ship Infantry to watch the landings from the water indicating that Fort Henry was not always considered the best place to watch the assault landing unfold for senior officers now that Crerar had departed.[73] January 1944 brought the arrival of new CinCs and staff across 21st Army Group which restarted the debate over which assault tactics were to be used. To demonstrate progress that had been made in the United Kingdom a fire support demonstration with skeleton infantry involvement was put on at Studland called Exercise Savvy on 12 February 1944. Fort Henry was at the centre of this exercise to

[69]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 13762, File: 700/GS, 3CID War Diary, 14 and 17 October 1943; LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 13685, File 1/GS, 1st Canadian Corps War Diary, 16 October 1943; LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 13614, File 1150/GS, First Canadian Army War Diary, 16 September 1943; TNA WO 166/10371, 1st Corps GS War Diary, 16 October 1943; TNA WO 166/10373, CCRA 1st Corps War Diary, 16 October 1943; LAC RG24-G-3-1-a, Vol. 10741, File 219C1.009(D303), 1st British Corps to 1st Canadian Corps, 9 October 1943.

[70]TNA WO 199/2302, Itinerary for Bradley and party to observe Pirate, 12 October 1943; U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (hereinafter USAHEC) Omar Bradley Collection, Series XVIII, Sub-Series I, Folder 1, Bradley diary, 16 October 1943.

[71]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14126, File 730, Exercise Vidi Commentary on 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade's Plans, 25 November 1943.

[72]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 14941, File 726, 3CID Signals War Diary, 24-28 November 1943.

[73]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 13762, File 700/GS, 3CID War Diary, 27 November 1943.

accommodate both military and political visitors. The main spectators in Fort Henry included King George VI, General Bernard Montgomery, who had replaced Paget, Francis 'Freddy' De Guingand (Chief of Staff 21st Army Group), Air Marshall Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory (CinC Allied Expeditionary Air Force), Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey (Supreme Naval Commander Allied Expeditionary Force) and Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey (CinC British Second Army).[74] In addition a large number of army group, corps, and division staff officers and commanders were present including American officers such as Major General L.H. Brereton, commander of the US Ninth Air Force.[75] Montgomery and most other senior spectators travelled to Studland on 11 February aboard the train *Rapier*, spending the night in Swanage. The king travelled via royal train accompanied by his Private Secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles and Admiral Philip Vian (CinC Eastern Naval Task Force) who explained Exercise Savvy on route. The party arrived at Swanage where they were met by Montgomery, Ramsey, Leigh Mallory, and a thirty man security party provided by the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa.[76] The party then proceeded to Fort Henry where breakfast was provided in a tent complete with silver cutlery. A special latrine was even constructed for the king's use.[77]

In March 1944, the SATA was transferred from 3 CID and Force J, to 50 NID and Force G. 50 NID had only been assigned as an assault division for Overlord in January 1944 and Force G was only just forming in March which required the two formations to compress their training program for large scale exercises into a period of less than

[74]Robert Love and John Major (ed.), *The Year of D-Day: The 1944 Diary of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey*, (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1994), p. 25. Note: both the QORC and Freddy De Guingand comment that Eisenhower was also present at Studland that day. However, consultation of Eisenhower's desk diary confirms that he was in Grosvenor Square in London. See Francis W. De Guingand, *Operation Victory*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947), p. 354; LAC RG24-C-3, Vol. 15168, File 753, Queen's Own Rifles of Canada War Diary, 12 February 1944; Alfred D. Chandler et al.(ed.), *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years Volume V*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 144.

[75]LAC RG24-G-3-1-a, Vol. 10439, File 212C1. (D65), 1st Corps to First Canadian Army, 9 March 1944.

[76]Duff Hart-Davis, *King's Counsellor: Abdication and War: The Diaries of Sir Alan 'Tommy' Lascelles*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2020), p. 201; Anon., *Historical Records of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders 1932-1948*, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1952), p. 212.

[77]LAC RG24-C-3, Vol: 14328, File 704, Commander Royal Canadian Artillery 3CID War Diary, 11-14 February 1944.

six weeks.[78] To fit this time scale two brigade and two division level exercises were planned under the names of Exercise Smash I-IV to be held in April 1944. The Smash exercises are now what Studland is best known for, yet perhaps surprisingly they are also the most misrepresented. It is important to recognise that in both popular and academic culture alike, a considerable amount of misinformation has been spread relating to who was in Fort Henry in April 1944. Before this account goes further it is necessary to understand the nature of these false claims and why they are wrong, before the actual events of April 1944 are described.

The 1990 book *Dorset at War: Diary of WW2* by Rodney Legg claims that on an unspecified date in April 1944, Sir Winston Churchill, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Montgomery, Bradley and Dempsey watched Exercise Smash from Fort Henry. In his revised 2004 edition, Legg alters his account to state that this happened on 18 April and adds that General Sir Alan Brooke, Lord Louis Mountbatten and the king were also present.[79] The National Trust, the current owner of Fort Henry has also strongly supported this suggestion with notice boards at Redend Point and online articles.[80] Multiple other books have also repeated the idea that Churchill, Eisenhower and the king watched Smash such as the 2020 popular history *Sand & Steel* by Peter Caddick-Adams which prefers the date of 4 April for their visit during Exercise Smash I.[81] Andrew Holborn in his 2015 book *The D-Day Landing on Gold Beach* also supports the theory. He prefers the date of 18 April, but no source is listed.[82] Articles have also supported this theory, including Cousins, Harrison, and Parham's 2016 paper 'The Maritime Archaeology of Duplex Drive Tanks in the United Kingdom', which prefers 4 April for Churchill and Eisenhower's visit.[83] The most important, and wrong part of this story is that Eisenhower, Churchill, the King, Mountbatten, Bradley, and Brooke were at Studland in April 1944. No evidence has been located to support this

[78]TNA DEFE 2/416, No.0301/6613, Report by Naval Commander Force G, Appendix A Narrative, 15 July 1944.

[79]Rodney Legg, *Dorset at War: Diary of WW2*, (Wincanton: Dorset Publishing Company, 1990), p. 237; Rodney Legg, *Dorset's War Diary: Battle of Britain to D*-Day, (Tiverton: Dorset Publishing Company, 2004), p. 226.

[80]The National Trust, 'History of Studland Bay', https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/studland-bay/history-of-studland-bay . Accessed 28 August 2025.

[81]Peter Caddick-Adams, *Sand & Steel: A New History of D-Day*, (London: Arrow Books, 2020), p. 216, p. 923. Note: strangely the source for Caddick-Adams believing this story is Ramsey's diary entry for 12 February, when he was at Studland for Savvy. Why Caddick-Adams is so confident that this is in fact referring to 4 April is unclear.

[82]Andrew Holborn, *The D-Day Landing on Gold Beach*, pp. 103-104.

[83]Cousins, Harrison, and Parham, 'The Maritime Archaeology of Duplex Drive Tanks in the United Kingdom', p. 652.

suggestion, and considerable evidence to suggest that in the case of Eisenhower, Churchill, Mountbatten, Bradley, and Brooke, they never visited Fort Henry at all.

Figure 4: One of three interior compartments inside Fort Henry - 2025.[84]

By starting with Alan Brooke and Mountbatten, it is simple to confirm for certain that neither of these individuals visited Studland during April 1944 as both kept detailed diaries confirming that Mountbatten was in India and Brooke largely in London.[85] Eisenhower's movements are also well recorded during April, and diaries maintained by his staff confirm that there is no evidence of him ever having visited Studland.[86] However, Eisenhower was in Dorset and Hampshire on several occasions in April 1944. On 2 April he visited American 26 Infantry Regiment at Swanage and Wareham,

[84]Photographed by the author in 2025. 50cm scale.

[85]Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, *War Diaries 1939-1945: Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2002), pp. 537-542; Philip Ziegler, *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten: Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia, 1943-1946*, (London: Collins, 1988), pp. 82-102.

[86]Chandler et al.(ed.), *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, pp. 149-151.

while on 18 April he visited RAF squadrons at Hartford Bridge, and again on 21 April at Homsley South and Thorney Island. Aircraft from these airfields did take part in the Smash exercises, yet this appears to be the closest he came to actually watching the exercise.[87] Like many, Bradley kept a diary recording some of his movements, yet consultation with library staff at USAHEC, where this diary is now held, did not lead to entries for the dates of the Smash exercises being traced.[88] Nor have any documents been located to suggest that Bradley attended any of the Smash exercises. Like Eisenhower, he was also in the east Dorset area during this time as on 10 and 11 April he conducted a tour of US 1 Infantry Division, including visiting Swanage.[89] Churchill's engagement diary for April 1944 also makes no mention of visiting Studland and confirms that he was in London on all days which Smash exercises took place.[90] The exact movements of the king have not been traced during April 1944, yet no diary entries for individuals at Fort Henry or military records make reference to his presence, in drastic contrast to Exercise Savvy.

This leaves the question as to where the suggestion that the above-mentioned individuals were present at Studland came from. It would appear that the main source is Legg's books, but none provide sources. Legg did get some information correct, and both Montgomery and Dempsey were present at Studland for Smash III on 18 April.[91] The continued mentions of the king at Studland appear to all relate back to his presence in Fort Henry during Savvy in February. A similar explanation can be used for Churchill, as it would appear descriptions of his presence in April 1944 are actually referring to his visit in July 1940, long before Fort Henry was constructed.[92] A similar explanation can be applied to Eisenhower due to his visit to Swanage. It is interesting to note that even some oral histories by those who took part in the Smash exercises, such as a 2013 interview with General Sir Robert Ford (ex 4th/7th Royal Dragoon

[87]Robert R McCormick Research Center First Division Museum Illinois (hereinafter RRMRC) 3rd Battalion 26th Infantry Regiment Journal, 2 April 1944; RRMRC Journal of Brigadier General Willard Wyman, 2 April 1944; RRMRC 1994.126, Huebner Diary, Colonel Stanhope Mason Chief of Staff, 2 April 1944; TNA AIR 27/717/7, 88 Squadron (Sqn) Summary of Events, 18 April 1944; TNA AIR 27/1482/7, 245 Sqn Summary of Events, 21 April 1944; TNA AIR 27/1170/27, 198 Sqn Summary of Events, 21 April 1944.

[88]Email correspondence between the author and USAHEC, 15 September 2025.

[89]RRMRC Journal of Brigadier General Willard Wyman, 10-11 April 1944; RRMRC 1988.31 Box 185, 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry Journal, 10 April 1944.

[90]George Washington University Gelman Library, Washington DC 2015.048/Flat box: 39, Churchill Engagement Diary April 1944.

[91]Love and Major (ed.), *The Year of D-Day*, p. 57.

[92]TNA WO 166/4283, 5 East Yorkshire Regiment War Diary, 17 July 1940.

Guards), refer to Eisenhower and the king being present.[93] Ford visited Fort Henry for the 2004 unveiling of the memorial to those who died during Smash I and it is likely that he heard the king, Eisenhower and Churchill suggestion during this time, before inadvertently repeating it in 2013.

The spectators who actually attended the Smash exercises on the 'A' list largely consisted of staff officers from 50 NID and 30 Corps. Smash I and II were effectively brigade level fire support exercises and offered nothing new to be seen for external spectators. Smash III on 18 April consisting of an assault by 69 Infantry Brigade and a follow on landing by 151 Infantry Brigade attracted more visitors.[94] Leading figures watching the exercise were Montgomery, Dempsey, Ramsey, Vian, Commodore Sir Cyril Douglas-Pennant (Commander Force G), Lieutenant-General Gerrald Bucknell (GOC 30 Corps), Major General Douglas Graham (GOC 50 NID) and Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air. Additional figures included a wide array of staff officers from 21st Army Group and notably New Zealand Observer Brigadier James Hargest.[95] The extent to which Fort Henry was actually used during the Smash exercises is debatable, although the spectator instructions list it as being the 'A' list point of observation, a painting by war artist Alaxander Gross of Smash I shows spectators, including Bucknell and Graham, standing at Redend Point outside the building.[96]

Fort Henry's final major use appears to have been on 26 April 1944 when Exercise Bunsen was held at Studland. This was a demonstration of strategic air power for ground commanders to witness the destructive power against beach defences and also to test a variety of different bombs and fuses. Montgomery and Freddy De Guingand were present among a large number of other officers.[97] Smaller amphibious exercises continued to be held at Studland even after June 1944, such as Exercise Puddleduck in

[93]Eric Stockley, 'Gen Sir Robert Ford', https://www.rdgmuseum.org.uk/history-and-research/oral-history/. Accessed 27 April 2025.
[94]TNA WO 171/512, X/523/G Exercise Smash Combined Plan, 11 March 1944.
[95]TNA WO 171/334, 30 Corps GS War Diary, 20 April 1944; TNA WO 199/2320, SOUTCO to 50NID, 30 March 1944; Love and Major (ed.), *The Year of D-Day*, p. 57; Imperial War Museum (hereinafter IWM) Documents.4835/8, Bucknall Office Diary, 17-18 April 1944; TNA WO 205/989, 30 Corps to 21 Army Group, 15 April 1944; TNA WO 171/512, 50NID Signals Log, 15 April 1944.
[96]TNA WO 199/2321, Exercise Smash Combined Plan, 11 March 1944; IWM ART LD 3954, Landing Exercise 'Smash One' by Alexander Gross, 4 April 1944.
[97]TNA AIR 51 307/4, AEAF/TE.22305/TRG1A, Exercise Bunsen 25 April 1944; Anon., *Sunday Punch in Normandy: The Tactical Use of Heavy Bombardment in the Normandy Invasion*, (Washington: Headquarters Army Air Forces, 1945), p. 16.

January 1945, yet no information has been found to date to suggest that Fort Henry was further used.[98]

Conclusion

Fort Henry was built in September and October 1943 as an observation post for 3 CID and Force J Exercise Pirate. Built by 12 Field Company RCE to a design led by Canadian engineer Bascom Darwin, this building is unique to Studland and serves as a clear reminder of the numerous large scale amphibious exercises held at the SATA in 1943 and 1944. The reasons for its construction can be considered a combination of practical and political motivations by its conceiver H.D.G. Crerar. The exact reasons behind the name Fort Henry remain open to interpretation, yet it appears most likely that it is named after the nineteenth century fort in Kingston, Ontario, which is located adjacent to the RMC. Although popular culture and the historiography to date has primarily associated the building with the 50 NID Smash exercises, this is largely in error. Fort Henry should be considered for what it is, a 1943 Canadian building most notably used during exercises Pirate, Savvy, Smash III, and Bunsen, by those who directly shaped the allied assault.

[98]TNA ADM 179/519, No.23/4/825, Exercise Puddleduck, 2 January 1945.

Gender, Duty and Change: An Oral History of the Women's Royal Army Corps (1949-1992)

JOAN TURNER*
Independent Scholar, UK
Email: *info@legasee.org.uk*

ABSTRACT
Founded in 1949, the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) was the first permanent peacetime corps for women, yet little has been written about it. As part of its mission to uncover unexplored chapters in British military history, the charity Legasee Educational Trust interviewed thirty women who served in the WRAC. Their personal stories now form part of Legasee's video archive. This article seeks to use these interviews to explore the WRAC's value and unique qualities. To consider the opportunities it gave, the constraints it imposed, and the impact of disbandment in 1992, when this women-only corps was consigned to history.

Introduction

'In those days it was very, very difficult for a woman to prove herself. But I did'.[1]

These are the words of Warrant Officer Class 1 Patricia Rosewell, reflecting on her long, rewarding and varied career in the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC). In a similar vein, when considering what defines a veteran, Sergeant Jane Fountain tells, 'I take pride in the fact that even though I wasn't called to pay the ultimate sacrifice, I was there, and it could have happened and I put myself forward for that'.[2] Indeed, it is

*Joan Turner is an independent researcher who holds a Masters Degree in history from the University of Birmingham.
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1959
[1]Patricia Rosewell, 'A Veteran Interview with Patricia 'Budgie' Rosewell', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 30 January 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/patricia-budgie-rosewell/. Accessed 24 March 2025.
[2]Jane Fountain, 'A Veteran Interview with Jane Fountain', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 4 October 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/jane-fountain/. Accessed 25 March 2025.

important to remember that fifty-nine members of the WRAC died in service.[3] Yet, a leading journalist described them as 'a genteel outfit' whose members led 'an uneventful life being useful and supportive' having no desire to 'be side by side with men in the front line'.[4] Moreover, the Corps motto, *Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re* (Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed), which suggests an assertive, but tactful and diplomatic attitude, clearly differentiated them from male forces.[5] Proposed by Dr Edgar Feuchtwanger, who lectured at both the WRAC School of Instruction (at Liphook) and the WRAC College (at Camberley) for many years, it was felt to be 'an appropriate reminder of the aim and spirit of our Corps'.[6] So, what was the reality? What was it really like to serve in the first permanent peacetime corps for women, and why is it important that we remember the WRAC?

In 2024, with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the charity Legasee Educational Trust, whose aim is to uncover unexplored chapters of military history, filmed interviews with thirty women who served in the WRAC. Their voices and personal stories are now preserved as part of a major addition to Legasee's video archive. As Colonel Ali Brown states, while writers have focused on the work of the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in the Second World War, 'hardly anything on the WRAC existed for a long time, and nobody really on a broader stage knows about them'.[7] This oral history project sought to change that. By capturing details of the women's lived experiences that would otherwise be lost, an invaluable archive of new material providing unique insights into life in the WRAC has been created. Each interview captures a chronological record of service, book-ended with questions about early life, family, and post-military transition. This format enables service experiences to be compared. Further questions probe individual roles with a focus on personal experiences. This article seeks to use these interviews to explore the value and unique qualities of this female only corps. It considers the opportunities it opened up, as well as the constraints it imposed. In addition, it draws on the results of a veteran's survey carried out by Legasee at the WRAC Association's Grand Reunion, held in Cardiff in March 2025. This Likert scale survey was devised to gauge the women's views on issues including weapons training, disbandment and the WRAC's

[3]National Army Museum, 'Breaking Boundaries' https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/breaking-boundaries. Accessed 12 March 2025.
[4]Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage: Women and War,* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), pp. 215, pp. 231-2.
[5]Editor, 'Corps Motto, Suaviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re', *The Lioness*, February 1975, p. 20.
[6]Ibid.
[7]Ali Brown, 'A Veteran Interview with Ali Brown', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 17 December 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/ali-brown/?t=2197. Accessed 25 March 2025.

legacy. The article concludes by examining how the women felt when the corps disbanded in 1992, at which time, while still largely restricted to support and medical positions, women were absorbed into the rest of the Army.[8]

The WRAC was founded on 1 February 1949, under the Army Act 1948, 'to provide replacements for officers and men in such employment as may be specified by the Army Council from time to time'.[9] During the Second World War, the ATS 'proved that women were an invaluable resource to the British Army', and prompted by the contributions women had made, the WRAC was formed.[10] The jobs it initially offered were mainly administrative, with women employed in roles including drivers, cooks, store women and stewardesses. They were completely excluded from combatant positions, with no weapons or field training.[11] As Lance Corporal Judy Hasnip who served in the mid-1960s recalls, the trades available to women were 'very very restricted'.[12] Indeed, from the start, Major General Richard Hull, Director of Staff at the War Office, made the distinction plain. Asserting that 'it would be psychologically unsound and an expensive waste of equipment, ammunition and training time to train women in the use of personal arms' and that 'it is still the soldier's duty to protect womenfolk whatever they are wearing', Major General Hull clearly regarded WRAC members first and foremost as women, not military personnel.[13] The recruitment poster below from 1968 (Figure 1), with images of women in support, administration and driving roles, alludes to the limitations on women's trades in the British Army at that time. Yet, with its pictures of yachting and leisure activities in the sunshine, it also hints at offering more opportunity than a typical office role. Something that, as we shall see, many WRAC recruits relished.

[8]National Army Museum, 'A Timeline of Women in the Army' https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/timeline-women-army. Accessed 7 October 2025.
[9]WRAC Association, 'History' https://wraca.org.uk/history/. Accessed 10 June 2025.
[10]National Army Museum, 'Auxiliary Territorial Service' https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/auxiliary-territorial-service. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[11]Christopher Dandeker and Mary Wechsler Segal, 'Gender Integration in Armed Forces', *Armed Forces & Society*, 23, 1 (Fall 1996), pp. 29-47, p. 31.
[12]Judy Hasnip, 'A Veteran Interview with Judy Hasnip', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 20 November 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/judy-hasnip/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[13]Kathleen Sherit, *Women on the Frontline,* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2020), pp. 54-55.

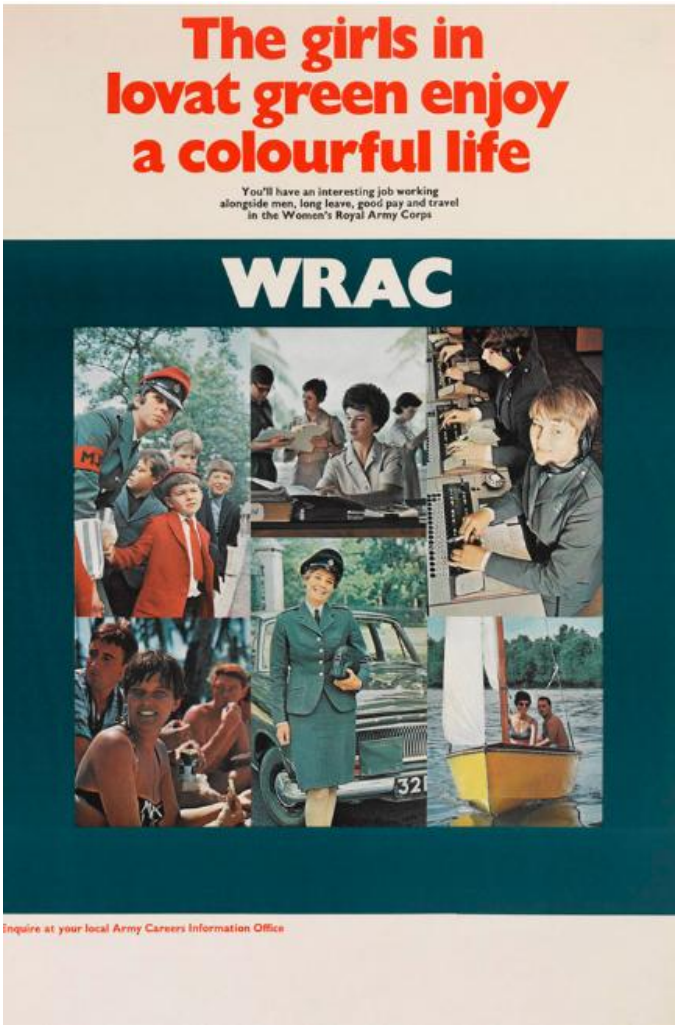

Figure 1: WRAC Recruiting poster, 1968[14]

Beginnings, Opportunities and Limitations

Despite the limited range of roles open to them, the corps offered women their first opportunity to join the regular army in peacetime. It was a necessary first step and enabled them to serve in a range of capacities that had previously been closed. Widely accepted social norms in the mid-twentieth century determined that women could

[14]Crown Copyright, National Army Museum, Study Collection.

not, and indeed should not be deployed in combat, so any acceptance of women serving in the forces was always going to be qualified. Moreover, most women who served at this time did not want the same roles as men. As Corporal Pat Pressler, an experimental assistant in gunnery between 1957 and 1960, explains, 'I don't think I would have joined had it been today's circumstances … we didn't train with the men. We were treated as women and had concessions, you know, to our physical capability'.[15] And speaking of how different life in the army is for women today, Private Jenny Wing, who served in the early 1970s, recognises 'I couldn't do what they do like handling a rifle, I've done rifle shooting but not actually to go on exercises'.[16] In the early years women generally accepted and indeed, often wanted the constraints. They were primarily looking for something new and exciting, and the army offered this.

Women often saw joining the army as a way to escape the humdrum lives they saw other women living, to learn new skills, and to push the boundaries. Sergeant Sandy Acathan, who joined in 1958, described the 'adventure' the WRAC offered, and Lance Corporal Lieann Andrew, who joined thirty years later, wanted to 'get out there' because she had 'a zest for life'.[17] The WRAC offered a chance to escape cultural expectations. To travel, to belong, and to do something different from the path many women traditionally followed. Whilst many remained in Britain, Judy Hasnip had the opportunity to serve overseas. She was posted to Aden in Yemen during the 'Aden Emergency' of the 1960s and witnessed first-hand the reality of a combat zone. Despite only serving for three years, she reflects on how different her life may have been had she not enlisted, and the lasting impact the WRAC had

> I would have met a local lad, we'd gone on the council housing list, and probably had two point four children, probably never left the town except to go on holiday. So, when you compare that to what I did just in that short space of time and the repercussions it's had in my life, all for the good.[18]

[15]Pat Pressler, 'A Veteran Interview with Pat Pressler', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 20 November 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/pat-pressler/?t=2342. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[16]Jenny Wing, 'A Veteran Interview with Jenny Wing', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 29 April 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/jenny-wing/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[17]Sandy Acathan, 'A Veteran Interview with Sandy Acathan', interview by Martin Bisiker. Legasee, 15 August 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sandy-acathan/. Accessed March 26, 2025; Lieann Andrew, 'A Veteran Interview with Lieann Andrew', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 3 October 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/lieann-andrew/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[18]Interview with Judy Hasnip

Many interviewees spoke of the pride they felt at their passing out parades, their sentiments summed up by Major Janet Brodie-Murphy who reflected, 'it's amazing, you feel part of something really big, something important'.[19] Lance Corporal Dorothy Apps, who played cornet in the WRAC Staff Band from 1956 to 1961, describes regularly playing at passing out parades, as well as having the opportunity to travel to Holland, Germany, Cyprus and Libya with the band, something unimaginable in civilian life.[20] The Army gave women confidence, and self-belief. Lance Corporal Margaret Lee, who served in the 1970s, reflects, 'I didn't realise at the time I was doing things a lot of people don't experience. And the confidence it gave me, it changed my outlook on life'.[21]

Members of the WRAC were primarily based in the UK or with the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). BAOR was the military force that occupied and administered the British Zone of Germany from 1945 to 1955, when the Federal Republic of Germany came into existence, and the British land force tasked with defending the North German Plain from the armies of the Warsaw Pact.[22] Some, however, despite the non-combatant policy, were given the opportunity to serve in locations across the globe. Ali Brown stresses the importance of telling these stories to challenge the perception that 'the moment things became 'interesting', the women were left behind'.[23] As she explains, 'there are lots of WRAC soldiers and officers who had really interesting times and at a time of the Aden emergency, the Cyprus emergency, world events, all the world events there were WRAC there, and those are the stories that just haven't been told'.[24] Colonel Audrey Smith recounts her posting to Singapore, where, as a staff officer, she was involved in writing 'three withdrawal plans' and working with locally enlisted personnel from the Singapore Malay Regiment.[25] She also served in

[19]Janet Brodie-Murphy, 'A Veteran Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 14 February 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/janet-brodie-murphy/. Accessed 26 March 2025.

[20]Dorothy Apps, 'A Veteran Interview with Dorothy Apps', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 October 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/dorothy-apps/. Accessed 24 March 2025.

[21]Margaret Lee, 'A Veteran Interview with Margaret Lee', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 19 November 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/margaret-lee/. Accessed 26 March 2025.

[22]*The Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992*, (Winchester: WRAC Association, 2009), p. 27.

[23]Interview with Ali Brown; Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage,* p. 231.

[24]Interview with Ali Brown.

[25]Audrey Smith, 'A Veteran Interview with Audrey Smith', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 27 November 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/audrey-smith/. Accessed 27 March 2025.

Cyprus in the 1970s following the Turkish invasion. Lieann Andrew, who was attached to the Royal Corps of Signals, volunteered to go to the Falkland Islands in 1990, where she spent four months, and in early 1991 she was posted to Cyprus where she worked at a listening post.[26] There were also some rather unusual postings. In 1981, Major Rowena Patrick travelled to Brunei, where she spent almost three years.[27] The Sultan, looking to promote the recruitment of women into the Brunei army, sought support from the British Army, and Patrick was part of a small team, funded by the Sultan, who founded the Women's Army in Brunei and trained new recruits.[28] In contrast to the perception of life in the WRAC being banal and dull, for some, the army opened up exciting opportunities and unique experiences that would not have been available to women in civilian employment.

