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**'Not for Queen and country or any of that shit...': reflections on citizenship and military participation in contemporary British soldier narratives.**

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**Soldiers, citizenship and denial**

In his narrative *For Queen and Country*, Nigel 'Spud' Ely tells a gripping tale of a military career with the Parachute Regiment and special forces, of active engagement as a soldier in the Falklands and Northern Ireland. The narrative is framed by reflection on the disjuncture between Ely's own understanding of his motivations for participation in the British Army, and what he sees as wider cultural myths which rationalise that participation in terms of citizenship as service to Crown and nation. Looking back on his Falklands experiences he quotes Dick, a friend and fellow soldier, who is adamant in his denial that their actions in the Falklands constituted some sort of personal sacrifice for wider national objectives:

People have asked me if I'm OK after the war, after killing people and all that shite. Well, I'm fine, thanks. It was my job, not for Queen and Country or any of that shit. Not for the people we liberated and not for the politicians who told the Argentines we were going to attack them the day before we actually did. [...] It was for the men who fought along side of me. (Dick, quoted in Ely, 2003: 243-244)

Dick's denial is startling in the degree to which it clearly and explicitly counters a political, cultural and sociological orthodoxy that equates the practice of military participation with the expression of citizenship through service to the nation. Dick's denial is not unique, however. It is representative of a feature of contemporary British soldier narratives, namely their engagement with these orthodoxies – more correctly, discourses – through which the meaning of being a soldier is articulated and debated. The ways in which these narratives

engage discursively is the focus of this chapter. These narratives, I will argue, are strategic interventions in long-standing and on-going cultural negotiations over the meaning of military participation, which include arguments about its citizenship effects.

Contemporary British soldier narratives, because of their strategic intent, are a rich resource for the issues around which this edited volume is framed. They are useful because they tell us what their authors – soldiers – think is important that we know. They engage directly with the practice of war, the articulation of citizenship and the construction and control of territory, and they do so in myriad ways. As Dick's denial illustrates, they frequently unsettle the easy conflation of military participation, national gain and service to the state. They do so in ways which destabilize and disturb comfortable myths about duty and sacrifice, community and nation, nationhood and territory. Sometimes, alternatively, they reinforce prevailing notions of solidarity, cohesion and bravery. Reading these narratives for what they say about military participation and citizenship means moving beyond the conceptualisation of the soldier as the passive recipient of rights and the bearer of obligations, and towards an understanding of the soldier as an active participant and protagonist in uneasy arguments about where, exactly, the contemporary British soldier sits in relation to the wider civilian society which he or she purportedly serves.

In this chapter, I start by outlining some key features of contemporary academic debates with regard to the idea of the soldier as citizen, in order to place my reading of contemporary British soldier narratives in a wider conceptual context. I go on to introduce soldier narratives and argue for their utility as an empirical textual resource in unpacking ideas about military participation and citizenship. I consider narratives' descriptions and reflections on the act of enlistment for what they say – and do not say – about the idea of soldiering as the performance of citizenship, and see the limited reflection on this within these narratives as an outcome not just of the conventions of the genre, but also of the conventions through which the figure of the soldier is understood within British culture. I then go on to look at how a specific discourse of citizenship, as 'mateship', is articulated in these narratives, both in lieu of statements about national service, and as a strategy to engage with, counter, and destabilize

both state-military and popular discourses about the meaning of the soldier. I conclude that studies of the citizen-soldier need to pay due heed to these statements about what soldiers think, not because of any naïve desire to reclaim lost voices, but rather because of the significance of the genre of the contemporary British soldier narrative in shaping what we, collectively, think of the contemporary British soldier.

### **The British soldier-citizen**

The quotation above, refuting the idea of military action as an act of explicit citizenship in service to the nation, jars when considered in the context of more conceptually abstract writing on citizenship and military participation. This body of work understands military participation as inextricably bound to the expression of and negotiations over citizenship. An orthodoxy in military sociology, drawing on the observations of Weber and expressed most clearly by Janowitz and later Moskos in North American post-war military sociology, rests on the idea of the citizen-soldier. For the citizen-soldier, military participation is understood as service to a wider community beyond the military unit, undertaken in exchange for the (variously defined) benefits of citizen-membership. Whether conceptualised in terms of a liberal discourse of citizenship, where military service is provided by the individual in exchange for political, social and civic rights (following the work of Janowitz), or a republican discourse where military participation is symbolic of the willingness of the individual to make personal sacrifice for the wider good of the nation, contemporary military sociology is clear on the connections that military participation consolidates between the individual and the nation state (Barbalet, 1988; Heater, 1999; Sasson-Levy, 2003a, 2003b; Cowan, 2005). This connection has been understood as fluid and contingent, varying with the modes of enlistment (conscription or voluntary) and military organisational structure (Burk, 1995; van der Meulen and Manigart, 1997; Soeters et al, 2003) and with shifts in the moral values of the wider society (Abrams and Bacevich, 2001; Morgan, 2003). More recent analyses have drawn on the insights of, for example, political economy (see, for example, Cowan, 2005), identity politics and nationhood (see, for example, Sasson-Levy, 2003a, 2003b; Kanaaneh, 2005), and gender (Feinman, 2000; Gullace, 2002) in promoting greater understanding of the