However, as society began to change around them in the 1970s, the army was slow to adapt. Well-educated women were attracted to the WRAC but left when it failed to offer the opportunities they wanted and, indeed, expected. As Kathleen Sherit explains in her book *Women on the Front Line*, the problem was that unlike men, 'women's mainstream employment was as a woman in a female corps, rather than in specialist work'.[29] An organisation that had offered freedom and excitement, was, for many, now imposing barriers. When the WRAC was founded, a non-combatant policy was central to its philosophy. This meant that women could not be employed in theatres of war, postings overseas were limited, and as a result, 'the best jobs were closed to women'.[30] Lieutenant Colonel Sue Westlake, who as commander of 29 Company in Rheindahlen Germany received an overseas posting, recalls that even in the mid-1980s, despite there being 27 trades open to women, restrictions on postings still existed.[31] Furthermore, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, designed to 'eradicate discrimination against women in the workplace and other areas of life', excluded the Armed Forces altogether (s. 85(4)), only changing to exclusion on the basis of 'combat effectiveness' in 1994.[32] Recognising that change was needed, a report was

[26]Interview with Lieann Andrew.
[27]Rowena Patrick, 'A Veteran Interview with Rowena Patrick', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 27 December 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/rowena-patrick/?t=0. Accessed 22 April 2025.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Sherit, *Frontline*, p. 50.
[30]Ibid., p. 60.
[31]Sue Westlake, 'A Veteran Interview with Sue Westlake', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 9 May 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sue-westlake/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[32]The University of Edinburgh, 'Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the creation of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)'

commissioned in the 1970s to consider the future of the WRAC. It proposed two employment pathways: one for women working solely in the WRAC, and another for women, who whilst still cap-badged to the WRAC, were able to work in other parts of the army where they could compete with men.[33] However, even those women who served with other corps were still excluded from any role that could come into direct contact with the enemy, those whose primary purpose was to kill, or those which demanded physical work.[34] For the women of the WRAC, significant constraints remained.

Careers and Operational Experience

Despite the non-combatant policy, the army was forced to accept that there were some tasks in operational areas that could not be carried out by men. In these circumstances it suited them to deploy women, and they deviated from their principles. However, significant constraints remained, and women's ability to operate effectively was severely hampered by army policies. In 1972, during the 'Troubles', 181 Provost Company WRAC was formed, and women began to be deployed to Northern Ireland to assist in searching females at checkpoints (Figure 2) and during house searches to prevent accusations of inappropriate behaviour against male personnel.[35] They worked alongside women from the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), who became known as the 'Greenfinches'. In contrast to the WRAC, Greenfinches were fully integrated into the UDR from the start.[36] Nevertheless, whether a Greenfinch or a member of the WRAC, all women were excluded from carrying weapons. As Rowena Patrick, who joined the WRAC in 1969, explains, the policy brought about 'nonsensical' situations, where, for example, a Provost Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) could be out on patrol and 'the man she was with had a weapon and she didn't'.[37] In her article 'Of hockey sticks and Sten guns: British auxiliaries and their weapons in the Second World War', Corinna Peniston-Bird reveals the idiocy of unarmed women serving alongside armed men was nothing new.[38] She refers to the testimonies of women who, armed only with a pick-axe handle and a whistle, stood

https://www.genderequalitiesat50.ed.ac.uk/timeline/sex-discrimination-act-1975/. Accessed 22 January 2025.

[33]Sherit, *Frontline*, p. 147.

[34]Ibid.

[35]*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992,* pp. 30-31.

[36]National Army Museum, 'The Ulster Defence Regiment' https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/ulster-defence-regiment. Accessed 18 February 2025.

[37]Interview with Rowena Patrick.

[38]Peniston-Bird, Corinna, 'Of Hockey Sticks and Sten Guns: British Auxiliaries and their Weapons in the Second World War, *Women's History Magazine*, 76 (2014), pp. 13-22, p. 18.

guard alongside men armed with rifles, while others had their weapons removed when the male soldiers left their post.[39]

Figure 2: WRAC Corporal Searching Shoppers – Londonderry 1973.[40]

The restriction on carrying weapons fulfilled a perceived need to satisfy societal demands to keep women safe, and, as Hannah West explains, maintain a 'negotiated gender order', which sustained women as 'compliant and controlled but also tolerates their limited agency and resistance, in order to satisfy a military need for servicewomen's war labour on the 'front line''.[41] In practical terms, it resulted in

[39]Ibid.

[40]© Crown copyright reproduced under delegated authority from The Keeper of Public Records. Image: IWM (MH 30544).

[41]Hannah West, 'A Negotiated Gender Order: British Army Control of Servicewomen in 'Front Line' Counterinsurgency, 1948–2014' *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 16 (2) (2023), pp. 163–85, p. 164.

women being subordinated to male colleagues and created the need for them to be constantly escorted, a situation which led to acrimonious relationships. Sergeant Diane Pratt recalls a particularly unpleasant incident when she realised the 'dog' being talked about was her because the male soldiers resented having to escort her every time she went beyond the gate.[42] Pratt retaliated and was subsequently accepted, but she recalls that 'women got a lot of stick inside, and outside the camp'.[43] Based on the belief that, unlike a man, a woman would not be openly attacked, women were also required to wear their standard A-line skirts, which in theory made it easier to distinguish them from men. Yet as Pratt observed, 'nobody told the IRA that, they did shoot at us'.[44] Indeed, Margaret Lee, a hairdresser by trade, recalls a lucky escape, when she was covered in 'all this grey debris', when the buildings behind where she was buying supplies were blown up.[45] Her story illustrates how, regardless of trade, all WRAC members were first and foremost soldiers. Women carried out dangerous and demanding work in Northern Ireland including tasks that male soldiers were unable to do. They were an integral part of the 'front-line' force, representing the British government's agenda. Yet, through no fault of their own, gendered army policies meant they were seen as a liability, were put at unnecessary personal risk, and indeed, also put their male colleagues in potentially dangerous situations.

In 1981, the Secretary for Defence announced a significant change in policy. It had been decided to bring the WRAC in line with other NATO forces, and allow women to train in, carry and use firearms.[46] Some inroads into challenging the 'combat taboo', a deep-seated cultural, social and ideological resistance to women serving in direct combat roles, had finally been made. Initially weapons training was provided on an individual basis in areas it was deemed necessary, and in 1984 weapons training was introduced into the student officers and officer cadets programme at Sandhurst.[47] In his book *Women in Khaki*, Roy Terry comments that the policy received a mixed reception. Some senior WRAC officers protested, others praised the move.[48] The Legasee interviewees gave examples of some level of objection to the policy, but on balance it seems that it was generally accepted in a positive light. Sue Westlake, who received her weapon training in 1981 in Berlin, ten years after her commissioning,

[42]Diane Pratt, 'A Veteran Interview with Diane Pratt', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 13 March 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/diane-pratt/. Accessed 27 March 2025.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Interview with Margaret Lee.
[46]Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: the story of the British woman soldier,* (London: Columbus Books, 1988), p. 217.
[47]Ibid., p. 218.
[48]Ibid.

states, 'I wasn't bothered whether I was weapon trained or not, but the younger girls were very keen, very keen [to do it]'.[49] Even after women were weapons trained in the 1980s the 'no weapons' policy in Northern Ireland remained in place. Driver Katherine McMullin, who was posted to Northern Ireland in the early 1990s tells, 'even though I was weapons trained I would have to go out every day and do my job without a weapon'.[50] Asked whether most women would have liked to carry weapons early in their careers, Rowena Patrick cited a friend who refused to carry weapons, saying 'that's not what I signed up for'.[51] However, she went on to say that most women thought the non-combatant policy held them back, and consequently they welcomed the change.[52] This view is backed up by a survey carried out at the WRAC Grand Reunion in which over seventy percent of those who responded agreed that weapon training was a positive development.[53]

Whilst things were changing, and opportunities were increasing, for some the wheels continued to move frustratingly slowly. Crucially, postings to combat zones were still restricted. Ali Brown recalls being 'eternally grateful' to the Commander who challenged the rules and allowed her to be deployed to the First Gulf War in 1990 in the role of Staff Officer Grade 3 Artillery Logistics with the rest of HQ 1 Armoured Division.[54] Warrant Officer Class 2 Karen Mallion, who served between 1984 and 2006 (transferring to the Royal Logistic Corps when the WRAC disbanded in 1992, and going on to serve in Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo) tells how the WRAC failed to give her the opportunities she wanted, remarking 'there was just so much more that I wanted to do, but the WRAC didn't have that'.[55] She goes on to explain the 'massive learning curve' she was on when she joined the Royal Logistic Corps due to what she describes as 'years lost being WRAC' and a lack of infantry tactics.[56] It was not until 2018, twenty-six years after the WRAC disbanded, that all army roles including infantry and special forces units were finally opened up to women.[57]

[49]Interview with Sue Westlake.
[50]Katherine McMullin, 'Veteran Interview with Katherine McMullin', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 22 March 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/katherine-mcmullin/. Accessed 28 March 2025.
[51]Interview with Rowena Patrick.
[52]Ibid.
[53]WRAC Veteran's Survey, Grand Reunion 2025, Cardiff. Survey by Martin Bisiker.
[54]Interview with Ali Brown.
[55]Karen Mallion, 'A Veteran Interview with Karen Mallion', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 18 April 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/karen-mallion/. Accessed 28 March 2025.
[56]Ibid.
[57]National Army Museum 'Women's Royal Army Corps' https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/womens-royal-army-corps. Accessed 22 January 2025.

A Man's World

WRAC experiences in Northern Ireland ably illustrate that the military was, and in many ways still is, a male dominated world. In her book *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex,* Lucy Noakes highlights the difficulties that women entering the army faced both before and after the Second World War.[58] Indeed, as one reviewer of Noakes's work observes, her book establishes how 'male members of the military hierarchy never fully accepted women's trespass into the male preserve of military service', a view that is supported by the deeply ingrained misogynistic attitudes many of the interviewees encountered.[59] Janet Brodie-Murphy, who worked in welfare, tells how an 'old school' male clerk who, because he disagreed with women being in the army, 'went out of his way to ensure I didn't see the mail, that I was not told of things'.[60] As a consequence, this posting was particularly difficult for her. Lieutenant Colonel Mary Woollard explains that male officers 'weren't so much anti-women, they were anti-women in the Army. They didn't think we had a role, they didn't think we were needed, [that] we were as good as them'.[61] As a consequence, many women felt undermined by male colleagues, and under pressure to prove their worth. There was a perception that they represented women as a whole, and if one failed, then all women failed. Groom Lance Corporal Lorraine Patrick states, 'we had to be better than the men to be as good as the men, there was always that. May not have been absolutely true, but we felt it was. So, we had to work harder, do better'.[62] Indeed, Patrick describes taking on the 'most dangerous, awkward, spooky, aggressive' horses to prove she could do as well as the men.[63] These attitudes persisted after the WRAC disbanded. When Karen Mallion joined the Royal Logistic Corps she faced men who would 'do anything they possibly could to see you fail […] they didn't want it to work'.[64] For Mallion, her sheer determination ensured 'there was no way that they could get rid of me', yet, the environment she experienced endures.[65] As a House of

[58]Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948,* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[59]Nicoletta F. Gullace, 'Review of *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*, by L. Noakes', *Journal of Contemporary History*, *44*(3) (July 2009), p. 550.

[60]Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

[61]Mary Woollard, 'A Veteran Interview with Mary Woollard', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 16 August 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/mary-woollard/. Accessed 28 March 2025.

[62]Loraine Patrick, 'A Veteran Interview with Loraine Patrick', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 16 August 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/loraine-patrick/. Accessed 28 March 2025.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Interview with Karen Mallion.

[65]Ibid.

Commons Defence Committee report (2022) states, despite attempts to integrate women and attract more into the service, women still need to 'conform to 'typically masculine' ways of working to succeed'.[66] Indeed, the report concludes, 'within the military culture of the Armed Forces and the MOD [Ministry of Defence], it is still a man's world'.[67] Ali Brown corroborates this conclusion, stating that, as a minority, women are a 'victim of the culture', and sharing the mindset she adopted during her service she tells, 'I chose to be tough and professional and ambitious to the cost of my personal life'.[68] For many women dealing with misogyny was an ongoing challenge. To succeed they were forced to constantly prove themselves and often adopt typically male traits. As we shall see, one of the WRAC's undoubted strengths was the support and camaraderie it provided, something that many believe has been lost in today's armed forces. Indeed, in the survey undertaken at the WRAC reunion event, an overwhelming ninety percent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'something important was lost with the disbandment of the WRAC'.[69]

The army's male centric culture also impacted more practical issues including pay. Women in the WRAC were paid less than their male colleagues. Introduced in 1970, the men had a 'X-Factor' applied to their basic military pay, an additional percentage intended to recognise the special conditions of military life, as compared with civilian employment.[70] The women did not receive this uplift. The historic justification for this gendered pay differential was that 'while every man was potentially deployable, women were not'.[71] In her book *Service with the Army*, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Chief Controller of the ATS during the Second World War, explains, 'in the last resort, the soldier clerk or cook was a potential reinforcement, the woman was not'.[72] Janet Brodie-Murphy complains, 'I'd lived with the X Factor all my life in the Army, not being given the same rates of pay as the men but doing the same job'.[73] Moreover, as an infuriated Diane Pratt bemoans, this policy was not amended when women served in operational areas, 'what did we do in Northern Ireland if that wasn't on the front line, if getting beaten up wasn't on the front lines? And the male clerk that sat opposite me

[66]House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Protecting those who protect us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life', Second Report of Session 2021–22, p. 41.
[67]Ibid., p. 79.
[68]Interview with Ali Brown.
[69]WRAC Veteran's Survey.
[70]Incomes Data Services, *A Review of the X-Factor Components*, February 2014, p. 1.
[71]'Of Hockey Sticks', p. 13.
[72]Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army,* (London, Hutchinson & Company Ltd, 1942), P. 111.
[73]Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.

did exactly the same job as me, but he got a lot more money than me'.[74] By excluding military personnel from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the army was legally allowed to pay women less than men, thus reinforcing a gendered order and the belief that they were secondary to their male colleagues.

The uniform and a lack of protective equipment designed to fit women, further reinforced this stance, and again left women unprotected and more vulnerable to harm than male counterparts. The No. 1 dress, introduced in 1950, was designed by Royal dressmaker, Sir Norman Hartnell, fashioned in lovat green.[75] It reflected the army's desire to retain an element of femininity within the WRAC. As Lance Corporal Julia Crockett, who served in intelligence in the 1970s explains, 'it was very chic, it was very stylish, but I now know that in terms of being a soldier, it was kind of ridiculous. It was office clothing essentially'.[76] She goes on to describe the absurd situation during practice invasions in the former West Germany when 'the women had not a tin hat between us', and being put in locations to be observers, but having 'no kit at all to protect us'.[77] Moreover, despite the obvious issues, measures were not introduced to rectify them and the problem persisted. As Ali Brown explains, throughout her service and even after the WRAC disbanded, she 'wore body armour the whole time that never fitted', and 'had to buy [her] own boots because you couldn't get small sizes'.[78] She concludes, 'there's a lot more work to be done on that side to make serving better for women', a statement confirmed by the House of Commons Defence Committee report (2022), which reveals that, 'more than three-quarters of the currently serving female personnel who engaged in this inquiry told us about inappropriate, ill-fitting uniform and body armour, which placed them at greater risk of harm in combat'.[79]

Relationships and Children

Combining army life and a relationship is challenging. For the women of the WRAC it was especially complicated, and many were forced to make difficult decisions, often being forced to choose between their career and a relationship. Marriage, becoming pregnant or having a gay relationship could all bring a career to an abrupt end. Whilst there was never a restriction on married women serving in the army, it was generally accepted that 'if you married you left', an injustice not experienced by their male

[74]Interview with Diane Pratt.
[75]*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992,* p. 24.
[76]Julia Crockett, 'A Veteran Interview with Julia Crockett', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 13 March 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/julia-m-crockett/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[77]Ibid.
[78]Interview with Ali Brown.
[79]Interview with Ali Brown; 'Protecting those who protect us', p. 4.

counterparts or most women in civilian careers.[80] As Jenny Wing, who served in the early 1970s explains, this led to resentment and lost opportunities,

> you couldn't stay in the army and be married at the time. I wish we could've stayed on … it cut your career short. I would have liked to have done other things, and I never had the opportunity.[81]

Corporal Roxanne Lawton vividly describes her anguish and feeling like her heart had been ripped out when she was forced to leave the career she loved and excelled at.[82] She goes on to explain that the army was 'her world', and despite securing a good civilian role it could not replace the opportunity and sense of belonging the army gave her.[83] At the same time, Audrey Smith made the difficult decision to turn down a marriage proposal when she was offered the role of commandant of the new Duchess of Kent Barracks in Aldershot if she agreed not to leave the army for two years.[84] Twenty years later, when Sergeant Sharon Broderick married in 1990, serving in the army was still not compatible with married life. The army offered little support and continued the practice of posting spouses to different locations, and in many cases different countries. Despite being desperate to retain both her career and her husband, another serving member of the armed forces, the army failed to post them somewhere together, and as a consequence they both resigned.[85] For most women there was a clear choice, career or marriage.

Whilst there was no definitive restriction on married women in the army, if you were pregnant, you were given a 'right of retirement'. Officers were required to resign their commissions, and servicewomen were discharged after four months of pregnancy.[86] Lance Corporal Cheryl Woon describes the struggles she faced, and her determination to make things work, after being 'dumped at four months pregnant'

[80]Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p. 221.
[81]Interview with Jenny Wing.
[82]Roxanne Lawton, 'A Veteran Interview with Roxanne Lawton', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 July 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/roxanne-lawton/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[83]Ibid.
[84]Interview with Audrey Smith.
[85]Sharon Broderick. 'A Veteran Interview with Sharon Broderick', Interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 2 October 22024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sharon-broderick/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[86]Terry, *Women in Khaki,* p. 222.

with no help, or maternity pay.[87] In rare cases there was a right to rejoin after six months, but it seldom happened, and if they did, unlike men, women were required to demonstrate that adequate provision had been made for the child.[88] Whilst women in civilian careers who were protected by the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 which, prohibited dismissal on grounds of pregnancy and granted maternity leave, thus protecting women from workplace discrimination, those serving in the WRAC were excluded from the act and therefore received no such protection.[89] Margaret Lee remembers the reality of what she describes as this 'cruel' policy, 'it was like my career was there one day, next day it was gone'.[90] And Private Pauline Milnes believes 'they lost many a good person, soldier, female soldier because of that'.[91] It was not until August 1990, fifteen years after the Sex Discrimination Act was passed, that the MOD finally revised their policy and pregnant service women were no longer required to leave the service.[92] However, this was not the end of the matter. As Janet Brodie-Murphy explains, there were senior officers who were hostile to the ideas of pregnant women working in their offices, one making the comparison with a civilian worker going on maternity leave by saying, 'that's different, she's a civilian, she's not a soldier'.[93] There were practical issues too. Diane Pratt, who was one of the first pregnant women not to have to leave, tells how 'they didn't have a pregnancy uniform. I just got bigger sizes until the QM [Quartermaster] said, "sorry Di, no more"'.[94] Women who want a career in the army are often faced with a difficult decision, as Ali Brown states, 'it was a deliberate decision of mine not to have children because I knew I couldn't have a career and have children'.[95] The impact of this choice was often felt later in life. Audrey Smith reflects that the only thing the women who chose a career in the army regret

[87]Cheryl Woon, 'A Veteran Interview with Cheryl Woon', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 9 May 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/cheryl-woon/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[88]Terry, *Women in Khaki*, p. 222.
[89]Sex Discrimination Act 1975, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/65/enacted. Accessed 14 March 2025.
[90]Interview with Margaret Lee.
[91]Pauline Milnes, 'A Veteran Interview with Pauline Milnes', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 30 January 2024, https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/pauline-milnes/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[92]UK Armed Forces Maternity Report, 'Annual Statistics 2012, MOD', 16 October 2014, p. 3 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7d713bed915d2d2ac08fc3/maternity_report_2012_final.pdf. Accessed 15 March 2025.
[93]Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.
[94]Interview with Diane Pratt.
[95]Interview with Ali Brown.

is that they do not have children and grandchildren.[96] Even in today's army, 'among mid-ranking Officers, 90% of men have children, compared to 10% of women'.[97]

Being dismissed on the grounds of sexual orientation also brought an abrupt, and often traumatic, end to a career. As Emma Vickers explains, during the Second World War, policy had been dictated by the demands of war, and 'women suspected of being lesbians [were] largely ignored'.[98] This changed in the 1950s when policies were tightened, and same-sex relationships were no longer tolerated.[99] Unlike men, however, no woman was court-martialled. Instead, whilst subject to the same, often traumatising, Special Investigation Branch (SIB) interrogations and inquiries, they were dismissed and told to leave.[100] Warrant Officer Class 2 Wendy Hooton reflects on the toll this took on mental health and how overnight these women 'lost what they loved dearly'.[101] Warrant Officer Class 2 Bernadette Dolan, who worked in the postal service, describes the SIB investigators who arrived unannounced, interviewing those suspected of lesbianism for many hours, and who spent a significant amount of resources on sad 'witch hunting', which resulted in them 'disposing of some very good soldiers, being highly trained as well'.[102] Being gay herself, she explains, 'I didn't worry about it constantly, but it was always there in the back of your mind'.[103] Most heterosexual women 'turned a blind eye', Karen Mallion recalls, 'there was no problem with it, different matter with the guys, but with the girls it was just accepted really'.[104] However, Rowena Patrick emphasises getting the balance right, and the importance of curtailing lesbian activity, without calling on the SIB to intervene, when it impinged on the lives and living quarters of the other women.[105] It was not until January 2000, following a lengthy legal battle in the European Court of Human Rights, that the British government finally announced that it would lift the ban on gay people serving in the

[96]Interview with Audrey Smith.
[97]'Protecting those who protect us', p. 4.
[98]Emma Vickers, Infantile Desires and Perverted Practices: Disciplining Lesbianism in the WAAF and the ATS during the Second World War, *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 13(4) 2009, pp. 431–441, p. 439.
[99]Ibid.
[100]Interview with Ali Brown.
[101]Wendy Hooton, 'A Veteran Interview with Wendy Hooton', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 17 April 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/wendy-hooton/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[102]Bernadette Dolan, 'A Veteran Interview with Bernadette Dolan', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 22 March 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/bernadette-dolan/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[103]Ibid.
[104]Interview with Karen Mallion.
[105]Interview with Rowena Patrick.

Armed Forces.[106] SIB investigations were overwhelmingly regarded as a horrendous waste of resources. Time, money and effort was wasted, and well-trained women were needlessly lost. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, lesbianism was banned in the British Army, and as Bernadette Dolan reflects, 'it was against the law, and you knew that. If you got caught and you got kicked out, … that's the risk you took'.[107]

Support and Camaraderie

Despite the frustrations, obstacles, and limitations, for many women the WRAC provided a supportive environment, with those in senior positions understanding the additional challenges facing women in the army. As Lieutenant Colonel Ishbel Thomson remarks, she felt 'secure in the WRAC'.[108] Bernadette Dolan explains her concerns that once the corps disbanded then bullying and sexual harassment would increase and in line with many others, she feared there would be 'no protection for them anymore' against this kind of behaviour.[109] Interestingly, for some, including those who were looking for more than the WRAC could offer them, the supportive environment the WRAC provided was only fully appreciated after disbandment. Ali Brown reflects, 'the support that women give to women is invaluable, and I think one of the true strengths of the WRAC was that women gave women support … I think it was probably essential, and I probably didn't realise at the time'.[110] Sue Westlake highlights an important part of her role as Commander of the 250 soldiers of 29 Company in Rheindahlen Germany, was to be 'there for them [to] sort out whatever difficulties or challenges they were facing'. Something she feels has been lost in today's army.[111] Echoing these sentiments, Julia Crockett commented that although she is pleased women 'may take on being in the tanks or infantry', she suspects there is a need 'to bring back in some way a safe hub of some kind just for women'.[112] And indeed, these views are borne out in the House of Commons Defence Committee report (2022), which raises what it calls grave concerns over bullying, harassment and discrimination, and how 'the MOD and Services are failing to help female personnel achieve their full

[106]Imperial War Museum, '25th Anniversary of the Lifting of the LGBT Ban in the Armed Forces' https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/lifting-the-ban. Accessed 14 March 2025.
[107]Interview with Bernadette Dolan.
[108]Ishbel Thomson, 'A Veteran Interview with Ishbel Thomson', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 31 May 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/ishbel-thomson/. Accessed 31 March 2025.
[109]Interview with Bernadette Dolan.
[110]Interview with Ali Brown.
[111]Interview with Sue Westlake
[112]Interview with Julia Crockett.

potential'.[113] How women in the army are protected from bullying and harassment is clearly a real and current issue that the army is yet to resolve.

The WRAC also fostered an enduring sense of camaraderie. Remembering her basic training at the barracks in Guildford in the 1970s, Corporal Sylvia Adams tells, 'you had companionship with the other girls, and it was nice because you didn't have to worry about wearing something different to anybody else because you all wore the same thing'.[114] This view of the WRAC was shared by those who joined later and went on to serve after disbandment in 1992. Military training instructor, Karen Mallion, commented, 'there was a camaraderie that I never had further in my career, … the girls would look after each other', and Ali Brown observed that when the WRAC disbanded, 'you lost that camaraderie … women, I think, are brilliant at sorting other people's problems'.[115] One area in which this camaraderie came to the fore was in team sport, something else that was lost on disbandment. Mary Woollard comments, 'I played a lot of unit sports, and the biggest loss for me when the WRAC went, was sport stopped overnight for women … we'd have inter-divisional competitions, that died overnight, which was a huge shame'.[116] The WRAC created a strong sense of belonging and a feeling of togetherness that has since been lost. As Sharon Broderick says, 'I know women now who have served post-WRAC in the army, and I feel sorry for them that they didn't have those bonds. If I had needed them, they were there, and I think it's so important that this story is told'.[117]

Disbandment

In 1990, the Army board decided to move away from the concept of an all-female corps. As Rowena Patrick explains, 'you were beginning to get women at a higher level who had been trained along with their male counterparts and who were doing the type of jobs that the men were doing', and as a result, 'more and more of our women [were] beginning to go into employments that were changing and opening up for them'.[118] In her book chapter 'Infantrywomen - An Ethical Dilemma?', Georgina Natzio states, 'it is clear from this country's broadest experience of war … that servicemen and women have, can, and do work excellently together', going on to assert that society had become more accepting of women playing a more prominent role in the

[113]'Protecting those who protect us', p. 3.
[114] Sylvia Adams, 'A Veteran Interview with Sylvia Adams', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 12 March 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/sylvia-adams/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[115]Interview with Karen Mallion; Interview with Ali Brown.
[116]Interview with Mary Woollard.
[117]Interview with Sharon Broderick.
[118]Interview with Rowena Patrick.

Army.[119] On disbandment, any women deployed to other corps were permanently transferred to them, while those who remained in a WRAC specific function were transferred to a new Adjutant General's Corps, created to undertake the general administration of the British Army.[120] On 6 April 1992 this new corps was founded, and a female only corps ceased to exist.[121] On hearing that the WRAC was to be disbanded, the emotions of those serving were diverse, ranging from 'devastated' to 'delighted'.[122] Those who were not cap-badged to their employing regiment or corps and had stayed in WRAC specific roles were hardest hit by the change. Sue Westlake explains that these women 'just couldn't imagine how it would be' after the WRAC went. Due to the concept of corps based on gender rather than specialist functions, they had no specific trade and so whilst they were resigned to accepting disbandment as the way forward, for many it was a 'great personal issue'.[123] In a similar vein, Ishbel Thomson explains for those working with other corps 'it was a great transfer', but 'for those who were in generalist WRAC, it was a bit of a "what's going on?"'[124] Indeed, many of those already cap-badged to other regiments or corps relished the opportunities disbandment created. After seeing service in Iraq, Ali Brown remembers looking forward to seeing the WRAC go because they had tried to stop her deploying.[125] She describes losing faith in the WRAC because they would not let her do her job, and 'just waiting for them to disband'.[126] Whether devastated or delighted, it was clear that in the same way women's aspirations and expectations had changed in civilian careers, the role of women in the army had also changed beyond recognition. As Mary Woollard explains, 'the opportunities were coming, and you could see that you couldn't really understand how a female-only corps would survive'.[127]

What Makes a Veteran?

Many women who served in the WRAC do not consider themselves veterans. They take the view that to be a veteran you need combat experience, something most of them lack. Lieann Andrew sums this up when she states, 'I don't think I'm a soldier, I think of a veteran as a World War I, World War II [soldier]. My husband's been out

[119]Georgina Natzio, 'Infantrywomen - An Ethical Dilemma?', in Teri McConfille and Richard Holmes (eds.), *Defence Management in Uncertain Times*, (Oxford; Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), pp. 186-210.
[120]*Women's Royal Army Corps, 1949-1992,* p. 37.
[121]Ibid.
[122]Interview with Sue Westlake; Interview with Janet Brodie-Murphy.
[123]Interview with Sue Westlake.
[124]Interview with Ishbel Thomson.
[125]Interview with Ali Brown.
[126]Ibid.
[127]Interview with Mary Woollard.

to Afghanistan, he's got medals, that to me, is a war veteran or an army veteran'.[128] Others think of veterans as men, not women. For them, veterans are 'old men, who stand in a bar and drink beer, and get to go on Remembrance Parade'.[129] Increasingly, however, as women join local branches of the WRAC Association, whose aim is to 'both celebrate and support' female veterans, and society in general increasingly values veterans' contributions, their thoughts are changing.[130] Sergeant Marion Prescott was in the Horse and Groom in Guildford in 1974 when the IRA detonated the first of two bombs in town centre pubs. She reflects that recent events, including the 2022 inquest, and particularly the fiftieth anniversary memorial service, have helped her achieve closure, and as a consequence feel proud to be a veteran.[131] As Wendy Hooton comments, all service people are ready to go to war if that need arises, and consequently, all those who served should consider themselves veterans.[132]

Conclusion

The WRAC formed 'the basis for women, modern women in the army', yet their story is often overshadowed by the wartime exploits of women in the ATS.[133] Speaking of women in today's army, Rowena Patrick conveys with some passion that the WRAC was the foundation for 'where they all are today', and consequently it is important that their story is told.[134] It was the first step for women to serve in peacetime, paving the way for the women who serve today. There were significant constraints and obstacles that often made it difficult for the women to function effectively, and the army was slow to adapt to societal changes. Yet, the women of the WRAC shared a determination to succeed, to exceed expectations and to overcome barriers their male colleagues did not have to face. There was a genuine sense of camaraderie, and some had opportunities and experiences unavailable to women in civilian life. The army instilled a sense of pride, they were doing something worthwhile. This belief shaped the lives of those who served, and is aptly summed up by Mary Woollard, who reflected, 'to this day, when I march at the Cenotaph, as soon as you've got your beret on and your neck in the back of your coat, and the band goes, you just feel immensely proud'[135]

---

[128]Interview with Lieann Andrew.
[129]Interview with Sharon Broderick.
[130]WRAC Association, 'Our Work' https://wraca.org.uk/our-work/. Accessed 26 March 2025.
[131]Marion Prescott, 'A Veteran Interview with Marion Prescott', interview by Martin Bisiker, Legasee, 19 November 2024 https://www.legasee.org.uk/veteran/marion-prescott/. Accessed 1 April 2025.
[132]Interview with Wendy Hooton.
[133]Interview with Rowena Parick.
[134]Ibid.
[135]Interview with Mary Woollard.

Reacting to Kate Adie's assessment that the women of the WRAC would not want to sit on the frontline, Audrey Smith said, 'I don't understand it. If I had to sit on the front line with a man, I would, … as far as I was concerned all through my career, I was a soldier, and they were a soldier, and we were doing a job'.[136] Ali Brown adds, 'it's a very unintelligent comment because it's too generalist, I don't think she bothered to find out what women can actually do', she goes on to point out, 'there will be women who would hate the idea of doing that, but there will also be men who hate the idea. I don't think it's a gender thing'.[137] By the late 1980s it was clear that a women-only corps was no longer viable. However, integration has not been without issue, and the army clearly has unresolved problems regarding bullying, harassment and misogyny. As Audrey Smith states, 'it was an evolution that had to happen, and I do feel that perhaps now women should look out more for other women and make sure that things are going on all right'.[138]

[136]Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, p. 232; Interview with Audrey Smith.
[137]Interview with Ali Brown.
[138]Interview with Audrey Smith.

Naval Encounters of the Nigerian Civil War: Biafra's Brown-Water Navy and Federal Responses

AKALI OMENI*
Independent Scholar, USA
Email: omeni@terrorismstudiesconsultancy.com

ABSTRACT
The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) has been examined primarily through its land and air campaigns, leaving its maritime dimension comparatively neglected. This article reconstructs the development, operations, and limitations of the Biafran navy, situating it within Federal maritime strategy and amphibious warfare. Drawing on archival material, memoirs, and triangulated sources, it analyses how foreign mercenaries helped fashion a makeshift brown-water force that conducted limited riverine raids but failed to challenge Federal naval superiority. By treating naval operations as a coherent operational theatre, the article repositions maritime power as a structurally significant, if ultimately asymmetrical, element in the war's trajectory.

Introduction

This article's significance lies in its contribution to the history of the Biafran Navy during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. It also raises questions about the challenges of realising even modest naval ambitions in new states – contrasting the capabilities of a navy established by a former colonial power to one whose creation was in the hands of non-state actors such as mercenaries. Along these lines, using accounts from former Biafran commanders, former mercenaries that assisted the Biafran Navy, and Federal Nigerian Naval commanders who engaged Biafran vessels in Biafra's littoral waters, this article analyses the Biafran Navy's early exploits, wartime

*Akali Omeni is a terrorism studies consultant and independent scholar. The author of five monographs, he is widely published in his field.

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1960

The Editor asks readers of the Journal to note that footnote hyperlinks to the British Pathé News website were functional when this article was written; it is hoped that their current unavailability is temporary.

activities, fleet vessels, riverine warfare challenges, and eventual demise. In piecing together the Federal Nigerian Navy's own origins, it employs original archival material.

As a conflict fought primarily by land forces, the Nigerian Civil War has been extensively interrogated whereas naval actors on both sides are under-examined, principally in the conflict's first two years from 1967 to 1968, when most naval activity occurred. Furthermore, even less emphasis has been placed on the operational history of the Biafran Navy. Seeking to help fill this gap, this article presents a historical corrective around the Biafran Navy, its exploits, and how the Biafran fleet fared against the Federal Navy.

The article begins with a broad background of the Nigerian Civil War which is essential for audiences unfamiliar with the conflict. As part of this analysis, the paper's opening sections also revisit the constitutional amendments made by the Federal Military Government (FMG) to bring the Federal Navy's capabilities in line with its expanded maritime duties and remit in a wartime context. Following this background to the navy's civil war preparations, including its role in the FMG blockade, the paper turns to wartime operations along the southern seaboard. It examines in particular the consequences of Federal forces capturing Bonny Island, a key crude oil export terminal located in what was then Biafra. The paper examines the Biafran government's apparent indifference to the FMG's naval threat, before taking a closer look at Biafra's own navy, which it is argued was a brown-water force that depended heavily on improvisation, white mercenary assistance, and commando-style riverine raids. Finally, the paper revisits the key features of the naval war, leading to the conclusion, which presents the late-war implications of the paper's findings.

Research Overview, Methods and Challenges

The naval dimension of the Nigerian Civil War has received comparatively limited sustained analysis. Earlier studies by Abiodun William Duyile, Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe and Lawrence Okechukwu Udeagbala, have addressed aspects of Federal naval operations, while Adeyinka Makinde's work provides useful treatment of the Bonny amphibious landings of July 1967.[1] Yet such contributions tend either to focus

[1]Duyile, William Abiodun. 2024. 'The Nigerian Navy, 1956-1966: Manpower and Platform Development and the First Court Martial.' *Polit Journal: Scientific Journal of Politics* 4 (1): pp. 27-37. doi:10.33258/polit. v4i1.106.; Duyile, Abiodun William. 2020. 'From the Biafra war to the Liberian crisis: historicizing the contribution of the Nigerian Navy.' *Defence Studies* 20 (2): pp. 1-19; Chukwuma C. C. Osakwe and Lawrence Okechukwu Udeagbala 'Naval Military Operations in Bonny during the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970,' *Advances in Historical Studies* no. 4 (2015), p. 234; 'A Comparative Study of the Nigerian and Biafran Navies During the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70', Lawrence Okechukwu Udeagbala in *African Navies: Historical and*

primarily on the Federal Navy or to treat maritime operations episodically within broader campaign narratives. The operational history of the Biafran Navy, by contrast, has remained largely fragmentary and anecdotal, appearing only in passing within memoir literature or general political histories of the war.[2]

More recent monographs on Biafra, including Samuel Fury Childs Daly's study of law and crime in Biafra, and Roy Doron's account of the war, offer important political and military insights but do not undertake sustained analysis of naval organisation, riverine strategy, or amphibious counter-measures.[3] As a result, the maritime contest between Federal and Biafran forces has not been examined as a coherent operational theatre in its own right. This article seeks to address that omission by reconstructing the development, capabilities and limits of the Biafran Navy, while situating it within the broader framework of Federal maritime strategy and amphibious warfare. In doing so, it repositions naval activity from a peripheral subplot to a structurally significant element in the conflict's trajectory.

The relative neglect of the Biafran Navy is not confined to a single strand of the literature. Michael Gould's *The Biafran War*, despite its broad framing, makes no substantive reference to the Biafran Navy as an operational entity.[4] Lawrence Udeagbala is among the few scholars to address the subject directly.[5] However, his analysis relies largely on secondary historical material and adopts a comparative

---

Contemporary Perspectives, Timothy Stapleton (ed), (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 91-108; Adeyinka Makinde, 'The Bonny Landing: A Question & Answer Overview of Black Africa's First Amphibious Operation', https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00253359.2024.2371202. Accessed 6 March 2024; Makinde, Adeyinka, 'The Nigerian Civil War: A New History of the Bonny Amphibious Operation, July-September 1967', https://tinyurl.com/mwfmdsxv. Accessed 10 October 2024. doi:10.2139/ssrn.4531431.

[2]Recent monographs centred on Biafra, including Samuel Fury Childs Daly's *History of the Republic of Biafra* and Roy Doron's *Biafra*, provide valuable political and military analyses of the conflict but do not offer sustained operational examination of the Biafran navy. Daly's focus lies principally on law, governance, and crime within Biafra, while Doron's treatment concentrates more extensively on land and air operations than on maritime organisation or riverine warfare. See: Samuel Fury Childs Daly, *History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime, and the Nigerian Civil War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Roy Doron, *Biafra: A Military History*', (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2025).

[3]Daly, *History*; Doron, *Biafra*

[4]Michael Gould, The Biafran War: The Struggle for Modern Nigeria, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

[5]Udeagbala, 'A Comparative Study'.

framework that concentrates primarily on the Nigerian Navy rather than reconstructing the organisation, capabilities, and strategic limitations of the Biafran naval effort itself. Taken together, these studies underscore the extent to which the Biafran Navy has remained peripheral within the wider historiography of the war. Among the various domains of military activity during the Nigerian Civil War, it is arguably the least systematically examined.

Part of this historiographical lacuna stems from the uneven survival of primary sources. Unlike the Federal Navy, whose institutional origins were closely tied to British advisory and training structures and are therefore partially documented in British archives, the Biafran Navy left behind no comparable archival footprint. In seeking to address this imbalance, additional research was undertaken at the UK National Archives (TNA) where substantive holdings illuminate the development and operational posture of the Federal Navy but offer only fragmentary references to Biafran maritime activity. Colleagues within the Nigerian military assisted in identifying further material, and documents held at the Nigerian National Defence College (NDC) library in Abuja proved particularly valuable. Even so, significant gaps remained, necessitating careful triangulation with memoir literature, contemporary reportage, and foreign intelligence records in order to reconstruct as complete a picture as possible.

The lack of academic and official historical sources on the Biafran Navy specifically left mostly journalistic sources, media prints, and biographical accounts by Benard Odogwu, Rolf Steiner, Emeka Ojukwu, Nelson Soroh, Pascal Odu, and Alabi-Isama amongst others.[6] These sources supplemented what little can be gleaned, specific to the Biafran Navy from TNA and, to a lesser degree, from the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and State Department archives. Where possible, the author has triangulated sources. For instance, in discussing the death of the Italian rebel mercenary, Pier Giorgio Norbiato, his biography was employed first, then a reference to the incident in the journal of Rolf Steiner, another mercenary, and finally, the account of Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo, one of the Federal commanders active in the sector when Norbiato was killed. Notwithstanding its limitations, this approach has informed and allowed a more analytical and evidence-based study.

[6]Bernard Odogwu, *No Place to Hide: Crises and Conflicts inside Biafra*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1985); Rolf Steiner, *The Last* Adventurer*,* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978); Frederick Forsyth, *Emeka*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1992); Nelson Bossman Soroh, *A Sailor's Dream: Autobiography of Rear Admiral Nelson Bossman Soroh*, Lagos, Nigeria*:* Crucible Publishers, 2001); Pascal Odu, *The Future That Vanished: A Biafra Story*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris Corp, YEAR); Godwin Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 2013).

Military Rule & Dysfunction, Ethnic Violence & The Road to Civil War

By the mid-1960s, Nigeria's political system was in visible decline. Riots and disturbances, particularly in the Middle Belt and Western Regions, deepened the crisis. Two military coups, in January and July 1966 respectively, violently truncated the First Republic and installed the military in power. One proximate consequence of the coup, even as Nigeria's praetorians settled into an odious interregnum, was that the military disintegrated, with the effects of disintegration most evident in the Army as the oldest of the three service branches. Indeed, by July 1966, 'the Army on the whole looked like a loose bundle held together by a thin thread'.[7]

Stratified along ethnic lines and with a disastrous attempt at politics and governance since January, when it first came into power, the Army effectively imploded. The January coup led to the murder of the most powerful Northern politicians and the most senior Northern military officers. This coup, led by persons of predominantly Igbo ethnic extraction, cast the Eastern Igbo in conspiratorial roles.[8] Moreover, that Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Eastern Igbo and the Army's head, emerged in charge of the country deepened Northern suspicions. In many quarters, it was taken as confirmation of an Igbo conspiracy.[9]

In a second *coup d'état* that occurred in July 1966, Northern officers seized power, targeting officers and men of Igbo ethnic extraction, while looking also to avenge the January murders. The 'July Rematch', as the July counter-coup is cynically referred to, employs a metaphor that requires some reflection.[10] Specifically, its significance lies in the overtones of a structured fixture – predictability that what occurred in January 1966 would, inevitably, be followed by a response driven by affected ethnic parties.

[7]Hilary M. Njoku, *A Tragedy without Heroes: Nigeria-Biafra War*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co Ltd., 1987), p. 62

[8]Akali Omeni. 2025. 'Politics and the Nigerian Army (1965–1966): 'Nigerianization' and the Implications of Aguiyi-Ironsi's Appointment as General Officer Commanding (GOC).' *Journal of African Military History* pp. 1-39. doi:10.1163/24680966-bja10024. Accessed 23 January 2025.

[9]Ibid.

[10]See, for instance, Isaac Olawale Albert. 1994. 'Violence in metropolitan Kano: A Historical Perspective', in Jinmi Adisa, Eghosa E. Osaghae, Ismaila Touré, N'Guessan Kouamé and Isaac Olawale Albert (eds.), *Urban Violence in Africa: Pilot Studies*, (Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 1994), pp. 111-136, p. 92; Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, (1961–1976)*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), pp. 97-116; D.J.M. Muffett, *Let truth be told*, (Zaria, Kaduna: Hudahuda Publishing, 1982), pp. 106-109.

In this instance, by the time the July mutineers were done, Ironsi and over a hundred other ethnic Igbos in the Arny had been killed. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a Middle-Belt Army officer, was promptly installed as Supreme Commander and military Head of State by the predominantly Northern coup plotters. Despite this shift in ethnic power, the anti-Igbo killings soon spread beyond the Army, with many thousands of Igbos living in the Northern Region murdered by Northern, predominantly by Hausa, mobs.[11]

By January 1967 these pogroms, as they came to be known, led the country to the precipice of civil war.[12] In the following months, propaganda around the brutality of the pogroms and the idea that Igbos were unsafe anywhere in Nigeria, except in the Eastern region, became widespread as more Easterners returned home. Nor were the killings restricted to Kano – there were mass murder of Igbos in the Northern towns of Kaduna, Gombe, Jos, and Sokoto.[13] Some estimates put the number of Igbos killed in the pogroms at up to 30,000.[14] The Igbos were not the only victims. Other non-Igbo Easterners were also killed. And many Hausas, attempting to flee the East, were intercepted by Igbo soldiers and mobs and killed.[15]

Ethnic tensions worsened and military divisions deepened as the Eastern Region increasingly warned that it would secede from the Nigerian Federation, with negotiations to resolve these divisions coming up short.[16] Armed hostilities between the former countrymen and brothers-in-arms now seemed inevitable. Yet even before the shooting war began in July 1967, the maritime space emerged as a conflict arena.

The Nigerian Navy at War

As the old English idiom goes, 'it takes two to tango'. In investigating the Biafran navy's wartime operations, it is necessary to shed some light on the capabilities, posture and

[11]Michael Vickers, 'Competition and Control in Modern Nigeria: Origins of the War with Biafra', *International Journal* 25, 3 (1973), pp. 603-633; see also, John Naber Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano*, (California: University of California Press, 1973), p. 333 and Albert, 'Violence in metropolitian Kano,' p. 91.

[12]Chinua Achebe, There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra, (London: Penguin Books, YEAR)

[13]Ibid., p. 48.

[14]Achebe, There Was a Country, p. 82.

[15]Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, pp. 48-49.

[16]British Pathé, 'Nigeria: Eastern Military Ruler Boycotts Benin City Meeting of Nigerian Military Governors (1967).' 10 March 1967. https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/212846/. Accessed 30 December 2024.; see also, Rex Niven, The War of Nigerian Unity 1967-1970, (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1970), p. 122.

actions of Biafra's opponent – the Federal Nigerian Navy. A relevant question at this juncture is what sort of navy did the Federation of Nigeria possess at the outbreak of the civil war in 1967? This section of the paper seeks to address that question, the answer to which helps identify, broadly speaking, the threat faced by the Biafran Navy.

By 1960, and after more than a half-century of colonial rule, Britain was set to leave Nigeria's affairs to Nigerians. In 1959, a year before Nigerian Independence, the British government left, as parting gifts to the newly-formed Royal Nigerian Navy, two naval vessels: the first was H.M.S. *Hare,* an Algerine Class Minesweeper, a Second World War vintage warship armed with one 4-inch QF gun and four Swedish-made *Bofors* 40-mm anti-aircraft guns; the second was a much smaller Seaward Defence Motor Launch (SDML), a small vessel armed with two *Oerlikon* 20mm anti-aircraft guns and machine guns. Both were obsolescent and surplus to Royal Navy requirements.[17]

In gifting the Nigerian government those vessels, Britain did not equip Nigeria with an offensive navy that might pose a regional threat and spark a regional naval arms race.[18] Instead, the role of the Royal Nigerian Navy, formed in 1959, was said to be 'purely defensive and anti-submarine'. Along these lines, British officials, seeking to assuage neighbouring Ghana's security concerns that the Nigerian Navy would quickly be employed for war, noted that Nigeria's Navy was created 'to assist Nigeria to contribute to its own defence and that of the Commonwealth … of which Ghana is a member'.[19] Moreover, British officials were also adamant that, in helping Nigeria establish a navy, the institution served as a 'small defensive force' with no other purpose other than its obvious one – the beginning of Nigeria's own seaward defence'.[20] However, was the Nigerian Navy strictly a defensive force? The Navy's capabilities by 1967, shortly before the outbreak of war, suggest otherwise.

Even before war came, the Balewa regime, cognisant that a navy came with a new and expanded range of maritime responsibility for the government, began revisiting the existing legislation. As part of this process, the 1964 Navy Act was pivotal. It repealed the 1958 Ordinance, abolished the three-mile restriction, and gave the service for the first time a mandate for the 'naval defence of Nigeria.' This mandate carried both

[17]TNA DO 35/10461 Dominions Office, Enclosure: Note on Gift of Ships to Nigeria, CRO, 1 June 1959.
[18]TNA DO 35/10461 Colonial Office, Ghana Department, M.E. Allen to Mr Snelling, Secret: Nigerian Navy, 28 January 1959.
[19]TNA CO 968/662 Colonial Office, Alan Lennox-Boyd (Secretary of State for the Colonies) to James Robertson (Governor-General of Nigeria), Personal No. 23, 30 January 1959.
[20]TNA CO 968/662 Colonial Office, M.G. Smith, Esq. (Colonial Office) to M.E. Allen, Esq. (Commonwealth Relations Office), 27 January 1959.

strategic and operational weight: defending the coastline; conducting hydrographic surveys; training officers; and supporting customs and port enforcement. Between 1964 and 1967, further changes expanded the Federal Navy's Area of Responsibility. However, by far the most significant change to maritime law came during the military interregnum when the Gowon regime issued the Territorial Waters Decree of 1967.[21] Anticipating war and the need to blockade Biafra's southern seaboard (see Figure 1), this FMG Decree extended Nigeria's territorial waters from three to twelve nautical miles. The change was made possible through the FMG's amendment to section 18(1) of the 1964 Interpretation Act.[22]

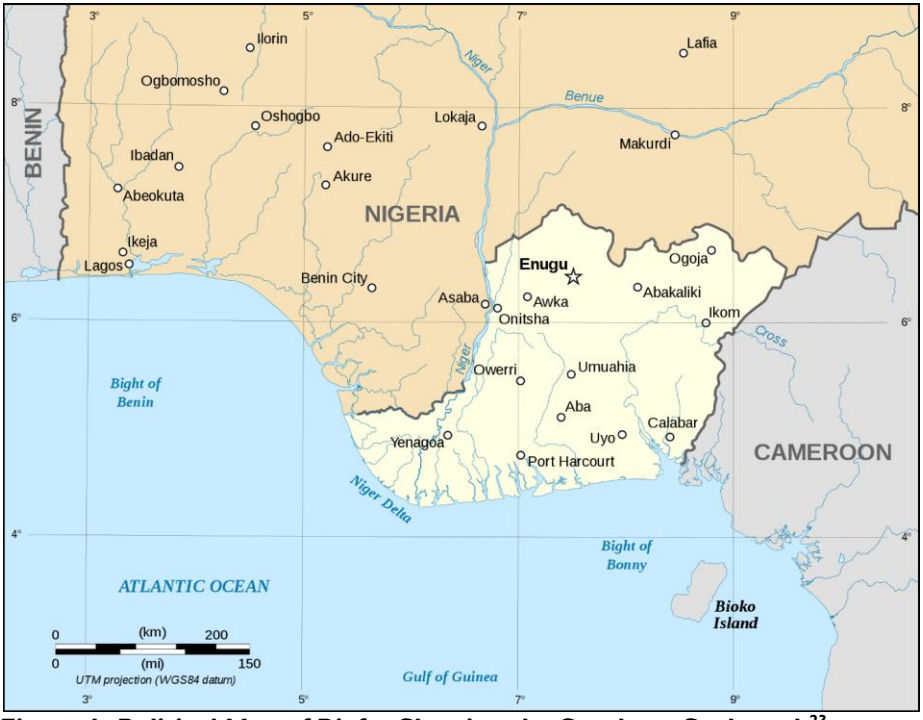

Figure 1: Political Map of Biafra Showing the Southern Seaboard.[23]

Still, laws on paper did not by themselves make a fighting navy. Expanded jurisdiction meant little without ships, weapons, and an organisation to back it up. Thus, alongside

[21]Duyile, "From the Biafra war," 6
[22]Ibid.
[23]Map of Biafra attributed to Eric Gaba. Used under GNU Free Documentation License.

these legislative reforms, Gowon's military government began to militarise its maritime arm in earnest. Key to this change in the Federal Navy, from coastal defence to one with a more offensive posture, was the frigate, *Nigeria*, which was ordered from Dutch shipbuilders Wilton-Fijenoord in 1963.[24] During the construction period, the Dutch government loaned Nigeria a U.S.-built PC-461 class patrol craft, the former HNLMS *Queen Wilhelmina* (ex-PC 468). Renamed NNS *Ogoja* it had originally been designed to counter German U-boats. *Ogoja* measured 52.9 by 7.0 by 2.2 metres, could make 12 knots, and carried a formidable set of weapons, most of which were fitted after transfer: a 76mm bow gun; a 40mm *Bofors* gun, five 20mm *Oerlikons*; two rocket launchers; four depth charge projectors and two depth charge tracks. In October 1965, the Dutch gifted *Ogoja* outright to Nigeria.[25]

As the navy's flagship, and at £3.5m, the single most expensive piece of military equipment purchased by Nigeria at the time, the 104-meter-long *Nigeria*, with a draft of 3.5m and width of 11.3m, came with competitive weapons systems for its class. These included two 4-inch Mk 19 British-made low-velocity 40-calibre naval guns in a twin turret; four 40mm/60 Mk 7 Swedish-made *Bofors* 40mm guns, and one British-made Squid Anti-Submarine mortar. The *Nigeria* was also fitted with a helicopter pad in addition to its Royal Navy-pattern armament.[26]

Aside from the capabilities of the NNS *Nigeria*, the navy's Ordnance Stores included a variety of weapons, equipment, munitions and bombs that warships across the fleet could employ.[27] Viewed in this light, the navy's pre-war Order of Battle (ORBAT) in 1967 tells its own story. The organisation and deployment of its forces suggest that, despite British officials' claims, Nigeria's new navy was not being created for strictly defensive purposes.[28] The navy could, if required, be deployed in offensive and interdiction roles beyond Nigeria's continental shelf.[29] Moreover, with conflict

[24]Mazumdar, Mrityunjoy, 'Fleet Review - The Nigerian Navy: Making slow headway against heavy seas.' In Seaforth World Naval Review, edited by Conrad Waters, 51-63 (Yorkshire: Seaforth Publishing, 2021), p. 55

[25]United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 'Dutch Gift of Warship', Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts No. 201, 1965, p. I13.

[26]Gardiner, Robert, Stephen Chumbley, and Przemysław Budzbon, Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1947–1995, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1995).

[27]Duyile, 'From the Biafra war,'

[28]Ibid.

[29]Nigerian Navy, History, Roles and Organization of the Nigerian Navy: Report for students of Senior Course 32, (AFCSC, Jaji-Kaduna: Armed Forces Command and Staff College, n.d.) pp. 7-8.

looming, the navy would soon be thrust into such roles on Nigeria's southern seaboard (see Figure 1).[30]

By contrast Biafra had no naval resources at the time of its secession.

The Naval Blockade

On 30 May 1967, and after months of a political impasse with the Federal Military Government based in Lagos, Eastern Nigeria's military government declared its secession from the Federal Republic of Nigeria and declared independence as the Republic of Biafra. Actions which resulted in civil war.[31] The FMG initially attempted economic statecraft rather than warfare to persuade the Biafran leadership led by Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Biafra's declared Head of State, to abandon secessionist ambitions. Along these lines, and months before the FMG's land offensives began, the Federal Navy was already playing a central role in enforcing the government's initial wartime strategy. Specifically, by June 1967, a naval blockade was in place to smother Biafra's economy by preventing any access to the southern seaboard.