soldier-citizen nexus in both contemporary and historical contexts. Specifically, much contemporary and critical sociological and historical inquiry has opened up academic explorations of the citizen-soldier by examining this nexus in discursive terms, and with a view to the agency of soldiers themselves.

The narratives under discussion here have been written by former members of the British armed forces, self-identified as British nationals, producing books written for a predominantly British readership. In view of this, and in view of my use of these texts to discuss citizenship issues, it is pertinent to consider whether contemporary studies of the sociology of the British military have anything to say about citizenship. In fact, there is a paucity of research explicitly on the citizen-soldier issue. Much of the literature outlining the concept of the citizen-soldier is based on empirical materials from the United States, where long traditions stretching back to the Civil War (and indeed to the War of Independence; see Kestnbaum, 2000) have been examined to show how ideas of military service as national service are fundamental to the foundation myths of the US nation state. Similarly, we can identify a rich body of work from Israel, where the citizenship-military service nexus is so visible because of the status of the military in Israeli political, economic and cultural life (Sasson-Levy, 2002, 2003 a, b). Studies of the sociology of the military in Britain have concentrated primarily on its institutional and organisational aspects (for an overview, see Dandeker, 2000). This literature follows the dominant concerns of the British Armed Forces in the post-Second World War period, a time when military engagements involving British forces have not been about nation-building. The discursive framing of British military activities internationally has certainly touched upon issues of nationhood with, for example, state representations of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas conflict as a British territorial issue, or peace-keeping and conflict resolution operations in, for example, Bosnia or Sierre Leone, portrayed as the gifting of British notions of order and stability to chaotic places. However, nation-building has not been a cause of armed conflict for the British armed forces from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Reflecting this, issues of citizenship and nationhood have figured less prominently within British sociological studies of the military than in, for example, the North American or Israeli literature.

This is not to say that these issues have been entirely ignored. Recent work on veterans, for example, explores current policy debates in order to ascertain how veterans of the British armed forces are treated and rewarded for past service (Dandeker et al, 2006). Research on the high levels of homelessness amongst former armed forces personnel has exposed the gulf between ideas of social rewards in return for military service, and the reality of this for many people (Higate, 1997, 2000). Research into the attitudes towards and experiences of the British armed forces amongst minority ethnic communities touches on questions of citizenship and belonging for first, second and third-generation minority ethnic citizens, many of whom have their origins in families and communities with long histories of service in the British forces (Hussein and Ishaq, 2002 a-d). Research on military personnel and gender identity shows how ideas about masculinity and place intertwine for the soldier (Woodward, 1998, 2003, 2006). Yet, as Gibson and Abell (2004) point out, there is little social scientific research in the British context about questions of military participation and identity in terms of national identification. For example, John Hockey's *Squaddies* (1986) and his subsequent reworking of this material (Hockey, 2002, 2003), one of the very few sociological studies of contemporary British Army life, is largely silent on questions about soldiers' perceptions of the wider meanings of military service. As a consequence, and in the absence of a coherent body of work on this,

...national consciousness and 'patriotic' motivation are often projected into the mind of the soldier by both politicians and social scientists. (Gibson and Abell, 2004: 873).

Gibson and Abell's work, which entailed interviewing a small sample of serving soldiers about their understanding of the meaning of military participation, argues that ideas about identity, nationhood and service are not absent, but rather that they are qualified and sometimes silenced by competing discourses. For example, the soldiers interviewed for their study are reticent about explaining military participation in terms of national pride and national service because of the connotations within British cultural life between explicit statements on national identity and racism, particularly as articulated by far-right political groups. This observation is interesting when set alongside Dick's denial quoted above; it indicates that the absence of an articulated idea need not be taken at face value, but rather needs to be unpacked in the

context of the discourses in which ideas are expressed. We need to look at the details, nuances, caveats.