However, Biafra remained defiant. At a press conference held at Enugu in July 1967, Ojukwu ridiculed Lagos' 'so-called economic blockade' and, amidst suppressed laughter, pointed to Biafra's 'ability to run the blockade and break through it'. … 'Ships have come in', Ojukwu added; 'ships have left'.[32]

Whereas Ojukwu had overembellished Biafra's ability to evade the blockade in a way that presented an undisturbed economic lifeline, the Biafran Head of State was not wrong about the blockade having sufficient gaps to allow vessels to slip in and out. In short, despite successfully interdicting import and export shipping routes into Biafran territory, Lagos could not depend on a blockade and a blockade alone to isolate Biafra. Amphibious landings were required for the Army to establish a second Southern front, and naval support was necessary to meet this objective. Put another way, the Nigerian Civil War was always destined to be fought primarily on land, as the FMG sought to recapture rebel territory. In that struggle, it was the 'biggest and best battalions that were most likely to secure victory'.[33] Yet the Federal Navy's force-multiplier role, in supporting, transporting, and coordinating with those battalions, proved essential to

[30]Reuters, 'Lt. Col. Emeka Ojukwu | Biafran Head of State | Press Conferences | Federal Blockade | Mid-July 1967,' https://bit.ly/48rRb9T. Accessed 28 October 2024.
[31]Michael Crowder, The Story of Nigeria, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 272-273.
[32]Reuters, 'Lt. Col. Emeka Ojukwu'.
[33]Sunday Telegraph. 1970. 'Colonel Robert Scott's Report.', p. 11.

the outcome. And at the heart of the Navy's multiplier effect was its coordination with the Federal army to facilitate a series of amphibious landings on the Biafran coast.

The Navy Plays a More Direct Wartime Role

There were other reasons for the navy to play a more direct wartime role, aside from blockade duties. Early in the conflict, the Nigerian Army's land campaign struggled, with slow advances by the Federal 1 and 2 Divisions, which had sought to quickly retake the strategic Biafran towns of Onitsha and Enugu – the latter being the first Biafran capital – see Figure 1.[34] However, successful amphibious landings from the southern seaboard would relieve pressure on 1 and 2 Divisions and lead to a two-front war by introducing the troops of 3 Nigerian Army division, in the Southern front to create a second front.[35] This would force Biafra to split their already stretched land forces: between the Northern Sector advances of the Federal 1 and 2 Divisions and 3 Division, approaching from the south (see Figure 2).[36] The opening of this second front was where the Federal Navy's wartime role proved pivotal in ensuring Nigerian Army troops were safely transported, supported by naval artillery and thus able to establish a land presence.[37] This objective was to be achieved via a series of amphibious landings on Biafra's southern seaboard.

By July 1967, and while the blockade was in effect, it became clear that land operations originating from the southern coast were necessary to encircle Biafra, so Rear Admiral Joseph Wey, the Federal Nigerian Navy's Chief of Naval Staff, was presented a list of possible landing sites for the army by General Yakubu Gowon.[38] Wey began evaluating the landing site options based on concerns that Biafra's use of locally-made naval mines made the navigable routes into Port Harcourt too perilous to attempt without further intelligence.[39] Seeking to avoid an attempt at landing at Port Harcourt as the Navy's

[34]TNA FCO 65/328 Ministry of Defence (UK). 1968. Secret: Report by Colonel P.H. Moir, 22 November 1968,. Whitehall, London: Ministry of Defence.

[35]TNA FCO 65/328 UK Consul Ibadan. 1968. Confidential: Observations on Some Senior Yoruba Army Officers, Enclosure, 12 December 1968.

[36]TNA FCO 65/328 Foreign and Commonwealth Office. 1969. Sir D. Hunt to FCO, 8 May 1969.

[37]Adeyinka Makinde, 'The Bonny Landing'.

[38]As Supreme Commander of the armed forces and Head of State, Gowon had promoted himself shortly before the onset of war in 1967, as otherwise he would have lacked seniority compared to more senior military officers including Brigadier Ogundipe, Commodore Wey, Colonel Robert Adebayo and even, potentially, Colonel Ojukwu. Such promotions were not unusual at the time. Ojukwu, as an example, also promoted himself to General, and many Biafran officers and mercenaries received accelerated promotions throughout the war.

[39]Al Venter, *Biafra Genocide*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2018), p. 36

first option, on Wey's instruction, James, Rawe, one of his commanders, helped draft a paper that weighed the pros and cons of each potential amphibious landing site. The paper, '*Landing by sea on enemy-held territory*', was eventually prepared for the Supreme Headquarters of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria in 1967.[40] In this plan, Bonny Island, a vital crude oil export terminal located off the southern seaboard, was selected as the site of the first amphibious landing. It was implemented by a naval task force transporting Federal infantry battalions from 3 Division.[41]

Aside from the NNS *Nigeria*, the Navy's new, full-sized, all-purpose frigate and de facto capital ship, eleven other vessels formed the naval task force, including the Navy's SDMLs, its Mine-Sweeping Motor Launches (MSMLs), and its sole Landing Craft Tank (LCT), the NNS *Lokoja*. Troops loaded onto the vessels came from the brigade-strength Lagos Garrison Organisation (LGO), composed of three infantry battalions. All Army formations were under the overall command of Lieutenant Colonel Adekunle as the LGO Commander.[42]

Troops were to make a beach landing underpinned by several rapid manoeuvres and provided with covering fire by Vickers machine guns on enemy troops close to the beach, and naval artillery fire on dug-in positions further from the coastline. For the main troop landings, which were delayed by bad weather, the *Lokoja* LCT, commanded by Lt. Commander Hussaini Abdullahi, took point.[43]

Whereas the Federal Navy's operational plans were developed by Commander J. Rawe, supported by Commodore J.E.A. Wey, the task force command was under Captain Soroh, with Commander Michael A. Adelanwa as his Second-in-Command. [44] Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Akahan developed the Army-side operational planning for the landing.[45] Meanwhile, actual operational command of own troops was delegated to Lieutenant Colonel Adekunle.

---

[40]Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1980), p. 152, p. 190.

[41]Rawe, 'Landing by sea on enemy-held territory.' Paper prepared for the Supreme Headquarters of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, 1967 cited in Makinde, The Nigerian Civil War.

[42]Olusegun Obasanjo, My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970, (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 44.

[43]Nowa Omoigui, 'Barracks: The History Behind Those Names - Part 5', 27 October 2007. https://bit.ly/4g1QhnO. Accessed 8 December 2024

[44]Adeyinka Makinde, 'The Bonny Landing'

[45]Ibid.

Thus, as part of the Federal Navy task force that sailed for Bonny from Lagos in July 1967, the Nigerian military demonstrated its advances in the combined arms approach that saw army and navy forces work in close tandem for the first time in Nigerian history. And without a Biafran naval presence to prevent the landing, and despite spirited coastal defence, Federal forces eventually secured a beachhead at Bonny between 26 and 27 July 1967.

The Significance and Consequence of the Bonny Landing

From the Federal perspective, the Bonny amphibious landing was hailed as a 'masterpiece in the history of warfare in Africa', as 'the first of its kind by any 3rd world country,' and as 'the African version of Omaha Beach landings that turned the tide of the Second World War'.[46] Indeed, such was the strategic importance of the Bonny landing to Nigeria's civil war campaign that it was the only battle in that conflict which, decades later, had a military barracks – Bonny Camp, Victoria Island, Lagos – named in its commemoration.[47]

Even after the loss of Bonny, the Biafran Navy's troubles were far from over. On the contrary, as a direct consequence of the Federal beachhead established at Bonny, further amphibious landings followed at Escravos in August 1967, at Warri, Sapele and Koko in September 1967 and Calabar on 18 October 1967.[48] The final amphibious landing was at Oron in March 1968.[49] Each of these landings exerted further pressure on Biafra. This new Southern Front eventually allowing Federal troops from the Northern and Southern theatres to link up and encircle Biafra's land forces. It was an approach that was as obvious as it was unstoppable – unless the opening of a second front from the south could be prevented. Indeed, Nigeria's military attaché in Bonn, West Germany, was clear that this was precisely the FMG's strategy: to land troops from the south, using the Federal Navy, then 'encircle the rebels, slowly tighten the noose and strangle them'.[50] Moreover, the opening of a second front via amphibious landings not only isolates the enemy geographically in that area but also interdicts possible (re)supplies by sea and effectively removes maritime logistics and their potential multiplier effect on the enemy's land positions.

For such reasons, the loss of Bonny to Federal forces, and the opening of a second front as a result, was a massive blow to Biafra and an indication of how much Biafra

[46]Awoyokun, Damola, 'Biafra: The Untold Story of the Nigerian Civil War - Part 2', https://bit.ly/2y3vW1F. Accessed 9 March 2026.
[47]Omoigui, 'Barracks: The History'.
[48]John De St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 173.
[49]Makinde, 'The Bonny Landing'.
[50]Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, 50; see also, De St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War*, p. 173.

had underestimated the Federal Navy's threat to the southern seaboard. It is unclear if the Biafrans genuinely believed that Nigeria lacked a navy or whether the Biafrans simply lacked accurate naval intelligence to that effect. Regardless it was quite a miscalculation.

How did Biafra bungle their threat assessment of the Federal Navy and the significance of Bonny? In his memoirs, Rolf Steiner, a German mercenary who fought for the Biafrans, and was eventually dismissed by Ojukwu, warned of the Federal naval threat which he noted was 'a tough proposition' to engage in battle'.[51] Biafran gunboats, after all, had no ordnance that could match the *Nigeria*'s 102mm guns.[52] Yet, the lack of a credible Biafran naval counter-threat was not the only issue here. The Biafrans' limited coastal defences against the Federal naval threat point to both an overall underestimation of that threat and its consequences to Biafra's defence.

At Bonny, for instance, despite defensive positions being overwhelmed by Federal fire and troop numbers, no Biafran reinforcements were forthcoming. This was partly due to a lack of resources on the Biafran side, as well as a lack of preparation and even a demonstrable misunderstanding of Bonny's strategic value. With over 200 miles of vulnerable coastline, the southern seaboard should have had a planned and well-resourced defence covering multiple potential landing sites, including Bonny.

In this sense, Ojukwu and the Biafran general staff missed a significant defensive opportunity: they had full access to Bonny; and months to prepare defensive fortifications. However, in being so readily dismissive of the Federal Nigerian Navy's capabilities and the possibility of an amphibious landing on the southern seaboard, Biafra's forces failed to mount a well-planned defence despite the site's many defensive advantages. After all, the features that made Bonny potentially vulnerable, specifically its open access to the sea, also could have made it extremely difficult to access from a defensive standpoint if it had adequate coastal defences. However, the Biafran coastal defences, not just at Bonny but in general, were not commensurate to the threat faced by these coastal sites. More specifically, just one battalion, the Biafran Army's 8 Battalion, was tasked with defending the entire southern sector.[53] Moreover, the same force of around 500 troops was divided into smaller units, detached and deployed at the following locations: a company at Ahoada; a company at Calabar; a company at Oron; and only a single platoon at Bonny.[54] This meant that Bonny Island, one of the

[51]Odogwu, *No Place to Hide*, pp. 114-117; Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, p. 53.
[52]Ibid.
[53]Together with the 9 Battalion, this constituted 52 Brigade of the Biafran Army by the start of the war.
[54]Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution*, p. 99; In Nigerian Army nomenclature, a company is a military unit with anywhere from 100 to 200 troops, typically with a major, and

most important strategic locations in the southern theatre, was, quite simply, there for the taking – having far fewer troops left to defend it than at any of the other southern seaboard coastal towns. Indeed, as General Alexander Madiebo, the Biafran Army's Chief of Staff, would later observe, 'there was nothing the 51 Brigade or indeed 53 Brigade [supporting Biafran brigades] could do to assist in the south'.[55]

It was not that the Biafrans were completely unaware of the Bonny landing plans. Rebel intelligence indicated that 'a Nigerian Armada was heading towards Bonny'.[56] Moreover, even before plans were made for the Bonny landing, shortly after Ojukwu's Independence Declaration on 30 May, he asked that 'the Navy Commander and the Command Headquarters at Port Harcourt be … alerted' of the high likelihood of an invasion, such that Biafra's seaboard defences be fortified.[57] However, 'without an effective Navy, there was nothing much that could be done to stop the invasion'.[58] And with the fall of Bonny, Biafra's loss of the southern sector was assured, as a formidable Nigerian Army division now had a beachhead.

An Ill-advised Dismissal of the Federal Naval Threat

The Biafran's offhand dismissal of a Federal naval threat from the southern seaboard had been going on for months, with them casting doubt on the blockade. It also did not help that, with perhaps the exception of the white mercenaries, the men Ojukwu surrounded himself with failed to provide a more realistic assessment of the Federal naval threat.[59] During a news conference held in London shortly after secession had been declared, Matthew Tawo Mbu, Biafra's Foreign Minister, claimed that no Nigerian Navy ships had violated Biafra's twelve-mile limit – which they asserted was a part of Biafra's maritime territory. When challenged regarding the Federal Nigerian Navy's threat, Mbu dismissed it, 'What navy"? he countered. 'I was Minister for the Federal Navy'.[60]

---

less commonly, a captain, in command. These are not hard numbers: the size and constitution of a company, and who commands it, can vary quite dramatically dependent on the nature of operations and the limitations of war imposed on a given formation.

[55]Ibid., p. 152.

[56]Odogwu, *No Place*, p. 20.

[57]Ibid., p. 18.

[58]Ibid., p. 20.

[59]For more on the sometimes-tense relations between Ojukwu and some of his mercenaries see Rolf Steiner's memoir, *The Last Adventurer*.

[60]John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 72-73.

Mbu had indeed held the position of Minister for the Navy and had been present in conversations involving Lord Mountbatten, the British Chief of the Defence Staff, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Nigerian Prime Minister, 1960-1966, regarding the need *to* 'Nigerianise' the Navy by the cautious and gradual phasing out of non-Nigerian personnel across the institution's ranks.[61] Therefore, of all people, he should have known the Nigerian Navy's organisation and capability building, including the acquisition of the *Nigeria*, and an LCT for amphibious landings, and SDMLs for coastal patrol and defence.[62]

Viewed in this light, the Nigerian Navy was no longer a coastal defence force, nor was it the Anti-Submarine Force that had originally been envisaged at its inception.[63] The Nigerian Navy of 1967 posed a coastal threat internally and externally. However, the Biafran authorities were, apparently, convinced it was not a threat. Indeed, the prevailing wisdom amongst them at that time was that amphibious landings on the southern board were impossible as 'no black African nation has ever done that type of landing'.[64] Even the Biafran government in Enugu, which should have known better with the lives of millions in its care, insisted 'that the [Federal] Navy was scrap'.[65] And Ojukwu's advisers insisted 'that there was no way Nigeria could land at Bonny'.[66]

As it turned out, the 'much ridiculed Nigerian navy' was far more competent at maritime warfare manoeuvres and amphibious landings more specifically than had been envisaged by Biafran forces.[67] Moreover, the Federal Navy's competence in effecting

[61]TNA DEFE 4/175 Ministry of Defence (UK), 1964. Record of Meeting Between the Chief of Defence Staff and the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 14 October 1964 and CDS Subsequent Call on Minister of State for the Navy, Appendix 4 to Annex to COS 3089/19/10/64, 14 October. Secret, London: MOD., pp. 2-3

[62]TNA DEF 86/14/01Colonial Office, A. Campbell (Colonial Office) to Governor-General Nigeria, Draft Telegram (Enclosure), 23 January 1959; TNA CO 968/662; also, TNA DO 35/10461, Dominions Office, Enclosure: Note on Gift of Ships to Nigeria, CRO, 1 June 1959; TNA ADM 1/27472, Admiralty. 1959. J.A. Sankey (Colonial Office) to Cullen Esq. (Military Branch II, Admiralty),. London: Admiralty; *The Guardian*, 'Building Up Royal Nigerian Navy'; 3 November 1959.

[63]TNA ADM 1/27472, Treasury. Copy of a Treasury Minute dated 12 January 1959, relative to the Gifts of the Algerine Class Ocean Escort, H.M.S. Hare and the Seaward Defence Motor Launch, S.D.M.L. 3515, with certain Training Equipment, to the Federal Government of Nigeria, Cmnd. 636. London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

[64]Hafiz Brahim Momoh, *The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: History and Reminiscences*, (Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 2000), p. 806.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Ibid., p. 804.

[67]De St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War*, p. 152.

the blockade was also made apparent by the capture of two ships seeking to smuggle goods into Biafra in early June 1967.[68] And on 5 July 1967, a few weeks later, another vessel, the Panamanian cargo ship, *Rigel*, was escorted into Lagos Harbour after being shelled by a Nigerian Navy vessel off the coast of Biafra.[69] The news of those seizures and broad international recognition of the naval blockade meant that shipping into Eastern Nigeria steered clear with several ships bound for the region rerouted to federal ports.[70]

Part of the unusual dismissal of the Federal naval threat might have been a result of Biafra's own naval inadequacies. Early in the war, Biafra lacked a naval presence that could in most instances dissuade the Federal Nigerian Navy's plans and operations Such was this naval deficit that the mercenaries employed by Biafra that were tasked with assisting the Biafran Navy came to the sobering conclusion that 'there was no navy'; they were also 'wasting [their] time' with the daily miracles of maintenance' needed to keep that navy's gunboats operational.[71] Along these lines, Pascal Odu, a Biafran navy commander, would later criticise the Nigerian Navy's hesitance in pressing its advantage after the successful amphibious landing at Bonny in July 1967. 'If they [the Nigerian Navy] had steamed up Bonny River that day', Odu would write, 'they could have occupied Port Harcourt without firing a single shot'.[72]

Despite such initial pessimism among Biafran naval commanders, Port Harcourt proved a far sterner coastal target than many had assumed. Arguably the most strategic location in the Biafran heartland, apart from Biafra's capitals, its commercial status, significant oil production and export capacity, and well developed port made it difficult for the Nigerian Navy to recapture.[73] This was partly due to Biafra's attempts to reorganise along naval lines by the time war arrived at Port Harcourt. This reorganisation, the politics of Nigerian Army deployments that saw the Federal campaign stall for months on end, and the fact that the narrow waterways leading to Port Harcourt were heavily mined all led to a lengthy delay before Federal forces eventually attacked and took Port Harcourt in May 1968. [74]

[68]*New Nigerian*, 8 July, 1967; *Daily Times*, 13 July 1967.
[69]British Pathé, 'Nigeria: Cargo Ship Fired Upon And Arrested As She Leaves Biafra. (1967),' 5 July 1967. https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/127887/. Accessed 3 January 2025
[70]*Morning Post*, 3 June 1967; *Morning Post*, 6 June 1967.
[71]Steiner, The Last Adventurer, p. 54.
[72]Odu, The Future That Vanished, p. 117.
[73]Stremlau, The International Politics, p. 165.
[74]TNA FCO 65/328, Ministry of Defence (UK). 1968. Secret: Report by Colonel P.H. Moir

Having learned a lesson from the botched Bonny defence, Biafran commanders placed more importance on the defence of Port Harcourt as a possible landing site for the Federal advance from the south. This was so much the case that one senior Nigerian Navy officer, Commander James Rawe, warned that, unlike Bonny, '[from a] naval point of view, to embark on an attack on Port Harcourt, direct[ly], would invite disaster.'[75]

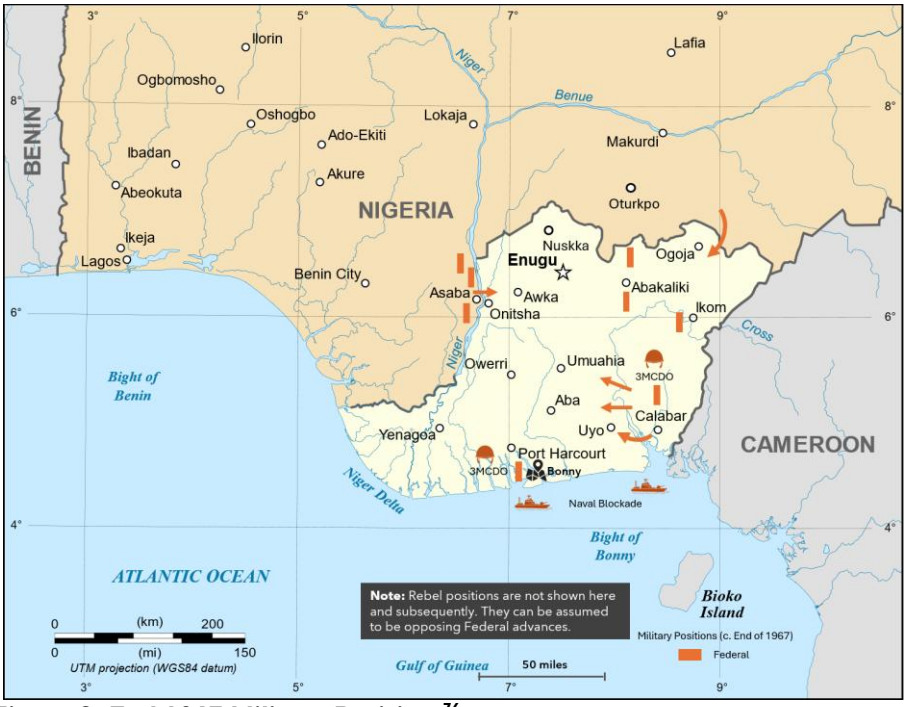

Figure 2: End 1967 Military Position.[76]

The delay to securing Port Harcourt notwithstanding, Bonny's capture and the establishment of a second front from the south had by the end of 1967 put the Federal advance in good stead. The significance of the Navy's role in these proceedings was such that, when the military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, received news that Bonny had been recaptured, he sent a personal commendation to Captain Nelson Soroh, who oversaw the operation. In his note to Soroh, Gowon lauded the success

[75]Makinde, 'The Bonny Landing'.

[76]Source: Author's Custom Map based on Eric Gaba's reference material; Niven, *The War*, p. 122. The Federal movement from the south is highlighted.

of 'combined operations at Bonny, which was your responsibility to see' and added that he had been debriefed on 'how nobly well the Navy did in the conveying, landing, and support fire role which the Navy gave to the Army at the operations in Bonny'.[77] Figure 2 illustrates the military situation at the end of that year, with Federal movements from the south highlighted.

Biafra's Brown-Water Navy

By the end of 1967 and on the strength of Federal military advances, Lagos, and indeed the Nigerian public at large, seemed confident that the war would 'soon be over'.[78] Facing this bleak prospect, Biafra knew that, to stay in the war in 1968, it had to slow the Federal progress recorded the previous year – especially after the Bonny landings and the establishment of a second land front, in the south. However, so far as Federal ingress via the waterways and creeks was concerned, coastal defences alone were unlikely to suffice. Biafra needed a navy, or at least a semblance of one. Despite major territorial losses, and with key coastal towns still in Biafran hands, there was a chance that Biafran naval action could stem Federal advances in 1968.

Months before Port Harcourt's recapture in May 1968 had left Biafra landlocked, it still retained naval ambitions and sought to press any perceived advantage in that domain.[79] Early in the war, the German mercenary Rolf Steiner, in one of his first contributions to Biafra tried to persuade Ojukwu to establish a brown-water Biafran navy, although this initiative was soon aborted.[80] In its broadest sense, a brown-water navy is built to deploy and conduct military options in the littoral zone and in inland waters such as creeks, small waterways, and estuaries. Typically a brown-water navy consists of small patrol boats, and small gun boats, deployable in riverine areas, with supporting vessels of a larger size to patrol and operate in more open waterways such as estuaries.[81] Best suited to defence a brown-water navy lacks the capabilities to conduct independent operations on more open blue water seas.[82]

Viewed this way, brown-water navies contrast the top tier of naval forces, the blue-water navies that can independently conduct foreign operations and project power far

[77]Soroh, A Sailor's Dream, p. 235.
[78]TNA FCO 65/328, Ministry of Defence (UK), Secret: Report by Colonel P.H. Moir, p. 1.
[79]Bernard Odogwu, *No Place to Hide*, p. 128.
[80]Venter, *Biafra Genocide*, pp. 64-65
[81]Victor J. Croziat, Brown Water Navy: River and Coastal War in Indo-China and Vietnam, 1948-72, (London: Blandford, 1984).
[82]American Battlefield Trust, 'Building a Brown Water Navy', n.d. 17 October 2024. https://tinyurl.com/486zzr7u. Accessed 8 March 2026.

beyond a state's own territorial waters.[83] Green-water navies, a naval tier where Nigeria's superior Navy was situated during the war, dominate brackish estuaries and littoral coasts and sit therefore between blue and brown water navies.

Realistically, a low-tier brown-water navy status was the most that the Biafran Navy could ever hope to achieve. Early in the war, Biafra thought it had a suitable flagship after the 30 May 1967 confiscation of the Nigerian Navy Ship *Ibadan*, which had been docked in Calabar Port, then in Biafran controlled territory. NNS *Ibadan* was an ex-Royal Navy Ford class seaward defence boat, which began life as HMS *Montford* (P3124). It was launched in 1957 and scarcely used before joining Britain's reserve fleet. It arrived in Lagos in October 1966 before transfer to Calabar and was crewed by Nigerian officers trained at Dartmouth. At Calabar, the *Ibadan* was seized by its crew of ethnic Igbo officers who had defected to Biafra, who were led by Federal Navy Lieutenant Ebitu Ukiwe.[84] The *Ibadan* was promptly renamed *Vigilance*.

Under the orders of the recently-promoted Commander Winifred Anuku, the Head of the Biafran Navy, Lieutenant Commander Pascal Odu, a senior Biafran naval officer also recently promoted by Ojukwu, relocated the *Vigilance* from Calabar to Kidney Island, Port Harcourt to establish the Biafran naval headquarters there. However, the *Vigilance* was not simply left moored at Port Harcourt but instead patrolled from Kidney Island to Bonny Island 'as often as possible'.[85]

As part of its scheduled patrol duty, BNS *Vigilance*, with Odu in command, set off from Port Harcourt in the early hours of 26 July 1967 and headed for Bonny. At Bonny, where the Federal amphibious landings were in progress, the *Vigilance* was destroyed by Federal naval gunfire.[86] The hulk was later towed away by Federal ships,[87] With no shipyards in Biafra that could build new capable vessels, even the establishment of a brown-water navy now seemed ambitious for the Biafrans.

Instead Biafra converted local riverboats and tugs to produce makeshift 'gunboats'. By October 1967 Biafra had been encircled, following the seven amphibious landings completed on the southern seaboard. A glance at Biafra's geopolitical map (see Figure 1) indicates that Biafra was surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on its southern seaboard

[83]Ibid.
[84]After the war, Ukiwe retained his rank, was readmitted into the Nigerian Navy, and later became the seventh Chief of Defence Staff (August 1985 – October 1986).
[85]Odu, The Future that Vanished, p. 114.
[86]Soroh, *A Sailor's Dream,* pp. 228-231.
[87]British Pathé, 'Nigeria: Recaptured Federal Navy Minesweeper Back in Lagos From Biafra', 11 September 1967. https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/144677/. Accessed 3 January 2025.

and flanked between Enugu and Owerri by the great Niger River to the west. From Yenagoa further south, a series of creeks and Niger River tributaries flow all the way to the Atlantic Coast. With Federal forces gradually capturing Biafra's strategic coastal cities, it seemed only a matter of time before Biafra would be cut off from the sea and the rivers. By 1968 the German mercenary Rolf Steiner believed that Biafra, flanked on two sides by water bodies, urgently required a naval presence in the coastal areas and littoral zones.[88]

Vessel-for-vessel, Biafra could not hope to compete with the Federal Navy. Suppose, however, that Biafra could seize some of the Nigerian Navy's vessels – thus weakening its naval functions while bolstering its own. In one incident aimed at addressing such thinking, the rebels sought to bolster their prospects of building a naval force by trying to confiscate one of the Federal Navy's SDMLs which was moored at Port Harcourt harbour. However, the operation failed when pro-Nigerian supporters intervened and instead sank the boat *in situ*.[89]

Undeterred, Biafra employed floating docks and tugs with troops operating machine guns on them, to patrol the rivers and creeks. In a few instances, raids undertaken by these vessels were supported by fire provided by a French-manned Biafran helicopter.[90] Biafra attempted to retake Bonny from 25 September 1967 in an action codenamed Operation Sea Jack. This operation failed, largely because of the Federal SDML the NNS *Ogoja*, which was dubbed *Hot Iron*. Despite Biafran forces mustering sufficient ground forces to threaten the island and killing Federal several troops with the help of air support the attempt was repelled.

In other instances, Biafra's improvised approach to land warfare extended to seaborne operations in ways that temporarily gave Biafra some respite. For example, when NNS *Ogoja* attempted to land troops at the Refinery Jetty in Biafran held Port Harcourt, the makeshift Biafran vessel *Ikwerre* presented a stern deterrent. The *Ikwerre* was an ocean-going tug which originally had belonged to the Nigerian Ports Authority before being confiscated by Biafran naval personnel. It mounted a 105-mm howitzer supplied by the Biafran army.[91]

Hastily inducted into the Biafran Navy, the *Ikwerre* and its crew soon saw action. On 9 August 1967, the NNS *Ogoja* supported by one of the Nigerian Navy's SDMLs showed up at the Refinery Jetty as Federal forces began some early probing of Port

[88]Al Venter, Biafra's War 1967-1970: A Tribal Conflict in Nigeria That Left a Million Dead, (Solihull: Helion & Company Limited, 2015), p. 95.
[89]Ibid.
[90]Makinde, Adeyinka, 'The Nigerian Civil War', p. 19.
[91]Odu, The Future that Vanished, p. 111.

Harcourt's defences. They were met by small arms fire from the *Ikwerre*. Up to 50 Federal troops were reported killed, with many injured, by the *Ikwerre*'s howitzer. The Nigerian Navy vessels were forced to retreat to BUOY 13 while ashore the Federal troops scrambled for cover. The corpses of Federal troops, cut down by the *Ikwerre*, were reported as floating in the Main Channel, and around the Refinery Jetty, for days afterwards.[92] After this action Nigerian Federal Forces did not attempt another assault on Port Harcourt for several months.

Biafran Mercenaries: Improvisation & Commando-Style Riverine Raids

In parallel with efforts like converting the *Ikwerre* into a riverine combat vessel the German mercenary Steiner made separate plans with Pier Giorgio Norbiato, a former marine commando who had served with the Italian navy and had fought as a mercenary in the Congo. Described by Steiner as 'a swarthy tough little man of about thirty', Norbiato played a key role in Biafra's limited guerrilla-style naval raids and was well-positioned to plan and implement such commando-style missions.[93] Having served six years in the Italian *Marina Militare*, Norbiato specialised in riverine operations, before going to work as a diver for an Italian company in the business of recovering sunken ships. During the Congo Crisis of 1960-1964 Norbiato had distinguished himself in amphibious operations conducted on rivers an ideal terrain for the former *Marina Militare* specialist. The last of these Congo operations was called *Alfa* and had been coordinated by the French mercenary Bob Denard in an action against rebel forces on the river island of Boula Beba. The operation failed, but Norbiato reportedly helped save fellow mercenaries' lives after they ran into an ambush.[94]

Like Steiner, whom Ojukwu granted an honorary officer commission, Norbiato was commissioned as a major in the Biafran army.[95] Such commissions were standard in Biafra's short-lived existence, as all mercenaries fighting for the rebels 'were treated as officers'.[96] The rationale for this preferential treatment is unclear – it did not sit well with the Biafran's own indigenous commissioned officers, who often left the mercenaries to their own devices. This was the case here, when the mercenaries took matters into their own hands and, instead of working with Biafran naval ratings trained as seamen, instead recruited and employed indigenous 'commandos' trained and loyal

[92]Ibid.
[93]Ibid., p. 83.
[94]Robert Müller and Ippolito Edmondo Ferrario, *A Parà in Congo and Yemen: 1965-1969* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2018).
[95]Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution*, p. 215; Steiner was originally a lieutenant but by the time he was kicked out the Biafran army in December 1968, he had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel; Federick Forsyth, *The Biafra Story: The Making of An African Legend*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), p. 132.
[96]De St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War*, p. 326.

to them. For all the criticisms of Steiner's behaviour in Biafra, he certainly knew his way around field guns and explosives.[97] Steiner also had a demonstrable understanding of soldiering and military tactics, especially the ambush, and had soon motivated the large number of Biafran troops under his command.[98]

Together, Steiner, Norbiato and their commandos began to stage some daring riverine raids – including an ambush of Federal 3 Division's resupply ships which routinely and secretly sailed from Lagos to Opobo in a convoy consisting of 'small freighters plus an escort of patrol boats which parted company with them at the river'.[99] Both men, along with a small group of mercenaries, confiscated three fast Chris-Craft Industries, luxury civilian powerboats from the Port Harcourt sailing club. Norbiato then helped convert the motorboats into a naval squadron with prow-mounted machine guns, crewed by a small complement of four mercenaries and a pilot.[100] While these improvised gunboats had no armour they were relatively light, manoeuvrable, and at short range possessed deadly fire. They were used to 'ambush small freighters moving upriver' once modifications were made to them.[101]

In its first riverine sortie around Port Harcourt on 7 April 1968 Norbiato's 'squadron attacked a vessel loaded with Land Rovers, rations and *matériel* for Federal troops that was being escorted by Nigerian Navy armed patrol boats. Camouflaged by the river's thick vegetation where they had waited to spring their ambush for three days since 4 April, the three Chris-Craft boats quietly started their engines and went into action against the much larger, but relatively unprotected Nigerian resupply vessels. Accompanied by his men, also mercenaries, Norbiato personally boarded one of the two Federal vessels. Two of the mercenaries were killed by a Federal soldier brandishing a British Sten gun before Norbiato returned fire with his Thompson gun, killing the Nigerian. The Nigerian pilot was also killed by Biafran commando gunfire, after which Norbiato personally took over the piloting role. The second Federal vessel was taken without incident, with the Federal sailors caught completely unawares and only realising they had been ambushed when the boat's pilot's hands went up. At that point the Federal sailors jumped overboard. The Biafrans, with both Federal vessels and their cargo now in their custody, had just recorded arguably their most significant naval victory of the war.[102]

[97]Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, pp. 60-61.
[98]Madiebo, The Nigerian Revolution, p. 215
[99]Steiner, The Last Adventurer, p. 87.
[100]Ibid.; Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, p. 87.
[101]Venter, *Biafra's War*, p. 95; Hilary M. Njoku, *A Tragedy without Heroes: Nigeria-Biafra War*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1987), p. 133.
[102]Rolf Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, pp. 87-88.

In that instance, the successful raid meant that Norbiato and Steiner, from one of the Federal vessels alone had seized the five Land Rovers along with 'thousands of uniforms and millions of 7.62mm cartridges'.[103] And in even better news for the Biafran navy, the second of the confiscated Federal vessels yielded 'ten tons of Soviet mortar shells and a good supply of grenades as well as several 20mm *Oerlikon* cannons that had been mounted specifically to thwart such actions'.[104]

By such accounts, and despite lacking a major warship, the Biafran Navy saw some success in its guerrilla-style night raids along the riverine and creek networks in the Port Harcourt area. Moreover, as the aforementioned raids by Steiner and Norbiato suggest, the Biafran navy's exploits also led to a brief injection of confiscated ammunition, armaments and small arms – all of which Biafra desperately needed. However, with just three makeshift gunboats and over two hundred coastal miles to patrol this Biafran naval force could not break the Nigerian Navy's blockade or stop the Navy's warships from dominating the southern seaboard.

The southern coastline was not the only impediment to Biafra's naval ambitions. Further pretensions of a naval counter-threat on Biafra's part were effectively aborted after Norbiato was killed in action in April 1968 by troops of Lieutenant Colonel Philemon Shande's 17 Brigade during the Federal advance on Umuahia, a part of the Federal forces' Port Harcourt campaign. Müller and Ferrario's biography of Norbiato suggests he was killed in a foxhole, while providing covering fire for his retreating men, supposedly firing to the last bullet of his FN MAG machine gun before being killed by advancing Federal forces.[105] Steiner would later write of Norbiato's demise that the latter was 'too impetuous … a good captain, but he never gave any thought to the overall picture'.[106]

It may seem as though Steiner and Norbiato were not entirely in sync with other Biafran military operations but this was largely the case across the mercenary experience. Their contributions were not effectively harnessed with any tactical gains made by the mercenary units not translating into strategic wins for the Biafrans. Unlike Nigeria, it should be recalled, Biafra could not afford to hire entire and large units of mercenaries, and so these actors tended to arrive individually, in pairs, or in small batches. Moreover, the rebels' mercenary contingent was essentially a hodgepodge of soldiers of fortune from different nationalities such as ex South African special forces, independent mercenaries, and Portuguese, French, German, Dutch, Polish, Italian, and

[103]Ibid.; Müller and Ferrario, A Parà in Congo; Gianluca, Un eroe italiano dimenticato
[104]Venter, *Biafra's War*, p. 95; Rolf Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, pp. 87-88.
[105]Obasanjo, *My Command*, 51; See also, Müller and Ferrario, *A Parà in Congo*
[106]Rolf Steiner, *The Last Adventurer*, p. 91.

even British ones fighting for Biafra and providing technical expertise and battlefield advice.[107]

Assessments of this mercenary contingent and its contribution to the rebel effort are, at best, mixed. As the conflict protracted, the image of the competent 'white mercenaries' and the mystique of 'the white man's superiority in the art of soldiering' relative to Africans, became tarnished. The racist tropes did not help. 'Those monkeys are shit', said one of the white mercenaries, referring to the Federal forces advancing on Biafran territory. Suggesting that just 'a hundred and ten whites' could 'wipe out' 4,000 black African troops; the same individual, a member of Steiner's party, bragged about the mercenaries' ability to turn back the Federal advance. 'One look at us', he said of the advancing Nigerian troops, 'and they are gone'.[108] There is no indication that Steiner himself held such views, but his general attitude was nevertheless disliked by the Biafran officers.[109]

After the war's end, Ojukwu's deputy, Phillip Effiong, was asked whether white mercenary soldiers helped prolong the war. Effiong's answer was uncharacteristically blunt, 'they did not help, he said, indeed, it would have made no difference if not a single one of them had come to work for the secessionist forces. Rolf Steiner stayed the longest. He was more of a bad influence than anything else. We were happy to get rid of him'.[110]

The Demise of Biafra's Navy

With Norbiato dead by April and Steiner expelled from the ranks in November 1968, the Biafrans lost two of the leading foreign mercenaries who seemed to have a clear sense of how a guerrilla-style navy should function. Still, despite the abandonment of any plans to scale up naval guerrilla actions, Biafra's fighters used the Niger Delta, including the Great River Niger and its many tributaries, to conduct early-warning patrols using improvised gunboats.[111] Aside from naval raids by Norbiato and Steiner, the Biafran Navy also conducted limited 'joint operations' with the Biafran army, although the failure of the latter 'to follow through after bombardment' was a cause of much frustration for Biafran naval commanders who expected these actions to translate to land gains.[112]

[107]Venter, *Biafra Genocide*, p. 133.
[108]Steiner, The Last Adventurer, p. 54.
[109]Odogwu, *No Place to Hide*, p. 117.
[110]Venter, *Biafra Genocide*, p. 133.
[111]Ibid., pp. 64-65.
[112]Odu, The Future that Vanished, p. 155.

Following these exploits and several successful landings by Biafran troops at the Port Harcourt wharf by the *Ikwerre* and the *Bodo West*, a second armed vessel operated by the Biafrans, Federal troops took steps to disable both. In May 1968, following the Federal recapture of Port Harcourt, Biafra's final coastal stronghold, elements of the Nigerian Army's 3 Division were given a new task. Known as the 3 Marine Commando Division, or 3MCDO, for its 'peculiarly riverine and creek operations', the formation was charged with permanently eliminating the Biafran naval threat.[113]

Lieutenant Colonel Ipoola Alani Akinrinade, one of the 3MCDO brigade commanders led the hunt for what remained of the Biafran navy. However, Akinrinade's troops lacked the weapons to strike the elusive Biafran vessels, which were often hidden outside small arms fire range and protected by low visibility during heavy rains. To solve this problem, Akinranade requisitioned a local fishing trawler and, with the assistance of troops from 3MCDO's reconnaissance unit, mounted a *Panhard* armoured vehicle on the trawler. Boarding the vessel in company with commando troops armed with self-propelled grenade launchers and machine guns, 3MCDO aimed to destroy the Biafran vessels in their hiding places.

In the early hours of 29 May 1968, Lieutenant Colonel Akinrinade's naval strike force made contact with the Biafran vessels at Buguma in the waterways around Port Harcourt. 'Sink the *Bismarck*!' screamed Akinrinade's excited men, who gave the Biafran vessel the same name as the Germany Navy's Second World War battleship.[114] 'It was like the British Navy attacking the German ship', quipped one of the Nigerian Army officers.[115]

In a naval skirmish that lasted until morning, the *Panhard* mounted on the trawler eventually scored a direct hit on one of the Biafran vessels. Amidst the waves, rain and low visibility, the hit seemed fortuitous but was welcomed by cheering Federal troops. The Nigerian Air Force provided supporting fire against the second ship, which also took several hits from Akinrinade's trawler and was also disabled.[116] These events were amongst the final acts of the functional Biafran navy. That one of the vessels defending a location as strategic as Port Harcourt was disabled by a mounted *Panhard* on a fishing trawler indicated the sorry state of Biafran naval options at that point in the conflict, even as Biafran troops continued to hold out in the now land-locked Igbo heartland for another 18 months.

---

[113]Obasanjo, *My Command*, p. 46.
[114]Stefan Draminski, *The Battleship Bismarck: The Anatomy of a Ship*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2018)
[115]Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy*, p. 283.
[116]Ibid., pp. 284-285.

From August 1968, Biafran naval officers had much time on their hands and no operational vessels or even non-contested waters to deploy to as seamen. Surprisingly, in November 1968, Ojukwu still allocated funds for the purchase of naval craft from 'various mothball shipyards in Germany and France'.[117] At Bremerhaven, a coastal town in northern Germany, Biafran agents located a craft 'about the size of a torpedo boat that could have been adapted suitably for river patrol'. However, this purchase never materialised. Naval stores, including uniforms and peaked hats, were purchased instead; almost as though the Biafran navy could be resurrected to its former state.[118]

By such indications, the Biafran government now restricted to Owerri, seemingly refused to accept the reality that it had lost control its waterways and was now fighting for the shrinking, land-locked remainder of its territory. During the day, naval officers mostly engaged themselves with 'secretarial work' for Ojukwu's Joint Planning Committee (JPC), which was formed in early 1969 and was yet another attempt to suggest the rebels had a credible response to what was now the inevitability of a Federal victory. Evenings were spent socialising and enjoying what little comforts remained, any patrols were limited to the parts of the Imo River close to Owerri, and the Niger River areas close to Ndoni – to the west of Owerri and south of Onitsha.[119] There were few complaints from the navy's officers and ratings, who, like most Biafrans at this time, were waiting for the end to come.

In June 1969, the remnants of the Biafran Navy were eliminated by the Nigerian Air Force which sunk six speedboats fitted with light machine guns for waterway patrols. The boats were still *in situ* at the Ndoni, Rivers State, boatyard, where several improvised barges and dug-out canoes were also destroyed. With Ndoni as the Biafran Navy's final base at a time when just one major city, Owerri, remained in Biafran hands, the navy would never rebuild or trouble Federal forces again.[120]

Conclusion

With Bonny captured on 27 July, Enugu on 4 October, Calabar on 18 October Federal troops entered Port Harcourt on 19 May 1968. Weeks earlier in March 1968 Federal troops had also taken Onitsha. The capture of Port Harcourt, after the previous

[117]Odu, The Future that Vanished, pp. 181.
[118]Ibid., p. 182.
[119]Ibid., p. 185.
[120]*Daily Times*, 'Arms Flow From UK to Continue', 27 June 1969.

losses, shrunk Biafra's territory to a fraction of its original size at the start of the conflict.[121] It 'left the outside world in no doubt of Federal supremacy in the war'.[122]

By January 1970 Biafran resistance had collapsed on all fronts. Facing superior Federal forces, who were more numerous and gradually hardened by months of riverine operations, Biafra's divisions had been wilting in the months before this collapse.

In the end, despite its patchy organisation and modest capabilities, such that even brown-navy status seemed ambitious by the end, the Biafran navy, at points in the war, could stake a claim to limited deterrence – at least in littoral and brackish contexts. However, compared to Federal naval superiority, which translated to strategic gains on the southern front, the Biafran Navy ultimately had little to show for its effort.

The naval deficit on the rebel part was even more telling given Ojukwu's claims that 'his forces would line the bottom of the creeks of the Niger Delta with the ships of the Nigerian Navy if they ventured close to the coast'.[123] Such claims were never matched by reality. Not only did the Nigerian Navy 'venture close' to the southern seaboard, it also implemented a broadly successful blockade and, beyond that, played an instrumental role in amphibious landings, which led to the opening of a second land front which hastened Biafra's eventual capitulation.

The failings of the Biafran navy highlight not just the limitations of one secessionist movement under extreme pressure, but also the broader challenges faced by post-colonial African states in establishing effective naval power. For most of these new states, the most straightforward pathway to naval viability lay in assistance from the colonial principal. Yet this reliance came at a political cost: dependence on former imperial powers risked undermining the very independence that these states sought to consolidate. Ghana's own scepticism of Nigeria's reliance on the British Ministry of Defence underscores how deeply contested this dependency was in the first decade of independence. The Biafran case thus illustrates both the practical difficulties of naval development and the ideological dilemmas that surrounded it.

The alternative, however, proved elusive. Biafra's attempt to improvise a naval capacity from scratch demonstrates the challenge of developing even a modest brown-water fleet without pre-existing infrastructure, resources, or training pipelines. Whereas mercenaries offered short-term technical expertise and operational skill, their

[121]Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Memorandum, Washington, January 29 1969, p. 3. https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/54571.pdf. Accessed 19 December 2024,
[122]Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy*, p. 51.
[123]Makinde, 'The Nigerian Civil War', p. 15.

contributions were necessarily limited in scope and sustainability. They could enhance tactics but not transform strategic capacity. In this sense, the Biafran navy remained peripheral to the overall trajectory of the war, yet its story reveals much about the limits of external stopgaps in building enduring military institutions.

At the same time, the naval dimension of the conflict had important, if indirect, consequences. Even if never decisive, Biafra's maritime efforts complicated Federal planning, forced Nigeria to allocate resources to coastal surveillance and interdiction, and drew in international attention through blockade-running and the contest over supply routes. In the smaller creeks where the Federal Navy had no initial presence, the Nigerian Army had to improvise using low-intensity naval tactics. Viewed in this light, naval warfare in this conflict mattered less as a conventional battlefield and more as a site of pressure on logistics, diplomacy, and perception. In this sense, it illustrates how sea power can matter asymmetrically in conflicts dominated by land campaigns.

More broadly, the Biafran experience raises questions about the trajectory of post-colonial African navies. To what extent could these institutions develop independently of external patrons? How central were mercenaries, contractors, and other external actors in providing not just capacity but credibility? And what does the Nigerian case suggest about the enduring marginality of naval warfare in African conflicts, where armies have generally been the decisive arm? Addressing these questions elevates the significance of this study: the failures of the Biafran navy should not be read merely as local setbacks, but as windows into the wider dilemmas of post-colonial state-building, military development, and the contested role of maritime power on the African continent.

The Special Air Service in the Falklands War: A Critical Reassessment

ADRIAN J PEARCE*
University College London, UK
Email: adrian.pearce@ucl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT
This article reassesses the contribution of the Special Air Service (SAS) in the 1982 Falklands War. Drawing mainly on primary sources, Argentine as well as British, it demonstrates that while the SAS performed valuable roles, particularly in intelligence gathering, their contribution elsewhere and especially in several direct actions was less impressive. It argues that this resulted from the difficulties the SAS experienced in working alongside conventional forces whose operations they little understood and whose ethos they did not share. The article thus serves as a corrective to celebratory accounts promoted since the war, not least by the SAS itself.

Introduction

Joint operations between special and conventional forces often produce tensions and friction, even when they yield positive results.[1] Meanwhile, recent trends toward the self-promotion and commodification of special forces have been argued to have impacted the internal ethos and effectiveness of those forces.[2] The Special Air Service (SAS) played a much-noted role in Britain's victory in its short 1982 war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands. The SAS contribution came primarily through intelligence gathering, but also through direct action against Argentine forces. Despite these achievements, however, aspects of SAS operations in the war caused irritation among other British forces, for reasons that went beyond simple inter-service rivalry. Some SAS actions were poorly planned, with significant consequences; more than once,

*Adrian Pearce is Associate Professor of Spanish and Latin American History at University College London, UK.
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1961
[1]For a recent review of the U.S. experience, which highlights many of the issues discussed in the present article, see Anna M. Gielas, 'Quarrelsome Siblings – The Relationship Between Special Operations and Conventional Forces', *Journal of Strategic Security* 17:1 (2024), pp. 58-75.
[2]Forrest Crowell, 'Navy Seals Gone Wild: Publicity, Fame, and the Loss of the Quiet Professional, Masters Dissertation, Monterey, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015.

disaster was only narrowly averted. These and related features have fuelled a significant critical literature on the SAS since the conflict, while a slew of recently published diaries and memoirs have shed new light on this topic. Many of these are by former members of the SAS, including a 2018 memoir by one of the squadron commanders.[3] The time is ripe, then, for a reassessment of the role of the SAS in the Falklands War. To this end, the present article draws heavily on British primary sources, and of equal importance, Argentine ones – the latter under-used and often revealing a different picture to British views. The resulting reassessment highlights three areas in particular: SAS independent communications with each other and their home base; over-confidence within the SAS, both among its own members and other actors; and the dangerous ambition to seize the opportunity of the conflict to enhance their reputation in high-profile operations, beyond established command structures and central planning. The key problem overall was that the SAS were not well prepared, either by training, experience, or regimental ethos, to work closely alongside conventional forces, particularly in direct action.

Dedicated British special forces operations in the Falklands War were undertaken by the SAS and by the Royal Marines Special Boat Service (SBS). The British Army has one regular SAS regiment, 22 SAS Regiment, totalling some 260 men – just a fraction of the thousands of conventional forces that embarked with the Task Force. This SAS Regiment has four operational squadrons: A, B, D, and G, of which the last three fought in the Falklands. Each SAS squadron consists of some 65 men commanded by a major, and then divided into four troops, each under a captain. In overall command of the SAS in theatre was a Colonel, Michael Rose, who established his headquarters on HMS *Fearless*; so in rank too, SAS officers in principle had only a relatively minor role in the Task Force. Ashore, they were controlled by the Commanding Officer (CO) of 3 Commando Brigade, Brigadier Julian Thompson, while the SBS was under Commodore Michael Clapp, head of amphibious operations.[4] In the early phases of the war, the SBS were tasked with beach reconnaissance of likely landing areas, while the SAS were to monitor Argentine forces concentrated around the main centres of population. The SAS were to report on enemy command structure, weaponry, morale, helicopter assets, minefields, and communication centres.[5]

[3]Cedric Delves, *Across an Angry Sea: The SAS in the Falklands War,* (London: Hurst & Co, 2018).

[4]Julian Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade in the Falklands: No Picnic*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2014), p. 44; Michael Clapp & Ewen Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault Falklands: The Battle of San Carlos Water*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), pp. 75-76, p. 102.

[5]Clapp & Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault*, p. 101.

The retaking of South Georgia on 25-26 April aside, the first insertion of special forces in the Falklands proper took place on 1 May, the day the main campaign to recover the islands began. That day witnessed the first Vulcan raid and Sea Harrier attacks on Stanley and Goose Green airfields, naval bombardments, and the first downing of Argentine aircraft. Despite all this activity, Admiral Woodward, the Carrier Battle Group commander, called the insertion of special forces Britain's 'really serious purpose of the day'.[6] While, as already noted, three SAS squadrons took part in the war, only two, D and G, were principally engaged - the role of B squadron is discussed later. The SAS patrols inserted on 1 May were all from G squadron, marking a clear division of responsibility with respect to D squadron. The primary reconnaissance role – based on deep-cover lengthy surveillance of enemy positions – fell to G and not to D squadron, which instead took on a direct-action role. This laid the foundation for the two squadrons' very different experiences during the war.

In the Cold War context, the principal role of the SAS was to gather strategic intelligence behind Warsaw Pact lines, and they were well prepared for it. The men inserted in the early hours of 1 May patrolled continuously and until almost the end of the month. They were ordered to stay away from the Falkland islanders, given the risks of detection and of placing the islanders in jeopardy.[7] From observation posts among crags in the hills, they spent weeks watching roads, troop deployments, and aircraft movements, and spotting for air strikes and naval gunfire. From the end of May until the eve of the final battles for Stanley, the SAS and SBS also patrolled the north-east of East Falkland to secure the left flank of 3 Commando Brigade. Throughout, no G squadron patrol was ever discovered by the Argentines; by contrast, a later D squadron patrol was discovered on West Falkland, resulting in the death of Captain John Hamilton. SAS intelligence gathering activities thus provide the main support for their CO Michael Rose's later contention that 'without the contribution of the SAS, the war could not have been won … in so short a timeframe and with so relatively few casualties'.[8]

With G Squadron accorded the primary intelligence role, D squadron was left with the more glamorous but challenging task of direct action against enemy forces, under

---

[6]Sandy Woodward with Patrick Robinson, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (London: Harper Press, 2012), p. 184; see also Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 28.

[7]'They were told: Stay up on the hills', Brian Hanrahan & Robert Fox, *I Counted Them All Out And I Counted Them All Back: The Battle for The Falklands*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982), p. 105.

[8]Michael Rose, 'Advance Force Operations: the SAS', in Linda Washington (ed.), *Ten Years On: The British Army in the Falklands War*, (London: National Army Museum, 1992), pp. 75-76, see also p. 55.

its commanding officer Major Cedric Delves. This too was a key role of the SAS, and not only were they highly trained for it, albeit primarily in counter-terrorism rather than conventional warfare, they also enjoyed specific advantages, in privileged access to advanced weaponry and other technology. U.S. special forces supplied them directly with different ordnance, including Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, used to shoot down an Argentine Pucara on the day of the British landings at San Carlos on 21 May.[9] However, SAS direct action also faced important constraints. At the outset, they had no authorisation for these, which would come from the War Cabinet only later and for specific operations.[10] Moreover, the SAS fell under the command of Brigadier Thompson, and until the landings under Admiral Woodward. As we will see, these constraints chafed with Rose, Delves, and their superiors.

The SAS undertook or participated in direct action in the Falklands War on five main occasions: in the retaking of South Georgia – Operation Paraquet; the Pebble Island raid; actions against the Argentine mainland – Operations Plum Duff and Mikado; the seizure and defence of Mount Kent; and the raid on Cortley Ridge. Four of these actions primarily involved D squadron, while Operations Plum Duff and Mikado involved B squadron, the third squadron deployed. The SAS made up a significant element of the land force that retook South Georgia during Operation Paraquet, as will be discussed below. However, the most celebrated SAS action of the war was the raid on the Argentine Calderón airbase on Pebble Island to the north of West Falkland on 14-15 May, described at the time as 'the kind of thing we have not had the chance to do since World War II'.[11] The decision to target this airbase with special forces rather than air strikes or naval gunfire was possibly due to the proximity of the Pebble Island settlement to the airstrip, though see further discussion of this point below. The SAS attacked with small arms, grenades, rockets, and explosive charges, and destroyed or disabled all eleven Argentine aircraft at the base. At the time and since, the Pebble Island raid has been considered a brilliant action, of strategic significance.[12]

[9]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 218-222; Mark Aston and Stuart Tootal, *SAS Sea King Down: The Extraordinary Story of the SAS at War in the Falklands*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2022), pp. 167-9, pp. 268-71.
[10]Clapp & Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault*, p. 76.
[11]Max Hastings & Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, (1983; London: Pan Books, 2010), p. 235; B. H. Turner, 'The Pebble Island Raid', *Marine Corps Gazette* 104:2 (2020), pp. 61-64.
[12]Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 46; Clapp & Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault*, p. 111; Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), vol. 2, p. 435; Turner, The Pebble Island Raid, p. 64.

Less well known but arguably equally important was D squadron's move from San Carlos to Mount Kent, forty miles to the east of and under a dozen miles from Stanley, between 24 and 28 May 1982. Mount Kent dominated the approaches to Stanley and over-looked the outer Argentine defences on Mount Harriet and Two Sisters. Having taken up a position there, the SAS defended it on 29-30 May against repeated incursions by Argentine special forces.[13] This operation represented a major leap forward for British forces, and in the view of one scholar was 'the most significant intervention of Special Forces in the advance towards Port Stanley.[14] Operations Plum Duff and Mikado and the Cortley Ridge raid are discussed hereafter.