With this in mind, my intention here is not to propose a broad agenda for the pursuit of citizenship studies in contemporary British military social science. My aims are more modest, and focussed more explicitly on the discursive representation of the figure of the British soldier in contemporary culture. Representations of the British soldier abound<sup>1</sup>; here, my intention is to interrogate one particular resource – contemporary British soldiers' narratives, memoirs and autobiographical accounts – and to ask what consideration of these texts can bring to our understanding of the citizen-soldier nexus. As Dick's denial illustrates, and as I will argue in this chapter, soldier narratives engage continually with discourses surrounding the figure of the soldier. Indeed, for many of these narratives, this is their point. Furthermore, these discourses speak to a huge variety of issues affecting the representation of the soldier; the citizenship issue is but a small part of the bigger story that these narratives tell. The question that therefore follows is what these narratives, when conceptualised as strategic interventions, bring to our understanding of the soldier as citizen? We can start answering that by turning to the narratives themselves.

### **On the use of soldier narratives**

Soldier narratives are endlessly fascinating. They are many things to many people, offering over time a huge diversity of post-hoc explanations, rationalisations and justifications for actions and activities that are variously and simultaneously unpopular and celebrated, unknown and famous, mundane and extraordinary (for an overview, see Vernon, 2005a; Hynes, 1997). They continue to fascinate us – as evidenced by sales volumes and their continued presence in the 'Military' section of bookshops – not only for the stories that they tell about the impact of organised violence on those caught up in its prosecution and effects, but also for what they tell us about our collective cultural responses to the practice of organised violence.

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<sup>1</sup> A research project currently in progress with myself, Trish Winter and K. Neil Jenkins is investigating representations of the British soldier more widely in both print media and in soldiers' own photography collections. See 'Negotiating identity and representation in the mediated Armed Forces', ESRC ref: RES-000-23-0992.

There is, of course, a range of opinion on how these soldier narratives can and should be read, reflecting debates within literary studies over the use and critique of autobiography and memoir in the reconstruction of events and renegotiation of their meanings (and for an introduction to these debates, see King, 2000; Anderson, 2001). One view of these soldiers' narratives is that they constitute one metanarrative – in Hynes' view, "the soldiers' tale" – that is celebratory of the authenticity of the combat soldier's experience, and the consequences of such activities for the individual (Hynes, 1997). Others are more cautious, alert to the partiality of memory, the motivation and intentionality in their writing, and the politics of their production and consumption (for a good overview of these issues, see Vernon, 2005b).

Bearing in mind these debates about the universality and partiality of soldier narratives, I want to make two points about their utility for exploring debates about citizenship. First, as I have already suggested, these narratives can be read as strategic interventions in broader social debates about what it means to be a soldier, carrying with them vigorous assertions about their veracity. Alert to their readership and market, these narratives ground themselves on assertions about their 'truth' (however fantastical this might appear to the reader) and do so through their presentation of the self, the narrator, as ordinary (however extraordinary that person might be) and thus believable. These assertions about their 'truth' are important for marketing purposes; the stamp of authenticity guarantees sales to a readership intrigued by questions about what military violence is actually like. This is significant if we consider how tenuous connections are for most contemporary British citizens with the armed forces. Given the small size of the contemporary British armed forces these narratives are a significant source of information for a readership which, more likely than not, will have little or no direct or relational experience of the armed forces. In using these narratives as a textual source, we have to be alert to the claims about 'truth' that are inherent in a genre that is aware of its role in speaking to a wider readership, whilst remembering that, like all memoirs, they are inherently partial and selective. They tell us what their writers consider important that we should know. This tension in the act of reading does not necessarily close off these narratives as a source of information and reflection about military issues; indeed, there is a

significant body of historical and contemporary cultural analysis which has looked explicitly at soldier narratives and their role in shaping social responses and collective myths about specific conflicts. For example, it is a truism that our contemporary understanding of the First World War has been developed by successive generations' readings and interpretations of the memoirs and narratives produced by those participating directly in that conflict (Fussell, 1975; Leed 1979; Lunn, 2005; Watson, 2004; Winter and Prost, 2005). For John Newsinger, who has written about military memoirs about the British armed forces' Malayan campaign (1948-60), and about special forces' activities in the 1980s and 1990s, these memoirs are a central component of British national culture and identity, promoting ideas about what it means to be British to a wider public hungry for heroic ideas (Newsinger, 1994, 1997). Foster (1997, 1999) similarly draws an explicit connection between military memoirs of the Falklands war and their function in articulating ideas about national identity. So these narratives are not just about 'telling it like it is' (a common assertion in the genre) but are also strategic engagements with dominant discourses shaping widely-shared beliefs about the national significance of specific military actions.