Their positive contribution notwithstanding, critical views have since emerged of SAS operations in the Falklands. The critique focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on direct actions, and thus on the activities of D and B squadrons. The current section highlights three aspects of SAS involvement in and approach to the conflict which have attracted negative attention. These aspects are discussed first here in general terms, and then in later sections as relevant to three specific operations or episodes. Thus, from this point, the article does not adopt a straightforward chronological structure. Rather, it moves between themes and operations across the chronology of the war as a whole, in such a way as to highlight the relation between both.

The first theme is that of the independent communications the SAS enjoyed both with each other and their headquarters in the UK. This derived from the fact that United States special forces had given the SAS several Tactical Satellite or TACSAT radios. These very advanced hand-held radios made possible communication across the globe, and represented the only means of contact between the Falklands and the UK that lay outside Royal Naval control and the established chain of command. An SAS squadron commander in the Falklands claimed that as a result, his headquarters often knew of key events hours before the Commander-in-Chief Fleet himself.[15] But the system also caused problems.[16] The SAS under Michael Rose were able to pass their views on the war directly to the military high command, when arguably they were neither senior nor experienced enough in conventional warfare to do so productively.[17] 'Outlandish

[13]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 237-258; Nick Van der Bijl & David Aldea, *5th Infantry Brigade in the Falklands,* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2014), pp. 61-66; Hugh Bicheno, *Razor's Edge: The Unofficial History of the Falklands War*, (London: Phoenix, 2007), pp. 191-197.

[14]Alastair Finlan, 'British Special Forces in the Falklands War of 1982', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 13:3 (2002), pp. 75-96, p. 90.

[15]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 15.

[16]Peter de la Billière, *Looking for Trouble: An Autobiography*, (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 344.

[17]The following passage draws on Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, pp. 38-39.

ideas for the conduct of the campaign' were fed directly from Rose's headquarters on HMS *Fearless* to military headquarters at Northwood. The potential impact of these signals was mitigated only due to the intervention of a Royal Marine officer attached to a Special Operations Group formed on 6 April to assess proposals for special forces operations by the various bodies concerned. In October 1982, Major General Jeremy Moore, the overall commander of land forces in the Falklands, wrote that the system for requests for special forces operations 'was short-circuited by the SAS using their own communications and taking orders from the Commanding Officer 22 SAS [Rose] based in HMS *Fearless*'.[18] We will see that SAS direct communications with their base during operations on both South Georgia and the Falklands also had significant tactical implications there.

A second feature was the great confidence, or indeed over-confidence, of the SAS in their own capabilities, coupled with a misunderstanding or over-estimation of those capabilities by some senior officers from other forces. This was something fostered actively within the SAS, which, in the view of Connelly and Wilcox, has 'engrained itself into society' through the 'secrecy and mythology' that surrounds it.[19] Critical scholarship on the SAS has noted that the aura that surrounds them, within government as well as in the popular view, has been the product of assiduous promotion. Drawing on the work of John Newsinger, Anthony King writes that 'the SAS has repeatedly overemphasized its own role in every campaign since the end of World War II'; SAS memoirs specifically 'can be hyperbolic, consistently exaggerating the performance of individuals and the SAS as a whole'.[20] This exaggeration even affects academic assessments, with usage of terms like 'phenomenally influential', 'enormous impact'.[21] During the Falklands campaign, again in the words of Major General Moore, this led to 'fatuous expectations' on the part of senior officers of the Navy or RAF of what the SAS could achieve, 'culled one suspects from avid reading of Boy's Own or Beano'.[22] It also probably fuelled accusations of arrogance or a prima donna attitude on the part of the SAS by those who fought alongside them: a sense that they were

[18]Quoted in Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 39.
[19]Mark Connelly & David R. Wilcox, 'Are You Tough Enough? The Image of the Special Forces in British Popular Culture, 1939-2004', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25:1 (Mar. 2005), pp. 1-25, see pp. 11-12.
[20]Anthony King, 'The Special Air Service and the Concentration of Military Power', *Armed Forces and Society* 35:4 (2008), pp. 646-666, see p. 648, pp. 650-651; John Newsinger, *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture*, (London: Pluto, 1997), Chapter 3.
[21]Finlan, 'British Special Forces', p. 92, p. 94.
[22]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, pp. 735-736.

not really team players, further exacerbated by the secrecy that cloaked their operations.[23]

There is ample evidence of SAS self-mythologising in the Falklands campaign, but a single salient instance must suffice here. This concerns a celebrated diversionary raid undertaken by the SAS against Darwin, near Goose Green, to cover the landings at San Carlos on 21 May. The raid was made by around forty men of D Squadron led by Cedric Delves. The SAS were flown in by helicopter, with sub-groups targeting isolated farmsteads north of Darwin, including High Hill and Burntside houses. An assault was made with handheld missiles, mortars, and tracer. The most striking claims would later be made for the success of this raid. It was said that radio intercepts, or prisoners interrogated afterwards, reported that the Argentines believed they had experienced a battalion strength assault, one of at least five hundred men, or that the raid itself constituted the main landings. Rose himself circulated reports to this effect, and they were echoed by Brigadier Thompson, as well as in leading journalistic accounts.[24] It is unsurprising that they have surfaced as a matter of course ever since, whether in popular histories of the war, academic articles, or special forces memoirs.[25] They even appear in the official record, in Delves' post-war citation for the Distinguished Service Order, which again records that 'the enemy were heard to inform their higher HQ that they were under attack from at least a battalion'.[26]

Despite their currency, these reports appear entirely without foundation. Delves' own account of the raid in his 2018 memoir portrays it as a curiously desultory affair, in which his men fired for a short time on an uncertain target, 'it could be sheep', and received no response.[27] The official Argentine Army report on the war does not

[23]See for example Rod Boswell, *Mountain Commandos at War in the Falklands: The Royal Marines Mountain & Arctic Warfare Cadre in Action during the 1982 Conflict*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2021), p. 120.

[24]Rose, 'Advance Force Operations', p. 59; Thompson, in Hugh McManners (ed.), *Forgotten Voices of the Falklands*, (London: Ebury Press, 2007), p. 194; also in Imperial War Museum (hereinafter IWM), sound recording 12428, reel 3, from 8.55; Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 246.

[25]Martin Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012), p. 208; Finlan, 'British Special Forces', p. 89; Hugh McManners, *Falklands Commando*, (London: William Kimber, 1984), p. 196; Aston & Tootal, *SAS Sea King*, p. 248; Tony Hoare, *Born for War: One SAS Trooper's Extraordinary Account of the Falklands War*, (London: Welbeck, 2022), pp. 193-194.

[26]*London Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1982.

[27]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, Chapter. 12, see p. 215; Mark Higgitt, *Through Fire and Water: HMS Ardent: The Forgotten Frigate of the Falklands War*, (London: Thistle Publishing, 2013), pp. 216-217, appears to record the length of the supporting naval

mention the raid; neither did the Argentine commander at Goose Green.[28] The Argentine commander at Stanley, meanwhile, notes the scarcity of records of the raid and says it 'had no influence on Argentine forces in the area'.[29] An Argentine history of the battle of Goose Green comments that allusions to the raid are rare in the Argentine historiography, and 'all but non-existent' in veterans' memoirs. One such account does state that the SAS helicopters were detected by radar and that tracer was seen for around half an hour; it also speaks of an 'exchange of shots' and refers to the action as a 'skirmish'.[30] But a dispatch sent from Goose Green to Stanley just after the raid described an action of 'possibly section strength in area 10 km NE Goose Green (High – Hile)' – for High Hill.[31] An Argentine army section typically numbers some forty five men, suggesting the Argentines were well aware of the true size of the attacking force, and that they placed the SAS more than four miles from Darwin. Meanwhile, the BBC's Robert Fox reported that none of the settlers at Goose Green noticed a nearby land attack that morning.[32]

Moreover, SAS over-confidence and the Darwin raid contributed to poor intelligence during preparations for the battle of Goose Green, which was fought by 2 Parachute Regiment (2 Para) a week later. The SAS provided the only eye-witness intelligence of the Argentine garrison there until immediately prior to the battle, while restricting 2 Para itself from patrolling out from its positions on Sussex Mountain.[33] Their initial assessment was that the garrison consisted of a single company of around 150 men,

---

bombardment at under half an hour. The action at Burntside house lasted just 'ten minutes or so': Tony Shaw, *SAS South Georgia Boating Club: An SAS Trooper's Memoir and Falklands War Diary*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2022), p. 114.

[28]Italo A. Piaggi, *El combate de Goose Green: Diario de guerra del comandante de las tropas argentinas en la más encarnizada batalla de Malvinas*, (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1994), pp. 80-83.

[29]Oscar Luis Jofre, *Malvinas: La defensa de Puerto Argentino*, (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1990), p. 134. For wider scepticism regarding British diversionary tactics, see Francisco Cervo, 'El cerco estratégico operacional y el combate de Darwin – Prado del Ganso', in F. R. Aguiar (ed.), *Operaciones terrestres en las Isla* Malvinas, (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1983), pp. 123-189, p. 136.

[30]Oscar A. Teves, *Malvinas: La batalla de Pradera del Ganso*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Argentinidad, 2010), pp. 160-161

[31]Omar Edgardo Parada, *Malvinas, llagas de una guerra: IIIra Brigada de Infantería: testimonios de su comandante*, (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 2012), p. 272.

[32]Robert Fox, *Eyewitness Falklands: A Personal Account of the Falklands Campaign*, (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 118.

[33]Dair Farrar-Hockley, in National Army Museum (hereinafter NAM), sound recording 5001322, from 44.11.

the figure they supplied to 2 Para's commanding and intelligence officers.[34] This figure contrasted with 3 Commando's Brigade's own assessment, made on the basis of conventional sources, which put the defence at more than three times this size.[35] The SAS were also able to say little about the disposition of the Argentine forces, and concluded mistakenly that no Islanders were present at the settlement.[36] Prior to the battle they revised their estimate upwards, and 2 Para's own intelligence gave them a clearer picture of the real situation, while the Argentine garrison was reinforced to perhaps 1,150 men. But the failings of SAS intelligence frustrated senior officers. The CO of 2 Para, Lieutenant Colonel 'H.' Jones, was recorded as asking, 'What the hell have the SAS been doing down here?', while Thompson himself later commented: 'The SAS didn't really go and look properly'.[37]

Indeed, D squadron's early experiences on South Georgia and then at Pebble Island seemingly led them to under-estimate the likely vigour of Argentine defences more broadly. In both places, they faced small and isolated garrisons which surrendered quickly, and this appears to have tinted their assessment of the much larger force at Goose Green. They briefed 2 Para that Argentine morale was low and military discipline weak, and that 'if we knocked them hard they would fall, crack like a windowpane'.[38] It was on this basis that 'H.' Jones concluded his Orders Group prior to the battle by saying: 'All previous evidence suggests that if the enemy is hit hard, he will crumble'.[39] After he was killed in action his replacement Major Chris Keeble commented: 'All this rubbish about them not wanting to fight … They were fighting hard'.[40] To be clear: intelligence gathering provided the signal contribution of the SAS to the British war effort. The deep-cover surveillance over weeks undertaken around Stanley by G squadron yielded hugely important information. But by contrast, intelligence provided ad hoc and during direct actions by D and B squadrons proved less satisfactory. In a letter covering his post-war report, Major General Moore

[34]Thompson; *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 90; Mark Adkin, *Goose Green: A Battle is Fought to be Won*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1992), pp. 72-73.
[35]Nick Van der Bijl, *Nine Battles to Stanley*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2014), p. 119; Thompson; *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 90.
[36]Fox, *Eyewitness Falklands*, p. 188; Fox, in IWM, sound recording 12427, reel 2, from 13.49.
[37]Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 301; interview with Thompson, Feb. 1990, in Adkin, *Battle is Fought*, p. 100, and Fn. 8, p. 286.
[38]Philip Neame, in Adkin, *Battle is Fought*, p. 113; see also p. 98; Neame, in McManners (ed.), *Forgotten Voices*, p. 242; Neame, *Penal Company in the Falklands: A Memoir of the Parachute Regiment at War, 1982*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2024), p. 45.
[39]Helen Parr, *Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2019), pp. 103-104; Adkin, *Battle is Fought*, pp. 56-57.
[40]Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 305.

indicated that 'four major SAS reconnaissance tasks had been conducted in a less than impressive manner'; this related to D squadron reconnaissance patrols in South Georgia, Goose Green, and even Pebble Island, and to B squadron's activities during Operation Plum Duff.[41] And to this assessment might also be added the reconnaissance of D squadron patrols on Mount Kent, which was similarly regarded as unimpressive by the COs of 3 Commando Brigade and 42 Commando.[42]

The third and final feature in the critique of the SAS focuses on their determination to carve out high-profile roles for themselves and to become key protagonists in the war. Newsinger notes that the Falklands represented the Regiment's first involvement in conventional warfare since 1945, and came in the wake of the positive publicity that followed the storming of the Iranian embassy in London two years earlier. From the outset, Newsinger thus argues that 'there was a determination to push the regiment into the limelight, to grandstand, to ensure that this was remembered as the SAS's war', through undertaking what he calls 'suitably daring headline-grabbing operations.'[43] The author is not alone in regarding this as having led the SAS to seek to determine the course of events, beyond the existing Falklands War campaign design, and parallel to the formal chain of command. Lawrence Freedman, author of the official history of the war, calls this their 'readiness to act outside the standard command structures'.[44]

Evidence of this tendency will be described here in two instances, though other examples follow. Firstly, several accounts suggest that Michael Rose played a decisive role in bringing about the Pebble Island raid, by deliberately introducing spurious reports of a radar station there at intelligence briefings held on board the flagship HMS *Hermes*, presumably to ensure a role in the operation for his men.[45] Certainly, as early as 7 May, Rose was briefing naval officers that 'his men were to take out an enemy radar installation on Middle Peak of Pebble Island'.[46] Meanwhile, Freedman cites an unidentified source to the effect that the decisive factor prompting the raid was indeed '(fictitious) claims that an Argentine warning radar was …located on the Island'.[47] There were of course good reasons to target the Pebble Island airbase, with or without a radar. Nevertheless, for a relatively junior officer like Rose to introduce

[41]See Southby-Tailyour, *Operation Exocet*, p. 295, n. 10.
[42]Vaux, *March*, p. 112; Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 114.
[43]Newsinger, *Dangerous Men*, pp. 29-30.
[44]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 735.
[45]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 140-142; Aston & Tootal, *SAS Sea King*, p. 175; Hoare, *Born for War*, pp. 157-158.
[46]Southby-Tailyour, *Reasons in Writing*, pp. 167-168.
[47]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 435.

conjectural briefings so as to shape the decisions of the Admiral commanding the Carrier Battle Group seems extraordinary.

Secondly, the SAS also intervened to force the British move forward to Mount Kent. Delves claims that D squadron's move to Mount Kent from 24 May was devised by Rose, partly so as 'to suck Brigade forward onto Mt Kent /Challenger'.[48] The unit chosen for this was 42 Commando Royal Marines, whose commanding officer, at first highly sceptical about the plan, was persuaded by Rose to support it.[49] The aim was to break the deadlock that for logistical reasons had delayed the British break-out from the beachhead for almost a week, by enticing 3 Commando Brigade into an earlier move forward than was planned by Thompson.[50] As we have seen, this yielded a strategically significant advance towards Stanley. But Rose's actions increased the military and political pressure on Thompson, who as early as 24 May was instructed that engagement with the enemy around Stanley 'requires earliest possible development of D Sqn SAS operation [near Mount Kent]'. This was the prelude to a peremptory order from the overall Commander of the Task Force in London, Admiral Fieldhouse, on 26 May for an action to take Goose Green and for a move out of the beachhead, including to reinforce the SAS.[51] The latter represented serious intromission by the senior military command in the UK in the handling of the war by the men on the ground, and deeply angered Thompson.[52] Freedman describes the frustration of local commanders with the failure of those eight thousand miles away to understand the logistical obstacles to an early advance, as well as their tendency to underplay the strength of enemy resistance – both factors arguably exacerbated here by the actions of the SAS.[53]

We now move to more detailed discussion of several controversial operations in which the criticisms of the SAS discussed in this section were prominent: Operation Paraquet, Operations Plum Duff and Mikado, and the raid on Cortley Ridge.

---

[48]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 237.

[49]Nick Vaux, NAM, sound recording 5002744, from 24.30.

[50]A member of D Squadron calls this 'bouncing enough forces forward': Aston & Tootal, *SAS Sea King*, p. 292. See also Nick Vaux, *March to the South Atlantic: 42 Commando Royal Marines in the Falklands War*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), pp. 97-8.

[51]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, pp. 557-563; for Thompson's reaction, see *3 Commando Brigade*, pp. 113-114.

[52]Thompson, in Michael Bilton & Peter Kosminsky (eds.), *Speaking Out: Untold Stories from the Falklands War*, (London: André Deutsch, 1989), p. 227; also in Adkin, *Goose Green*, p. 68, p. 77.

[53]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, pp. 557-562; also Van der Bijl, *Nine Battles*, p. 123.

Paraquet was the name given to the operation to retake South Georgia, a dependency of the Falklands located eight hundred miles to the south-east.[54] Plans for this were prepared from the day of the Argentine invasion on 2 April, when Captain Brian Young of the destroyer HMS *Antrim* was appointed to head a flotilla to go to South Georgia. HMS *Plymouth* and HMS *Endurance*, the only navy ship normally stationed in the South Atlantic, were assigned to this group, along with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary RFA *Tidespring*. The operation's land force was led by Major Guy Sheridan of 42 Commando Royal Marines, and initially consisted of 42 Commando's M Company with further forces attached, including a troop of SBS. One of D squadron SAS's four troops, Mountain Troop, was to accompany them.[55]

The forces taking part in the operation were embarked at Ascension Island, with M Company and associated troops sailing in RFA *Tidespring*, and D squadron sailing in another RFA ship, *Fort Austin*. *Fort Austin* replenished the South Georgia flotilla at sea on 12 April, with Mountain Troop alone due to transfer at that point to HMS *Endurance*. However, the D squadron C.O. Delves now intervened. He was disappointed that his remaining three troops were to be left out of the operation, and in his own words 'reacted badly'. He thus took the opportunity to embark the *whole* of D Squadron with the South Georgia flotilla; a move he termed 'shaping our own destiny'. Captain Young and Major Sheridan were surprised by this, even disconcerted.[56] But Young consulted with Northwood, which was receptive to the idea.[57] The whole of D squadron duly joined the flotilla.

The presence of Delves and the whole of D squadron threw the operation's command structure and planning off kilter. The sheer weight of SAS numbers aside, Delves was a Major, like Sheridan, the commander of the land forces and, moreover, enjoyed independent TACSAT communications with his Headquarters. Early plans for a naval bombardment by *Antrim* and *Plymouth* with *Endurance* landing troops directly on to the beach were soon shelved in favour of a more cautious approach, and discussions came to centre on reconnaissance.[58] Sheridan ordered Delves and his SBS counterpart to plan for the scouting of Leith and Grytviken respectively, instructing them among other

[54]Roger Perkins, *Operation Paraquat: The Battle for South Georgia*, (Chippenham: Picton Publishing, 1986), is detailed but dated.
[55]Vaux, *March*, pp. 17-19; Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 38.
[56]Guy Sheridan, 'What Really Happened in South Georgia on Op Paraquet in 1982', *The Sheet Anchor* 461 (special number 3) (2020), p. 1. I am grateful to John Beales for bringing this piece to my attention.
[57]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 229.
[58]Nick Barker, *Beyond Endurance: An Epic of Whitehall and the South Atlantic Conflict*, (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1997), p. 177; the SAS opposed the earlier plans: Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 33.

things that they should 'avoid glaciers like the plague'.[59] Despite this instruction, however, Delves' plan soon came to focus on a helicopter insertion on the Fortuna Glacier, over-looking Leith to the north-west of Stromness Bay.

This plan to approach Leith by crossing the Fortuna Glacier was thereby controversial from the outset. All those present with expertise in arctic conditions, or mountaineering, or knowledge of South Georgia argued against it. These included Sheridan himself, Captain Nick Barker of HMS *Endurance*, a naval lieutenant who had recently led an expedition to the glacier, the men of the British Antarctic Survey based on the island, and the aircrew of *Antrim*'s helicopter who were to fly in the SAS.[60] Sheridan's view in particular should have carried weight, when his battalion commander regarded him as 'probably one of the greatest experts in the military' in arctic warfare and arctic conditions, and who himself knew South Georgia.[61] All these men argued that unpredictable weather and dangerous surface conditions made an approach across the glacier too hazardous, while expressing scepticism about the other arguments advanced in favour.[62] But Delves was unmoveable. He was determined that D Squadron should play some leading role in the operation.[63] He consulted SAS HQ in Hereford via TACSAT and spoke to two men who had climbed Everest and a third who had crossed the glacier two decades earlier, who said it was feasible.[64] For his part, Sheridan was unwilling to contradict Delves openly, though he advised Young not to authorise the plan.[65] But Young was not alone in supposing that the SAS must know what they were doing, and almost disastrously, it went ahead.[66]

Mountain Troop was inserted on to the glacier on the afternoon of 21 April, and by nightfall had only been able to cover a half a mile in the appalling conditions. By the following morning, they were at serious risk from exposure and requested urgent extraction.[67] After a first failed effort, on the second attempt the helicopter from

[59]Sheridan, 'What Really Happened', p. 2; Vaux. *March*, p. 42.
[60]Barker, *Beyond Endurance*, pp. 178, p. 180; Chris Parry, *Down South: A Falklands War Diary*, (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 64-65; Tony Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins: The Story of the SAS, 1950-1992* 3rd ed., (London: Little Brown, 1992), pp. 85-86; Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 160; Van der Bilj, *Nine Battles*, pp. 68-69; Middlebrook, *Falklands War*, p. 105.
[61]Nick Vaux, in NAM, sound recording 5002743, from 40.41, see also from 42:21.
[62]See Parry, *Down South*, pp. 65; Vaux, *March*, p. 42; Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 242.
[63]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 38.
[64]Perkins, *Operation Paraquat*, p. 125.
[65]Sheridan, 'What Really Happened', pp. 2-3; Barker, *Beyond Endurance*, p. 180.
[66]For example: Parry, *Down South*, p. 69: 'they know their business, I thought'.
[67]Aston & Tootal, *SAS Sea King*, pp. 92-95, is a rare eyewitness account.

Antrim and two from *Tidespring* made it on to the glacier. But having picked up the SAS, first one and then the second helicopter from *Tidespring* crashed.[68] *Antrim*'s helicopter took off six SAS, before spending the afternoon attempting repeatedly to lift off the remaining dozen, achieving this only on the third attempt. The episode had cost the Task Force two helicopters and had almost resulted in the loss of an SAS Troop. As the first British action of the war, it had a heightened political as well as military significance: the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the senior military personnel in London regarded the period between the loss of the two helicopters and the final rescue as the worst of the conflict.[69] Delves afterwards maintained that the Fortuna plan had been the right one, but that they were caught out by terrible storm conditions; although unpredictability of the weather had been the main basis for the objections to it. Nevertheless, SAS HQ in Hereford sought to blame the helicopter crashes on the Fortuna glacier on 'bad airmanship' on the part of the Fleet Air Arm, – the very force that had rescued its men from near certain death.[70]

Nor did the South Georgia travails of the SAS end there. On the night of 23 April, Boat Troop made a second attempt at a reconnaissance of Leith by deploying in five Gemini boats into Stromness Bay. Within minutes, the outboard engines on three failed, and two boats were then blown out to sea.[71] One was recovered the next morning, while the other was found days later washed up on the coast. Boat Troop did, however, garner useful intelligence on Leith. The sudden detection and disabling of the Argentine submarine ARA *Santa Fe* early on 25 April then precipitated a British assault by sea, air, and land on Grytviken. The majority of the Marines of M Company were more than two hundred miles away, *Tidespring* having been ordered off due to the submarine threat, so that the SAS made up about a third of the seventy five troops available for the assault. Following naval bombardment the Argentines at Grytviken surrendered without firing a shot. None of the attacking force fired their weapons either – except for the SAS, who fired Milan missiles and shot several elephant seals by mistake. As white flags appeared over Grytviken, Delves dropped out of communication with Sheridan and, against explicit orders, advanced to take the initial Argentine surrender.[72]

[68]Geoff Puddefoot, *No Sea Too Rough: The Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the Falklands War: The Untold Story*, (London: Chatham Publishing: 2007), pp. 65-71.
[69]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, pp. 244-245; Hasting & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 161; Geraghty, *Who Dares Wins*, p. 90.
[70]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 112.
[71]Shaw, *SAS South Georgia*, pp. 88-9.
[72]Sheridan, 'What Really Happened', pp. 5-8; Perkins, *Operation Paraquat*, pp. 174-175; Van der Bilj, *Nine Battles*, p. 76; Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 96-99.

Given all this, Delves' DSO citation as it relates to Operation Paraquet makes for surprising reading. It glosses over the controversial aspects, including the near fiasco on the glacier. Rather, it describes 'a brilliantly successful series of operations', and how Delves, by 'quick decisive action and personal display of courage … was able to accomplish the fall of Grytviken without a single loss of life'. It concludes that he 'made a unique contribution to the overall success of operations in South Georgia'.[73] The recommendation and text for this citation were written by Ian Crooke, the second-in-command 22 SAS Regiment.[74]

Undertaken by B Squadron, Operations Plum Duff and Mikado were, with the related SBS Operation Kettledrum, the only British assaults planned on the Argentine mainland during the Falklands War. They arose from the threat presented by Argentina's most effective weapon system, the Exocet missile launched from Super-Étendard aircraft.[75] The main Argentine air base for Super-Étendards was Río Grande in Tierra del Fuego, and this became the target for both SAS operations. Plum Duff was a helicopter-launched eight-man mission, designed first to reconnoitre the base and then make an opportunistic attack. Mikado, by contrast, was to consist of a frontal assault by more than sixty men of B Squadron landed directly on to the airstrip by an RAF Hercules aircraft. In proposing Mikado, the SAS appears to have taken as its point of reference the celebrated Israeli special forces airborne assault on Entebbe airfield in Uganda in 1976.[76]

Given the Exocet threat and the concerns it provoked, these operations seemed justified. Plum Duff was approved by the War Cabinet, and Mikado was supported by Admiral Woodward.[77] Nevertheless, they were so secret that even high-ranking officers in the fleet remained in the dark as to their nature.[78] Ewen Southby-Tailyour presented the first detailed and amply documented account of these operations in *Exocet Falklands,* published in 2014, a work which presents perhaps the strongest critique to date of the SAS in the Falklands. Southby-Tailyour argues that the operations were at best ill-judged and at worst reckless. A distinguished veteran of the campaign who has written at length on the war, his conclusions are based on extensive interviews with key actors and carry considerable weight.

[73]Citation, *London Gazette*, 8 Oct. 1982.
[74]Recommendation, 30 Jun. 1982, The UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) WO 373/188/229.
[75]For example: Bryan Perrett, *Weapons of the Falklands Conflict*, (Poole: Blandford Press, 1982), pp. 77-78, pp. 125-126.
[76]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*¸ Chapter 1.
[77]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 437; Woodward, *One Hundred Days*, pp. 307-322.
[78]For example: Clapp & Southby-Tailyour, *Amphibious Assault*, p. 111.

In the event, Plum Duff was the only one of these operations actually undertaken.[79] B Squadron's 6 Troop was flown out via Ascension, and the mission was launched from HMS *Invincible* in a Sea King helicopter. This crossed the Argentine coast where it landed briefly, only ultimately to drop the SAS deep in *Chilean* territory, perhaps eighty miles from their target. They attempted to walk back, but after a week abandoned the mission. The men were flown first to Santiago and then to the UK; the helicopter crew, meanwhile, attempted to sink their aircraft in the Magellan straits, and when this proved impossible, they burnt it on the shore.[80]

Southby-Tailyour argues that Plum Duff and Mikado were ill-considered because the preparations made for them were inadequate, and above all because Rio Grande in 1982 was in no sense comparable to Entebbe in 1976. Thousands of troops were stationed around the base, which had two radar systems, while destroyers stationed off the coast mounted further radars.[81] Río Grande was defended by four anti-aircraft batteries and a further ten radar guided anti-aircraft guns. That is to say, the probability of the Hercules aircraft allotted for Mikado reaching the airbase without detection or destruction was slim. Even had they reached their target, locating the Super-Étendards on a crowded airfield in the dark would have presented formidable challenges. And while the British sought to pass Plum Duff off as a surveillance helicopter forced to ditch in Chile due to bad weather, Mikado would have constituted an overt attack on Argentine territory, and come at significant diplomatic cost.

Plum Duff and Mikado displayed in heightened form aspects of SAS operations explored throughout this article. Both were potentially high-profile, headline grabbing operations. But they were approached without the careful planning required for complex, challenging missions. The only maps available to the men undertaking Plum Duff, for example, were torn from a 1930s school atlas or published by the Argentine government in 1942 to 1:100,000 scale.[82] In fact, so vague was the planning, and so dangerous the mission, that it prompted dissent within the SAS itself. A sergeant due to take part in Mikado resigned, and when his squadron commander informed SAS Director Peter de la Billière of this while expressing his own reservations, he was summarily dismissed.[83] One participant noted of De la Billière that 'he clearly wanted his Entebbe-style raid', with another adding: 'We're all going to die to fulfil an old man's

[79]Unless otherwise indicated, this paragraph is based on Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, Chapter 11.
[80]Sidney Edwards, *My Secret Falklands War*, (Hove: Book Guild, 2014), Chapter 8.
[81]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, Chapter 4, pp. 171-172, p. 180, pp. 182-183.
[82]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, pp. 134-136, pp. 162-164.
[83]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, pp. 208-209; De la Billière, *Looking for Trouble*, pp. 346-347.

fantasy'.[84] Even Cedric Delves, himself poorly informed as to what was planned, wrote: 'Nobody in his right mind would contemplate such a gamble'.[85] Nevertheless, planning continued even after Plum Duff had failed, and after the Argentines had expended all but one of their air-launched Exocets.[86] It was only finally cancelled on 3 June.

Perhaps most striking of all, the mission was kept secret from virtually everyone. The SAS declined to engage with the Special Operations Coordinator appointed at Fleet HQ, whose role was to ensure that 'all operations, special and conventional, should be dovetailed and deconflicted rather than be conducted in isolation'.[87] In fact, 'the decision to use SAS troops from the United Kingdom on Plum Duff was … not a matter discussed at the Special Operations Group'.[88] And following the failure of Plum Duff, the SAS refused to provide Admiral Fieldhouse as Commander-in-Chief, Major General Moore as commander of land forces, or Admiral Woodward with any report, stating simply that it was 'no longer a matter for [them] … and thus no further information will be forthcoming'.[89]

As the end of the war grew nearer and the primary SAS reconnaissance role wound down, more of the troops shifted to direct action. Major General Moore later commented: 'I had a heck of a lot of special forces. As we were getting to the end of their reconnaissance role, they were very keen to be doing things'.[90] This presented a problem, however, since, again in Moore's words, 'there were more Special Forces than could be allocated tasks … which were given more through a sense of obligation than because of a valid requirement'.[91]

This was the context to the final SAS action, on 13/14 June – the last night of the war. Wishing to find a role for them, Moore stated, 'we concocted a plan for … a raid on the northern side of Stanley'.[92] This became a joint SAS and Royal Marines affair, led by Cedric Delves, against Cortley Ridge, which the Argentines called Camber Peninsula. This raid was purportedly diversionary, intended to draw Argentine fire

[84]In Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 240, and quoted in Newsinger, *Dangerous* Men, p. 30.
[85]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 115.
[86]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 201, p. 221.
[87]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, pp. 35-36, p. 201.
[88]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 204.
[89]Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, pp. 274-275 & p. 295, Fn. 10; Woodward, *One Hundred Days*, pp. 321-322.
[90]Moore, in McManners, *Forgotten Voices*, p. 412.
[91]Quoted in Southby-Tailyour, *Exocet Falklands*, p. 291, Fn. 34.
[92]Moore, in IWM, sound recording 10482, reel 5, from 20.13.

from 2 Para's simultaneous attack on Wireless Ridge.[93] The specific objective was several oil storage tanks on the feature. SBS rigid raider craft were to carry a score of D Squadron to the northern shore, while around sixty men of D and G squadrons provided covering fire across Hearndon Water.[94] The raid went badly from the start: an Argentine hospital ship reported the crafts' movements and illuminated them with spotlights.[95] The raiders were pinned down soon after they landed, and reported that they must withdraw. D and G Squadrons opened up in support, only themselves to be immobilised by withering fire.[96] The COs of 3 Commando Brigade and 2 Para state that the SAS requested assistance, which was refused; Delves disputes this.[97] The troops withdrew with several wounded.

The Cortley Ridge raid has divided opinion. It has been called 'flamboyant', 'swashbuckling' but 'unsatisfactory', or 'shambolic'.[98] Some participants later described it as an 'unacceptable risk mission' or even 'a total disaster'.[99] The focus on destroying oil tanks, when the oil would soon be needed by British forces and civilians, was questioned by observers from both sides.[100] And the broader rationale for the raid, of diverting attention from 2 Para's attack on Wireless Ridge, has also been questioned.[101] Senior officers in the Marines and Paras were irritated by it, and Moore himself acknowledged that the attack was not well coordinated with 3 Commando Brigade's operations and that his allowing it was 'a mistake' which 'hindered 2 Para' and 'was not helpful to them'.[102] Some writers have taken a more positive view, however.[103] The most supportive appraisal is that of Hugh Bicheno, who writes: 'The raid on

[93]Rose, 'Advance Force Operations', p. 59.
[94]Hastings and Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, pp. 381-382.
[95]Jorge Muñoz, *Barcos hospital: sanidad militar en la Guerra de Malvinas*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Argentinidad, 2017), pp. 82-86; Parada, *Malvinas*, p. 490; Shaw, *SAS South* Georgia, pp. 139-140; Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012), pp. 268-269.
[96]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 308.
[97]Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 180; David Chaundler, in IWM, sound recording 14152, reel 3, from 25.52; Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, pp. 648, p. 650; Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 309.
[98]Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, p. 382; Middlebrook, *Falklands War*, pp. 272-273; King, 'Special Air Service', p. 650.
[99]Jenny Simpson, *Biting the Bullet: Married to the SAS*, (London: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 32-33; Roger Edwards, in McManners, *Forgotten Voices*, p. 412.
[100]Jofre*, Malvinas*, pp. 253-254; Hoare, *Born for War*, p. 244.
[101]Finlan, 'British Special Forces', p. 90.
[102]Moore, in IWM, sound recording 10482, reel 5, 19.04 ('mistake') and from 20.30.
[103]Freedman, *Official History*, vol. 2, p. 648, p. 650; Hastings & Jenkins, *Battle for the Falklands*, pp. 381-382.

Camber Peninsula was an entirely successful diversion, as proved by the Argentine Army's official history and by Jofre's [the officer in charge of the defence of Stanley] 1987 memoir, in which he insists it was a full-blown amphibious landing attempt'.[104]

In that memoir, however, Oscar Luis Jofre, far from insisting that this was a 'full-blown amphibious landing', put the total raiding force at 'three boats, with around ten men in each', in itself an over-estimation of the true size of the attacking force.[105] By contrast, the Argentine Army's official report does call the raid 'an amphibious assault' and suggests, erroneously, both that a second wave was detected, and that hours later, there were indications the British planned further to increase the pressure on the Peninsula.[106] This report and others nevertheless make clear that the Argentine reaction was, beyond the vigorous local response, modest. Forty-five Argentine Commandos were sent to reinforce the Argentine positions, and crossed Stanley harbour to find that the SAS had already withdrawn.[107] The Argentines also disputed the ostensibly diversionary purpose of the raid.[108] Meanwhile, Jofre further wrote that 'without doubt this attack was aborted thanks to the energetic response of the [defensive] subsector': a rare Argentine success in the last hours of the war .[109]

The most striking discussion of the raid appears in Delves' own 2018 memoir, which underscores the raid's improvised nature as well as the misgivings it produced and its potentially disastrous consequences. Delves initially saw the operation as 'unlikely' and to be undertaken only if possible. But it was then confirmed at short notice, to his explicit consternation.[110] His mood became one of 'deep foreboding, tinged with irritation'.[111] There was little clarity around the objective: 'We had no immediately obvious high-value target to go for, no target save for enemy to our front. Nor was there precision, nothing to be precise about'. In these circumstances, the decision to target the oil storage tanks was not 'a clever choice'.[112] With the raiders soon forced to withdraw, an SAS trooper asked Delves for permission to target the hospital ship

[104]Bicheno, *Razor's Edge*, p. 306.
[105]Jofre*, Malvinas*, p. 254.
[106]Ejército Argentino, *Informe oficial del Ejército Argentino: conflicto Malvinas*, (Buenos Aires, 1983), pp. 112, p. 114.
[107]Jofre*, Malvinas*, pp. 253-256; Parada, *Malvinas*, pp. 489-490; Ejército Argentino, *Informe oficial*, p. 112.
[108]Rubén O. Moro, *La guerra inaúdita: historia del conflicto del Atlántico Sur*' (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1985), p. 490.
[109]Jofre*, Malvinas*, p. 253-254; see also Van der Bijl and Aldea, *5th Infantry Brigade*, p. 156.
[110]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 295, p. 301, pp. 303-304.
[111]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 304.
[112]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, pp. 305-307.

with a Milan missile – raising the prospect of a British attack on a hospital ship on the last night of the war.[113] When the SAS eventually withdrew though 2 Para's flank, they were almost targeted by British artillery, with a blue-on-blue incident narrowly averted.[114]

In conclusion: most of the problems that arose with SAS operations in the Falklands were the product of the differing expertise and experience of special as opposed to conventional forces. The SAS, accustomed to small-scale counter-insurgency operations in which they had largely a free hand, struggled to work effectively alongside much larger conventional forces, which controlled the campaign once ashore. Small-scale, risky actions that privileged speed and improvisation could produce successes such as at Pebble Island; but they could also conflict with the more measured, co-ordinated approach of the Royal Marines or Paras. And these differences were exacerbated by an ethos within the SAS that prioritised seizing the initiative over conformity to orders or the formal chain of command. Added to this was the determination of the SAS leadership to secure a prominent role; in Newsinger's words, quoted earlier, 'to ensure that this was remembered as the SAS's war'.

All of this meant that wherever the SAS were closely subordinate to conventional direction, they excelled – as they did in intelligence and surveillance operations around Stanley. By contrast, where they had a freer hand, they often performed less well. The irony, then, is that it was precisely in the direct-action role they most cherished that the weaknesses of the SAS were most apparent. Their buccaneering, go-it-alone approach only partially matched the demands of the larger coordinated campaign within which they were, after all, only a small element. In some cases – in South Georgia, Tierra del Fuego, or at Cortley Ridge – potentially disastrous outcomes were only narrowly averted. The broad conclusion to be drawn from the activities of the SAS in the Falklands were summarised by the CO of 2 Para, who argued:

> once the ground troops actually close up, then it's best that the SAS get off that particular real estate, because to have special forces and conventional troops operating on the same piece of terrain could have led to a fairly serious disaster.[115]

[113]Delves, *Across an Angry Sea*, p. 312.
[114]Chaundler, in IWM, sound recording 14152, reel 3, from 26.12.
[115]Chaundler, in IWM, sound recording 14152, reel 3, from 26.34.

Ypres: Canada's Legendary First World War Battles in Film

CAMERON TELCH*
Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada
Email: *camtelch640@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT
The 1925 British film Ypres *reenacted the three major battles of Ypres, including the Canadian experience in the Second and Third Battles of 1915 and 1917. Directed by Walter Summers and made by utilising archival footage from the war and First World War veterans to produce an authentic account of 'every detail, and the deathless glory won by the British forces.' The film's inclusion of Canadian fighting experiences at Ypres decentralised the British war narrative, showing that Canada contributed significantly to the cost of victory. Released in Canada in 1926,* Ypres *showed Canadian audiences that Canadian soldiers endured trauma at Ypres through its realistic portrayal of combat. Through its depiction of war, the creators of* Ypres *showcased to Canadian audiences that Canadian soldiers underwent the horrors of the First World War for victory, the very value Canada went to war for in 1914.*

Introduction

During the First World War the market town of Ypres in Belgium was the site of three major battles. Although the Canadians did not fight at the 1914 First Battle of Ypres, they were present at the Second Battle in April 1915 and again at the Third Battle in 1917. During the latter engagement, the Canadians captured the village of Passchendaele, duly acquiring a reputation as an 'elite force.'[1] After the war, Canada's legendary contributions at Ypres were immortalised in the film production, *Ypres* (1925). This research note considers the contemporary significance – to Canadian audiences – of *Ypres*, a British-produced film which nonetheless figures prominently in Canadian war memory.[2]

---

*Cameron Telch is a doctoral candidate at Mount Saint Vernon University, Canada.
DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1962
[1]Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War,* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), p. 131.
[2]The film *Ypres* can be viewed online (with adverts) at https://watch.plex.tv/en-GB/watch/movie/the-battle-of-ypres . Accessed 21 February 2026.

Canada's memory of the First World War has drawn significant scholarly attention in recent years. Jonathan Vance has explored the cult of the 'service roll' – in which Canadian veterans were remembered for their service in the war.[3] Ian McKay and Jamie Swift have analysed the memory of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, tracing how it has changed over the decades from marking the mythological 'birth of a nation' to becoming a metaphorical depiction of the war's carnage and death.[4] Tim Cook has examined the memory of trench culture among Canadian soldiers, Jennifer Wellington explored the presentation of war artifacts in public displays to highlight Canadian participation in the fighting, and Rebecca Powell has revealed how Canadians during the 1920s and 1930s erected statues, plaques, memorial towers, and cenotaphs throughout the country and overseas to remember the dead.[5]

Similarly, the important role played by film in shaping the memory of the war, especially in Britain, has also drawn attention. For instance, Mark Connelly has analysed the work of the British Instructional Films Company (BIF), which produced several war re-enactment films in Britain during the 1920s, including, significantly, *Ypres*.[6] As Connelly demonstrates, movie theatres became a collective space of public commemoration when film audiences attended the screening of a BIF film[7]. Michael Paris has likewise examined the role of film during the war in promoting national opinions, while Emma Hanna has considered the war's place on British television, specifically in terms of commemoration.[8] Several filmic productions of the interwar period – such as *Shell*

[3]Johnathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War,* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), p. 136.
[4]See Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *The Vimy Trap Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War,* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016).
[5]Tim Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived The Great War*, (Allen Lane: Toronto, 2018), pp. 5-8; Jennifer Wellington, 'Curating Dominion Narratives of the Great War' in *Curating the Great War*, eds. Paul Cornish and Nicholas J. Saunders, (Oxford: Routledge, 2023), p. 79; Rebecca Powell, 'Memory and Memorialization: How War Memorials Shape Historical Narratives of Canada's Role in Military Conflict,' BA Thesis. (The University of Victoria, 2018) pp. 6-7. https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/history/assets/docs/Honours%20Thesis%20-%20Powel%20Rebecca%202018.pdf. Accessed 21 February 2026.
[6]See Mark Connelly, *Celluloid War Memorials: The British Instructional Films Company and the Memory of the Great War*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2016).
[7]Connelly, *Celluloid War Memorials*.
[8]Michael Paris, Introduction in *The First World War and Popular Cinema: 1914 to the Present*, ed. Michael Paris, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 2-3; Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain*. 1st ed, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 1.

Shocked (1919), *Verdun: Visions of History* (1928), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and *Journey's End* (1930) – have also drawn scrutiny.[9]

To date, however, the point of intersection between these two bodies of scholarship – that is, the role played by film specifically in Canadian memory of the conflict – has drawn relatively little focused attention. By examining the previously overlooked reception in Canada of the 1925 production *Ypres*, this research note offers something of a tentative corrective.

Ypres (1925): Origins and Production

The British War Office supervised the creation of *Ypres,* which was produced by the British Instructional Films, a company that made several other films of a similar type and style, including the 1921 production *Battle of Jutland*.[10] The film was directed by Walter Summers and was intended to deliver a vision of 'every detail, and the deathless glory won by the British forces.'[11] To do this, the producers spent a few years researching for the film, and key scenes were shot at Aldershot with thousands of re-enactors, many of whom were veterans.[12] The makers of *Ypres* also included authentic

[9]For more information on such war films, see Cameron Telch, '*Shell-Shocked*: A Canadian Film About the Experience of Psychological Trauma in the Great War' *Journal of History* 59, no. 1 (2024): p. 82–87. https://doi.org/10.3138/jh-2024-0008; Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Glen Jeansonne and David Luhrssen, *War on the Silver Screen: Shaping America's Perception of History*, (Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2014); Geoff Brown, *Silent to Sound: British Cinema in Transition*, (New Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2024).

[10]'Ypres' Film is True to Detail: Educational Picture at the Capitol, Splendid Musical Programme,' *The Calgary Daily Herald* (Calgary), April 6, 1926. p. 6 https://www.newspapers.com/image/481627754/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026; 'Soul of British in this Picture: Ypres Film Monument to Empire's Heroes, Opens Today at Capitol Theatre,' *Free Press Evening Bulletin* (Winnipeg), April 24, 1926, p. 21. https://www.newspapers.com/image/785286932/?match=1&terms=ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026; Connelly, *Celluloid War Memorials*.

[11]See Lawrence Napper, *The Great War in Popular British Cinema of the 1920s: Before Journey's End*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); 'Ypres' Film,' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, p.6.

[12]'New Film is Plain Tale of British Valor,' *Edmonton Journal* (Edmonton), April 3, 1926, p. 57. https://www.newspapers.com/image/469070083/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026; G. C. 'Ypres' a Real War Movie.' *The Toronto Star*

footage from the war.[13] Originally produced as an eight-reel picture with different episodes to be shown in sequential order, the film took a year to manufacture.[14]

Various scenes highlighted the Canadian role in the fighting, including the Second Battle of Ypres – where the Canadians are shown bravely fighting against the Germans.[15] *Ypres* immortalised the actions of Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Birchall at Second Ypres, who, despite being British-born, served with the Canadians and regrouped with his men, and of Victoria Cross recipient Canadian Lance-Corporal Fred Fisher, who protected Canadians as they retreated from the front lines during Second Ypres.[16] At the Battle of Passchendaele, Victoria Cross recipient Canadian Private Tommy Holmes seized a German pillbox, and Canadian foreign-born Victoria Cross recipient Lieutenant Robert Shankland defended the strategic objective of Bellevue Spur.[17] As such, while *Ypres* was produced by the BIF, the film's inclusion of the Canadians at Second and Third Ypres revealed to British audiences that the Canadians had played a significant role in the fighting. To this extent, *Ypres* complicated British memory of the war, emphasising that Canadians, too, suffered greatly for the final victory.[18]

Weekly (Toronto), February 6, 1926, p. 28. https://www.newspapers.com/image/991332072/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film

[13]'New Film is Plain Tale,' *Edmonton Journal*, p. 57.

[14] G. C. 'Ypres,' *The Toronto Star Weekly,* 28; 'New Film is Plain Tale,' *Edmonton Journal*, p. 57.

[15]'Soul of British,' *Free Press Evening Bulletin*, p. 21.

[16]'Soul of British,' *Free Press Evening Bulletin*, p. 21.; 'Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Percival Dearman Birchall,' Passchendaele Archives, https://archives.passchendaele.be/en/soldier/4859. Accessed 22 February 2026; John Boileau, 'Fred Fisher, VC.' *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*. Historica Canada. Article published December 15, 2017; Last Edited November 05, 2021. https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fred-fisher-vc . Accessed 3 March 2026.

[17]'Soul of British,' *Free Press Evening Bulletin*, p. 21; 'Private Thomas William Tommy Holmes VC Memorial Armoury,' Government of Canada. https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/memorials/canada/private-thomas-william-tommy-holmes-vc-memorial-armoury. Accessed 22 February 2026; James Wood, 'Robert Shankland, VC' *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*. Historica Canada. Article published October 26, 2016; Last Edited November 05, 2021. https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/robert-shankland. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[18]Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*, (Vol. 1), (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007), p. 205; Tim Cook, *Lifesavers and Body Snatchers: Medical Care and the Struggle for Survival in the Great War*, (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2022), p. 339.

Ypres on the Silver Screen: Its reception in Canada

The film was well received in Canada upon its 1926 release. According to one journalist at *The Vancouver Sun*, *Ypres* 'depicts more vividly than any other film yet shown the glories and the sombreness of war. It brings home to Canadian people what 'their boys' went through [at Second Ypres].'[19] *Ypres* depicted to Canadian audiences that Canadian soldiers fought bravely against overwhelming odds as they fought the German Army.[20] The film portrayed the 'great achievements' of Canadian soldiers who defended the frontlines.[21] In many ways, *Ypres* decentralised the British narrative of the war to bring attention to Canada's important contribution, which prevented fifty thousand Allied soldiers from being surrounded by the German Army.[22]

The film also showed that the Canadians were the unsung heroes at Passchendaele. *Ypres* informed Canadian viewers that '20 weary Canadians find themselves in possession of Belle Vue Spur, an arm of Passchendaele Ridge.'[23] The film reflected the reality that it was often the proven battle-hardened Canadians that the British called upon to capture significant objectives, including Passchendaele.[24] While *Ypres* showed that the Canadians were near the point of exhaustion at Belle Vue Spur, they still held onto their positions despite ongoing German artillery.[25] The film highlighted the fact that the capture of the Belle Vue Spur allowed the Canadians to make the final push onto the village of Passchendaele.[26]

Ypres reconstructed for Canadian audiences the horrors of the war. *Ypres* presented to Canadians a realistic reenactment as the film that shows how, during the Second Battle, 'respirators of a sort had been issued the day before, [to the men], but the deadly gas cloud chokes and blinds before they can be adjusted.'[27] The film thus

[19]'Ypres, Film Real Thriller: Members of Military Institute See Private Showing,' *The Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver), March 8, 1926, p. 2. https://www.newspapers.com/image/490982462/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[20]*Ypres*, directed by Walter Summers (United Kingdom: British Instructional Films, 1925), https://watch.plex.tv/watch/movie/the-battle-of-ypres?utm_content=5e164484fef2d4003e8a6f04&utm_medium=deeplink&utm_source=google-catalog. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[21]'Ypres,' Film Real Thriller,' *The Vancouver Sun*, p. 2. See Cook, *At the Sharp End* and *Lifesavers and Body Snatchers* for the Canadian experience at Second Ypres; *Ypres*.

[22]*Ypres*; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, p. 205.

[23]'The Canadians at Belle Vue Spur,' *Ypres*.

[24]'The Canadians at Belle Vue Spur,' *Ypres*; Cook, *No Place to Run*, p. 125.

[25]'The Canadians at Belle Vue Spur,' *Ypres*.

[26]'The Canadians at Belle Vue Spur,' *Ypres;* Cook, *No Place to Run*, p. 131.

[27]'The Second Battle of Ypres,' *Ypres*.

conveyed to audiences that the fighting at Ypres was brutal, with tens of thousands of Allied and German soldiers becoming casualties during the fighting between 22 April and 25 May, 1915.[28] The *Edmonton Journal's* reference to the muddy trenches and artillery indicated that Canadian and Allied soldiers experienced a daily grind of attrition during the month-long battle and experienced hardships in terms of physical and psychological casualties.[29] One journalist at the *Saskatoon Phoenix*, similarly impressed by the film's depiction of the battle, wrote,

> It will take about twenty years for the troops of the late war to master the words that are necessary to describe the gigantic inhuman mechanism of the great war. Let this picture Ypres serve in the meantime to record what words have not yet been found to record.[30]

As Clark suggested, *Ypres* informed all Canadians about the horrors of the war through the 'gun fodder' of young soldiers to emphasise that no virtue or glory can be found in war.[31]

While *Ypres* paid tribute to the living who endured the horrors of combat at Ypres, the film also served as a memorial to the soldiers who fought at Ypres: '*Ypres* is indeed a cenotaph in pictures, and the medium by which such hallowed memories could be so beautifully presented is deserving of national consideration.'[32] As expressed in the

[28]'The Second Battle of Ypres,' *Ypres.* R. H. Roy and Richard Foot, 'Canada and the Second Battle of Ypres.' *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*. Historica Canada. Article published July 27, 2006; Last Edited December 4, 2018. https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/battle-of-ypres. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[29]'New Film is Plain Tale,' *Edmonton Journal*, p. 57; See Cook, *Lifesavers and Body Snatchers*; Mark Osborne Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

[30]Gregory Clark, 'Deathless Story of Ypres Told in Remarkable Film,' *The Saskatoon Phoenix* (Saskatoon), May 8, 1926, p.14. https://www.newspapers.com/image/508239002/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[31]Clark, 'Deathless Story,' *The Saskatoon Phoenix*, p. 14; *Ypres*; Cameron Telch, '*Forgotten Men*: An International Comprehensive Documentary on Remembering the Horrors of the Great War,' *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2024): 171-177. https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjnse/article/view/79877. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[32]'British War Film Depicts Great Heroism in the War: Sincere Film of 'Ypres Glories' Worthy Monument to the Brave,' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, (Calgary), April 3, 1926, p.

film, Ypres was a place where the Canadians reflected their bravery in defending the British Empire against the German Army.[33] One journalist at *The Calgary Daily Herald* even urged that the film must be shown throughout the British Empire, as the dead at Ypres had 'the soul of the Empire.'[34]

In general, *Ypres* was well received by mid-1920s Canadian audiences, as it was promoted nationally in Canadian newspapers.[35] One reporter, for example, described the atmosphere at the Casino Theatre in Halifax as 'an indescribable noise, practically continuous, except in the graver moments, accompanies each showing of the film; applause here, laughter there, a lot of humming [of] the old familiar war tunes.'[36] Some journalists observed that Canadians were profoundly impacted by the film and were proud to witness their Canadian heroes on the silver screen.[37] To audiences, ordinary Canadian soldiers, including 18-year-old Tommy Holmes of Owen Sound, Ontario, who struck a German pillbox at Passchendaele, and Bobby Shankland of Winnipeg, who held the front lines at Bellevue Spur against ongoing German counterattacks, were heroes for sacrificing and enduring so much hardship at Ypres.[38] Canadians even called *Ypres* 'the best war picture' for its true-to-life depiction of the war.[39] Some

8. https://www.newspapers.com/image/481627147/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[33]'British War Film,' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, p. 8; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, p. 204. Cameron Telch, 'Resilience Among Canadian Soldiers: Surviving and Enduring the Great War,' *The Journal of the Western Front Association*, no. 34 (June 2024): 42-45.

[34]'British War Film,' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, p. 8; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, pp. 205-206.

[35]See 'British War Film,' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, p. 6; 'Ypres, Film Real Thriller,' *The Vancouver Sun*, p. 2.; 'R.M.R. at Capitol: Westmount Regiment Invited to Witness Ypres Film,' *The Gazette* (Montreal), March 11, 1926, p.7. https://www.newspapers.com/image/419648274/?match=1&terms=ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026; 'Crowds Seeing Great War Film: The Casino Presenting 'Ypres,' A Story of 'The Immortal Salient,' *The Evening Mail* (Halifax), May 12, 1926, p.11. https://www.newspapers.com/image/776660623/?match=1&terms=ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[36]'Crowds Seeing Great War Film,' *The Evening Mail*, p. 11.

[37]'Ypres' Gripped Another Big Crowd: Plain, Unvarnished Narrative of Four Years in The Salient,' *The Sault Daily Star*, (Sault St. Marie), May 12, 1926, p. 10. https://www.newspapers.com/image/735844472/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[38]'Ypres Gripped Another Big Crowd,' *The Sault Daily Star*, p. 10; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, p. 14, p. 182; Telch, 'Resilience Among Canadian Soldiers,' p. 43.

[39]'Ex-Service Men Interested in Film Ypres' *The Calgary Daily Herald*, (Calgary), April 6, 1926, p. 6.

Canadian newspapers advocated that Canadians should watch the film since it was emotionally compelling to watch Canada's soldiers fighting for King and Country on the battlefields of Ypres.[40]

Even as *Ypres* was praised nationally for its depiction of the Great War, not all Canadians were convinced. The President of the Toronto branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) argued that the film's makers could never recapture the actual horrors of the war. [41] The same commentator also criticised the creators of the film for pushing a war film onto Canadian audiences, especially at a time when Canadian families were still mourning their deceased loved ones.[42] The tone of the President's letter to the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star* revealed a concern that showing the film might undermine peace, especially as countries were rebuilding in the aftermath of the war.[43]

Conclusion

Though a British produced film, *Ypres* is nonetheless important to Canadian memory of the conflict. The film – which is focused on the three major battles at Ypres and was released in Canada in 1926 – provided an important learning opportunity for many contemporary Canadian viewers, revealing the horrors of the war through the reenacted scenes of combat and death. Although not everyone supported the film's release, as this brief analysis has revealed most Canadians seem to have been proud to watch and thereby better appreciate the crucial contributions to the eventual victory achieved by their fellow citizens.

https://www.newspapers.com/image/481627754/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film%3B%20audiences. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[40]'Ypres' at the Regent Next Week, With The Mudlarks, a Jack Arthur Divertissement,' *The Toronto Daily Star* (Toronto), February 18, 1926, p. 8. https://www.newspapers.com/image/930781765/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, p. 38; *Ypres*.

[41]'The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom,' *The Toronto Daily Star* (Toronto), March 10, 1926, p. 6. https://www.newspapers.com/image/931163867/?match=1&terms=Ypres%20film. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[42]'The Women's International,' *The Toronto Daily Star*, p. 6. For more information on how Canadians processed death after the war, see Tracey Nichole Iverson, 'An Empty Grave: Grief and Mourning on the Canadian Home Front in the First World War,' (Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2021). Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/1880/113860. Accessed 22 February 2026.

[43]'The Women's International,' *The Toronto Daily Star*, p. 6.

Escape from Moyale: Corporal Daniel Mawendo

MELVIN E PAGE*
East Tennessee State University, USA
Email: PAGEM@mail.etsu.edu

ABSTRACT
This significant early Second World War operation by 1 Kings African Rifles in East Africa is illuminated in newly available oral history interviews. The account featured here – the most extensive of those recorded – is placed in its historical context incorporating evidence from other newly released oral histories describing the same heroic action. And it is contextualised by reference to previous considerations of its importance.

Introduction

Kenyan historian Meshack Owino opens his survey of Africa and the Second World War by noting that

> in 1939, the colonial government in Kenya began military preparations for the outbreak of full-scale war. A colonial military unit was … dispatched to the Kenya border with Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland.[1]

After Italian success in overwhelming Ethiopian resistance, signalling Mussolini's imperial ambitions, six King's African Rifles (KAR) battalions were ultimately assigned to counter the numerically superior Italian forces on the British imperial frontier in East Africa. Owino does not mention the initial mobilisation involved primarily Nyasaland *askari* serving in the first battalion of the KAR. One of their number, Elton Nkhwazi, actually recalled his first combat experience was when 'the war started with

*Melvin E Page is Professor of History (Emeritus), East Tennessee State University, USA

DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i1.1963

[1]Meshack Owino, 'Africa and World War II', in Martin S. Shanguhyia and Toyin Falola, eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 355. Okete J.E. Shiroya's earlier *Kenya and World War II,* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), is much more a social history with minimal attention to specific theatres, deployments, or engagements.

the Italians at Moyale'.[2] That outstation was only a 'little mud-walled fort', one of three situated on the 'barren … entirely artificial border'.[3] Although Nkhwazi's company was later replaced by another at that isolated frontier outpost, in an ironic twist one of the two Second World War battlefield honours awarded his Nyasaland KAR battalion was for its actions in defence of Kenya Colony at Moyale in July 1940.

A quarter century later Malawi's then President, Kamuzu Banda – with a measure of his typical bluster – opened a second Malawi Army garrison at Mzuzu, naming it Moyale Barracks in honour of that 1 KAR milestone. Though the action at Moyale was not in defence of Nyasaland itself, the President was anxious to tap into what historian and KAR veteran George Shepperson recognized well before independence: that the tradition of 'the old soldier patriot has been a … notable feature of Nyasaland' – and later Malawian – history.[4] The KAR achievements at Moyale were certainly a significant part of that heritage and, in an effort to claim political advantage from them, Banda actually amplified the KAR accomplishment, claiming a great victory: '120 men holding at Moyale … defeated the Italians there and the Italians ran away. 4,000 Italians, not from an African tribe but Europeans, and 120 of our boys'![5]

Although the Italians ultimately proved no match for British forces in East Africa, the KAR. achievement at Moyale was actually of a different sort. After being surrounded by Italian troops, a company-sized Nyasaland unit defending the fort on the Ethiopian border, rather than surrendering, actually managed an extraordinary escape.[6] As KAR

[2]Elton Nkhwazi, interviewed 8 Jul 1991 at the Old Soldiers Memorial Home, Mzuzu by James Njoloma and the editor, in *Chiwaya War Echoes: Malawian Oral Histories of a Second World War and After* (Rickmansworth: Great War in Africa Association/TSL Publications, 2022), Interview 232, p. 259. Nkhwazi later served in Madagascar.

[3]Andrew Stewart, *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East Africa Campaign,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 9.

[4]George Shepperson, 'External Factors in the Development of African Nationalism, with Particular Reference to British Central Africa', *Phylon* 22, 3(1961): p. 212.

[5]H.K. Banda, 'Speech by the President Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda at the Opening of the Moyale Army Barracks at Mzuzu on December 5, 1967', (Blantyre: Malawi Information Department, 1967), p. 3. (Mimeo pamphlet.) Uncharacteristically, Banda actually reduced the number Italian attackers by one-half! See Stewart, *First Victory*, p. 56.

[6]The British official history, however, merely notes dryly that 'after three days of intermittent fighting the Brigade Commander judged that to hold Moyale any longer would absorb too much of his strength. The withdrawal was successfully achieved'. I.S.O. Playfair, *et al.*, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, v. 1, J.R.M. Butler, ed., *The Early Successes Against Italy (to May 1941).* History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Military Series. (London: HMSO, 1959), pp. 180-181.

regimental historian Lieutenant Colonel Hubert Moyse-Bartlett suggests, 'the evacuation of Moyale coincided with the grimmest period of the war' for Britain and offered a welcome glimpse of imperial military determination.[7] 'With Italy in the war and France out of it', for the British 'the future was desperate'; even General Sir Archibald Wavell, senior general in the region, suggested the subsequent East African Campaign was 'an improvisation after the British fashion in war'. Nonetheless, the KAR 'had fought well at Moyale' and contributed mightily to the ultimate British victory in East Africa.[8]

The 1940 action at Moyale is only briefly mentioned in some accounts considering Africa and the Second World War. Another KAR regimental history offers even less on the askari role than does Moyse-Bartlett.[9] And until recently the only published first-person account of the action was that of H.G. Graham-Jolly who, as a 1 KAR subaltern, commanded a mortar detachment at Moyale. He describes the nervousness which afflicted the entire garrison because it was under siege, though barely mentions the important role of the African *askari* in implementing the successful escape plan.[10] Even a more recent military history of the East Africa Campaign praises the officers who led the escape while downplaying contributions of 'the African troops alongside them, barefoot, carrying their rifles and ammunition'.[11] Newly available evidence, however, may rescue these ordinary African soldiers from near anonymity.

Danial Mawendo's *askari* oral history offers a counter-point to Graham-Jolly's recollections while confirming a number of the critical details. It is extracted from an interview recorded on 30 June 1991 with the assistance of the then Malawi Army historian, Lt. Col. James Njoloma. Corporal Mawendo spoke at the Old Soldiers' Memorial Home on the Cobbe Barracks campus in Zomba, Malawi. Mawendo's account of his Second World War military service includes this African version of the historic 1 KAR action at Moyale, by far the most complete of four Moyale survivor

[7]H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956), p. 489. The KAR retreat from Moyale occurred just six weeks after the end of the Dunkirk evacuation, receiving 'considerable acclaim in the British press'; Stewart, *First Victory*, p. 56.

[8]Michael Glover, *An Improvised War: The Ethiopian Campaign, 1940-1941* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987), p. 18, p. 28; Wavell quoted, p. 61.

[9]Malcolm Page, *A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces* (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), pp. 67-68; (the author is not related to the editor of this note.)

[10]H.G. Graham-Jolly, 'Moyale', *Society of Malawi Journal* 41, 2 (1988): pp. 10-15. Another account – relying heavily on the text of associated honorary award citations – is Harry Fecitt, 'The withdrawal from Moyale, 14th July [1940]', in 'Harry's Africa', http://www.kaiserscross.com/188001/583622.html. Accessed 28 Dec 2023.

[11]Stewart, *First Victory*, p. 57

testimonies collected from 1 KAR veterans during research undertaken in 1991 but only made publicly available in 2023.[12]

Corporal Mawendo's Story

Corporal Daniel Mawendo spoke of his experience with little hesitation and minimal interruptions:

> At the time I was joining the army I was staying at home, and I came to Zomba to live with my brother, Corporal Anderson Chikungwa. Staying with him, I discussed my willingness to join the army. … My actual reason for joining the army was the zeal and determination of seeing what it is that my brother was looking for in the army. So, having learnt its weak and strong points, I then … joined the army … [as a] bugler … [and] was assigned to be a member of the band. … [I was] sent … to Tabora … and I stayed there.
>
> Now reports got to us that there was need for a first class bugler in Somaliland. And they wanted someone no other than the one they had sent to Tabora, somebody no other than me! I had stayed for a month at Tabora as I was then only a bugler boy. In Somaliland it was a married bugler that they needed. So they said they were going to give me seven days off so that I had to go home and fetch a wife to accompany me to Somaliland.[13] I got my wife, and off I went to British Somaliland.
>
> Unfortunately there were submarines that were causing a lot of troubles in the under ocean. So they ordered us not to proceed because that could have affected our lives. So we went back to Tabora, … [though] in this war the band did not perform any task but those of the signals section. … However, we were told to proceed and meet the Italians; ... as a result we deployed[14]

[12]The complete interview is found in Page, *Chiwaya War Echoes*, Interview 217, pp. 193-203. This presentation of Mawendo's account was initially offered at the (U.S.) African Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, December 2023. The editor is grateful for comments received at that time, as well as suggestions from two anonymous *BJMH* readers; all of that advice served to improve this version.

[13]Despite a somewhat casual approach taken by officers toward marriage in the ranks, 'the one rule strictly enforced in all KAR battalions was that … every female living in the lines had to be endorsed by a District Officer, medical officer, and trusted African NCO', thus necessitating Mawendo's sudden leave; Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank and File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1954*, (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), p. 151.

[14]The interview transcript provided by the Malawi Army has 'diverched' here and elsewhere, but 'deployed' is substituted in each case.

at Moshi. Having done so, we were supposed not to proceed, but have a test of some sort. Our bosses requested us to go ahead. But since they were persuading us they just asked us to retrain and we did so for some time, enough for us to really get bored.[15] …

[When] you've trained quite enough the only thing remaining now is for you to open the actual fire [in combat]. We left that place and deployed at another place. We were received at that place and stayed there for a month or so. It seems the name of this place was Nanyuki, (Kenya). We then left Nanyuki and camped in the bush. There, a hot debate broke out as regards the war situation; as a result, we left for not Nahalewe, but this place called Moyale. We stayed here for almost a month.

At this time we were seeing our 'friends' just by, [that is] the Italians. We were seeing them in the mountains of Moyale. Then we complained because [our officers] were telling us not to shoot while we were seeing the enemies. We told them we were anxious to fight; we wanted to struggle with them. However, our bosses insisted on the point of not fighting. So, as [it was a] command, we had to obey. They told us to be cool until their power was reduced.

Now after this we had to show them our power. Then we were ordered to open fire and we did as commanded. The enemies started retreating at Moyale. Unfortunately they surrounded us.[16] Then we questioned: How are we going to get out of here? However, we did not want to show our power in the eyes of our enemies. We had to do it silently, and we did it successfully and silently.

We had our Greek [actually of Afrikaner origins] officer [Lieutenant Sarel E.] Du Toit. He advised us to take it easy while we were inside the gate and our enemies were parked outside. We agreed that if we were to be commanded not to fight or open fire, we should not open fire. Now *bwana* Du Toit advised

[15]Moyse-Bartlett nonetheless suggests 'the long period of training … proved extremely valuable' to KAR successes in the East Africa Campaign; *King's African Rifles*, p. 572.
[16]For details of the Italian dispositions see Marek Sobski, 'Fighting for Fort Moyale', in Marek Sobski, trans. Tomasz Basarabowicz, *East Africa 1940-1941 (land campaign): The Italian Army Defends the Empire in the Horn of Africa*, Mussolini's War, vol. 1 (Ziolana Góra: the author, 2020), pp. 110–116.

> us to be on the alert to care for our gun and *bandalia*[17] [and] to take off our shoes. We did as commanded. Now when the time [came], 11:30 PM, Captain [Lieutenant] Du Toit [sent us into action].
>
> While we had our doubts, he skilfully cut open … the wire [surrounding our camp] and made a door-like opening. The whole group of ours went through the wire. … One could not imagine that it was war … we had to fight on our arms; now that's an African battle! … We went out and the [Italian] soldiers were still looking inside the wire not knowing that we had gone out. We deployed so that our enemies were not to know how prepared we were. We had to follow our enemies from the rear while their eyes were still facing the gate. … Some Italians together with our planes died there. There were four dead Italians. The 'soldiers for the queen' [at that time King] had to pass by, [all] going to the same place and they did what they wanted. … That's when we had gone out of the wire. …
>
> We fought with the Italians and the war was over. … Now at that point everybody was dispatched home and that's where we were given our leave. … Then we all came back and … advanced for the second time. This time it was the battle against the Japanese. … Now this was at Burma.[18]
>
> Since I left this place [Malawi] a bit educated … I was good at compass and map reading. … That is why I had this chance of taking this intelligence work and leaving that of a bugler. … It was the same job that later on led to my being injured. … But after recovery I told them that I … insisted on going on to the battlefield, but they refused … [and then] after the war we were given a rest.

Contextualising Mawendo's account

In describing the escape from Moyale, Corporal Mawendo emphasises – as does Graham-Jolly – the broader significance of the action in which they were both engaged. His account also confirms the high level of *askari* morale at Moyale reported by the garrison commander, Captain J. David N.C. Henderson, in his after action report.[19] But unlike either of the regimental histories cited above, both Mawendo and Graham-

[17]Ammunition belt; the Hindi word came into common military use in East Africa, as the first British colonial soldiers serving there in the nineteenth century were from India

[18]For a moving account of this subsequent campaign, prominently featuring Nyasaland and other East African *askari*, see Gerald Hanley, *Monsoon Victory*, (London: Collins, 1946).

[19]Moyse-Bartlett, *King's African* Rifles, p. 489.

Jolly recognize the vital role played by Lieutenant Sarel E. Du Toit in the success of the daring escape plan, for which he, along with Captain Henderson, was subsequently awarded the Military Cross.[20] At last Corporal Mawendo's account gives an African voice to the heroic actions of the *askari* under their command.

However, neither his story, nor that of Graham-Jolly, nor the regimental history, mentions the fate of 'the badly wounded men [who] had to be left behind in the fort'.[21] Gordon Gondwe – another of the intrepid *askari* defenders who escaped at Moyale – was especially focused on their fate in his account, knowing 'the doctor had given them an injection to sleep'.[22] Italian sources indicate that having been 'left in the fort in a solid dugout' and awakening the next day, 'they, too, decided to break through the Italian lines. One of them was captured'.[23] That man – Lance Corporal Morton Chawinga – later recalled 'at Moyale we fought heavily; they died and also some of our colleagues died. I was injured at Moyale'. While thus unable to recount any details of his colleagues' escape, Chawinga only remembered 'after I got injured the enemies took me to Addis Ababa'.[24]

Along with other prisoners he was released a few months later, but mentioned almost no details of his experiences as a prisoner of war after he, too – in a quite different fashion – escaped from Moyale.[25] However, due to his injuries Lance Corporal Chawinga did not re-join his battalion for further campaigning. Nonetheless he remained both proud of his service, and – along with Mawendo and their fellow Moyale *askari* survivors – remains a worthy part of the soldier/patriot tradition in Malawian history. Though part of an inauspicious battlefield retreat, their limited success despite

[20]See Harry Fecitt, *The King's African Rifles and East African Forces in both World Wars*, vol. 2, *1939 – 1945*, (Great Britain, King's African Rifles and East African Forces Association, 2021), p. 163. None of the *askari* were similarly honoured.
[21]Moyse-Bartlett, *King's African* Rifles, p. 489.
[22]Gordon Gondwe, interviewed 8 Jul 1991 at the Old Soldiers' Memorial Home, Mzuzu by James Njoloma and the editor, in Page, *Chiwaya War Echoes*, Interview 234, p. 269. Gondwe later served in Madagascar and Burma.
[23]Sobski, 'Fighting for Fort Moyale', p. 114.
[24]Morton Chawinga, interviewed 8 Jul 1991 at the Old Soldiers' Memorial Home, Mzuzu by James Njoloma and the editor, in Page, *Chiwaya War Echoes*, Interview 231, p. 256.
[25] Prominent among the British prisoners of war was Somali Camel Corps Captain Eric C.T. Wilson, VC, whom Chawinga describes as 'my English boss', suggesting Wilson, as senior British POW, assumed command of the British prisoner contingent; see Fecitt, *King's African Rifles*, v. 2, p. 60. Wilson, Chawinga, and their fellow prisoners of war were released in April 1941, shortly after liberation of the Ethiopian capital; Stewart, *First Victory*, p. 210.

being 'hopelessly mismatched' at Moyale, served as an opening statement in the East Africa Campaign which ultimately encouraged the British public by 'demonstrating the power available to an empire still trying to come to terms with the … apparently preeminent power of the German blitzkrieg' which in summer 1941 seemed nearly invincible.[26] In meeting that global challenge, KAR *askari* – who 'proved their value in defence of their own homelands' in eastern Africa – were soon called upon 'to enter the wider sphere of operations' in defence of the British Empire.[27]

[26]Stewart, *First Victory*, pp. 56 and 233.
[27]Moyse-Bartlett, *King's African Rifles*, p. 574.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES (July 2021)

General

The British Journal of Military History (the BJMH or Journal) welcomes the submission of articles and research notes on military history in the broadest sense, and without restriction as to period or region. The BJMH particularly welcomes papers on subjects that might not ordinarily receive much attention but which clearly show the topic has been properly researched.

The editors are keen to encourage submissions from a variety of scholars and authors, regardless of their academic background. For those papers that demonstrate great promise and significant research but are offered by authors who have yet to publish, or who need further editorial support, the editors may be able to offer mentoring to ensure an article is successfully published within the Journal.

Papers submitted to the BJMH must not have been published elsewhere. The editors are happy to consider papers that are under consideration elsewhere on the condition that the author indicates to which other journals the article has been submitted.

Authors must provide appropriate contact details including your full mailing address.

Authors should submit their article or research note manuscript, including an abstract of no more than 100 words, as an MS Word file (.docx) attached to an e-mail addressed to the BJMH Co-editors at editor@bcmh.org.uk. All submissions should be in one file only, and include the author's name, email address, and academic affiliation (if relevant), with the abstract, followed by the main text, and with any illustrations, tables or figures included within the body of the text. Authors should keep in mind that the Journal is published in A5 portrait format and any illustrations, tables or figures must be legible on this size of page.

The BJMH is a 'double blind' peer-reviewed journal, that is, communication between reviewers and authors is anonymised and is managed by the Editorial Team. All papers that the editors consider appropriate for publication will be submitted to at least two suitably qualified reviewers, chosen by the editorial team, for comment. Subsequent publication is dependent on receiving satisfactory comments from reviewers. Authors will be sent copies of the peer reviewers' comments.

Following peer review and any necessary revision by the author, papers will be edited for publication in the Journal. The editors may propose further changes in the interest of clarity and economy of expression, although such changes will not be made without

consultation with the author. The editors are the final arbiters of usage, grammar, and length.

Authors should note that articles may be rejected if they do not conform to the Journal's Style Guide and/or they exceed the word count.

Also note that the Journal editors endorse the importance of thorough referencing in scholarly works. In cases where citations are incomplete or do not follow the format specified in the Style Guide throughout the submitted article, the paper **will** be returned to the author for correction before it is accepted for peer review. Note that if citation management software is used the footnotes in the submitted file must stand alone and be editable by the Journal editorial team.

Authors are encouraged to supply relevant artwork (maps, charts, line drawings, and photographs) with their essays. The author is responsible for citing the sources and obtaining permission to publish any copyrighted material.

The submission of an article, book review, or other communication is taken by the editors to indicate that the author willingly transfers the copyright to the BJMH and to the British Commission for Military History. However, the BJMH and the British Commission for Military History freely grant the author the right to reprint his or her piece, if published, in the author's own works. Upon the Journal's acceptance of an article the author will be sent a contract and an assignment of copyright.

There is no fee payable by authors to publish in the journal, and we do not pay authors a fee for publishing in the journal.

The British Journal of Military History, acting on behalf of the British Commission for Military History, does not accept responsibility for statements, either of fact or opinion, made by contributors.

Articles

The journal welcomes the submission of scholarly articles related to military history in the broadest sense. Articles should be a minimum of 6000 words and no more than 8000 words in length (including footnotes) and be set out according to the BJMH Style Guide.

Research Notes
The BJMH also welcomes the submission of shorter 'Research Notes'. These are pieces of research-based writing of between 1,000 and 3,000 words. These could be, for example: analysis of the significance a newly accessible document or documents; a reinterpretation of a document; or a discussion of an historical controversy drawing on new research. Note that all such pieces of work should follow the style guidelines for articles and will be peer reviewed. Note also that such pieces should not be letters, nor should they be opinion pieces which are not based on new research.

Book Reviews
The BJMH seeks to publish concise, accessible and well-informed reviews of books relevant to the topics covered by the Journal. Reviews are published as a service to the readership of the BJMH and should be of use to a potential reader in deciding whether or not to buy or read that book. The range of books reviewed by the BJMH reflects the field of military history, taken in the widest sense. Books published by academic publishers, general commercial publishers, and specialist military history imprints may all be considered for review in the Journal.

Reviews of other types of publication such as web resources may also be commissioned.

The Journal's Editorial Team is responsible for commissioning book reviews and for approaching reviewers. From time to time a list of available books for review may be issued, together with an open call for potential reviewers to contact the Journal Editors. The policy of the BJMH is for reviews always to be solicited by the editors rather than for book authors to propose reviewers themselves. In all cases, once a reviewer has been matched with a book, the Editorial Team will arrange for them to be sent a review copy.

Book reviews should generally be of about 700 words and must not exceed 1000 words in length.

A review should summarise the main aims and arguments of the work, should evaluate its contribution and value to military history as broadly defined, and should identify to which readership(s) the work is most likely to appeal. The Journal does not encourage personal comment or attacks in the reviews it publishes, and the Editorial Team reserves the right to ask reviewers for revisions to their reviews. The final decision whether or not to publish a review remains with the Editorial Team.

The Editorial Team may seek the views of an author of a book that has been reviewed in the Journal. Any comment from the author may be published.

All submitted reviews should begin with the bibliographic information of the work under review, including the author(s) or editor(s), the title, the place and year of publication, the publisher, the number of pages, the ISBN for the format of the work that has been reviewed, and the price for this format if available. Prices should be given in the original currency, but if the book has been published in several territories including the UK then the price in pounds sterling should be supplied. The number of illustrations and maps should also be noted if present. An example of the heading of a review is as follows:

Ian F W Beckett, *A British Profession of Arms: The Politics of Command in the Late Victorian Army*. Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 2018. Xviii + 350pp. 3 maps. ISBN 978-0806161716 (hardback). Price £32.95.

The reviewer's name, and an institutional affiliation if relevant, should be appended at the bottom of the review, name in Capitals and Institution in lower case with both to be right aligned.

Reviews of a single work should not contain any footnotes, but if the text refers to any other works then their author, title and year should be apparent in order for readers to be able to identify them. The Editorial Team and Editorial Board may on occasion seek to commission longer Review Articles of a group of works, and these may contain footnotes with the same formatting and standards used for articles in the Journal.

BJMH STYLE GUIDE (July 2021)

The BJMH Style Guide has been designed to encourage you to submit your work. It is based on, but is not identical to, the Chicago Manual of Style and more about this style can be found at:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html

Specific Points to Note

Use Gill Sans MT 10 Point for all article and book review submissions, including footnotes.

Text should be justified.

Paragraphs do not require indenting.

Line spacing should be single and a single carriage return applied between paragraphs.

Spellings should be anglicised: i.e. –ise endings where appropriate, colour etc., 'got' not 'gotten'.

Verb past participles: -ed endings rather than –t endings are preferred for past participles of verbs i.e. learned, spoiled, burned. While is preferred to whilst.

Contractions should not be used i.e. 'did not' rather than 'didn't'.

Upon first reference the full name and title of an individual should be used as it was as the time of reference i.e. On 31 July 1917 Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), launched the Third Battle of Ypres.

All acronyms should be spelled out in full upon first reference with the acronym in brackets, as shown in the example above.

Dates should be written in the form 20 June 2019.

When referring to an historical figure, e.g. King Charles, use that form, when referring to the king later in the text, use king in lower case.

Foreign words or phrases such as *weltanschauung* or *levée en masse* should be italicised.

Illustrations, Figures and Tables:

- Must be suitable for inclusion on an A5 portrait page.
- Text should not be smaller than 8 pt Gill Sans MT font.
- Should be numbered sequentially with the title below the illustration, figure or table.
- Included within the body of the text.

Footnoting:

- All references should be footnotes not endnotes.
- Footnote numeral should come at the end of the sentence and after the full stop.
- Multiple references in a single sentence or paragraph should be covered by a single footnote with the citations divided by semi-colons.
- If citation management software is used the footnotes in the submitted file must stand alone and be editable by the editorial team.

Quotations:

- Short (less than three lines of continuous quotation): placed in single quotation marks unless referring to direct speech and contained within that paragraph. Standard footnote at end of sentence.
- Long (more than three lines of continuous quotation): No quotation marks of any kind. One carriage space top and bottom, indented, no change in font size, standard footnote at end of passage.
- Punctuation leading into quotations is only necessary if the punctuation itself would have been required were the quotation not there. i.e. : ; and , should only be present if they were required to begin with.
- Full stops are acceptable inside or outside of quotation marks depending upon whether the quoted sentence ended in a full stop in the original work.

Citations:

- For books: Author, *Title in Italics*, (place of publication: publisher, year of publication), p. # or pp. #-#.
- For journals: Author, 'Title in quotation marks', *Journal Title in Italics*, Vol. #, Iss. # (or No.#), (Season/Month, Year) pp. #-# (p. #).
- For edited volumes: Chapter Author, 'Chapter title' in Volume Author/s (ed. or eds), *Volume title in italics*, (place of publication: publisher, year), p. # or pp. #-#.
- Primary sources: Archive name (Archive acronym), Catalogue number of equivalent, *'source name or description' in italics* if publicly published, p. #/date or equivalent. Subsequent references to the same archive do not require the Archive name.

- Internet sources: Author, 'title', URL Accessed date. The time accessed may also be included, but is not generally required, but, if used, then usage must be consistent throughout.
- *Op cit.* should be shunned in favour of shortened citations.
- Shortened citations should include Author surname, shortened title, p.# for books. As long as a similar practice is used for journals etc., and is done consistently, it will be acceptable.
- Ibid., with a full stop before the comma, should be used for consecutive citations.

Examples of Citations:

- Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 21.
- Michael Collins, 'A fear of flying: diagnosing traumatic neurosis among British aviators of the Great War', *First World War Studies*, 6, 2 (2015), pp. 187-202 (p. 190).
- Michael Howard, 'Men against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914', in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 510-526.
- The UK National Archives (TNA), CAB 19/33, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Sclater, evidence to Dardanelles Commission, 1917.
- Shilpa Ganatra, 'How Derry Girls Became an Instant Sitcom Classic', *The Guardian*, 13 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/feb/13/derry-girls-instant-sitcom-classic-schoolgirls-northern-ireland Accessed 20 April 2019.

Note: Articles not using the citation style shown above will be returned to the author for correction prior to peer review.