The second point is about who writes, and does not write, narratives about their soldiering experience. Harari (2005), following Leed (1979), argues that the writing of the soldier narrative is an act of self-preservation, a way of getting to grips with and understanding the aberrance of war. They are 'the means by which the dreadful events of war were recast into an acceptable story of a 'normal' life (p.71). Furthermore, those who actually get down to it and write about their experiences are distinct in that they are those for whom war doesn't entirely contradict their pre-war expectations. They see connections between the lived experience of armed conflict and a life beyond and outside that. This is a significant point for soldier narratives because that connection with a life beyond almost inevitably includes within it ideas about the wider meaning and logic of the act of military participation. Soldier narratives are written by those who wish to 'tell it like it was', because these truths are often identified as absent in wider social debates about soldiers.

We should approach soldier narratives, then, alert to their purpose and function both as things written and things read. Being aware of this emphasises the point that they should be read not as innocent tales of reality, but as strategic interventions. This makes them very interesting as commentaries on the issue at the heart of this chapter, about how ideas about citizenship are articulated by soldiers themselves. We should be alert, though, to how the conventions of the genre shape, enable and restrict the articulation of those ideas; there are epistemological and methodological limits to the use of narratives as a data source for the interrogation of ideas of citizenship, as there are with any empirical resource.<sup>2</sup>

The genre used here is a sizeable one. I focus on published narratives by British soldiers writing about their experiences of military participation from the 1970s onwards in conflicts and situations such as Northern Ireland and the Falklands, Bosnia and the first Gulf War, Sierra Leone and the Iraq war. This genre is targeted at a specific segment of the British book-buying public, an elusive group of primarily adult male readers, traditionally in publishing terms a segment of the market not much given to buying and reading books. Broadly speaking, two types of narrative dominate this market. First, there are tales of elite combat adventure, a prime example of which would be Andy McNab's *Bravo Two Zero*, an account of special forces action behind enemy lines in the 1991 Gulf War. Having sold over 1.5 million copies, McNab has gone on to a successful career as an author of fictional stories about elite forces action, but the fiction is not considered here. McNab is one of many giving contemporary manifestation to a much older tradition in soldier memoirs, noted by Newsinger (1994, following Green 1980), both constituting and feeding into the 'energising myths of English imperialism', where action-adventure is celebrated in stories soldierly skill, technical competence and masculine virtues. In these we see the simultaneous refutation of easy ideas about military participation as national service, and their replacement with much more equivocal or ambiguous arguments about what military participation may or may not imply in

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<sup>2</sup> Narratives are a cultural product, read for the ideas and meanings that they convey, and for the ways in which they engage or counter wider discourses about the meaning of the soldier. They are valuable for the exploration of the construction of meaning, in that they are self-conscious about their readership and reception. They are valuable for an examination of the discourses around military participation and citizenship in the public realm. To re-state, they tell us what their authors think is important that we know, and they do so unprompted. Their limitation, of course, is that (unlike interviews) we cannot ask questions back to their authors, or prompt for a greater degree of explanation.

terms of service or commitment to another, wider soldier group, beyond the soldier himself (the author is almost inevitably male). Examples include Cameron Spence's *Sabre Squadron* and *All Necessary Measures*, Chris Ryan's *The One That Got Away*, Andy McNab's *Bravo Two Zero*, Phil Ashby's *Unscathed*, Michael Asher's *Shoot to Kill*, Nigel Ely's *For Queen and Country*, Vince Bramley's *Forward Into Hell*, Sarah Ford (a rare woman)'s *One Up*, Peter Ratcliffe's *Eye of the Storm* and Hugh McManners' *Falklands Commando*. The second type identifiable in this market constitutes a much smaller body of vindication narratives, where the personal story is set out as a means of writing through trauma and justifying courses of action explained in terms of that trauma. The traumatic impetus may be anything from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to a disciplinary issue. These narratives are less concerned with consolidating a representation of the soldier, and more with the analysis of the effects of soldierly acts on the individual. Examples include Barry Donnan's *Fighting Back*, Tony McNally's *Cloudpuncher* and Milos Stankovic's *Trusted Mole*. Although I have drawn a distinction between these two types here, some narratives will inevitably straddle both categories; see for example Kevin Mervin's *Weekend Warrior* and Ken Lukowiak's *A Soldier's Song*.

In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on two ideas common to these narratives – explanations for the act of enlistment, and explanations of the the wider social group identified as the beneficiary of military action. I have chosen these, from amongst the huge range of ideas about soldiering that these narratives collectively propose, because they illustrate so clearly both the ideas about citizenship circulating in these narratives, and the wider strategic purpose that these narratives serve.

### **Enlisting to serve one's fellow citizens**

Let us start with the act of swearing allegiance. The process of enlistment into the Army and Royal Air Force<sup>3</sup> is marked by the recruit swearing the 'loyal oath', an oath of allegiance to the Crown.

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<sup>3</sup> Recruits to the Royal Navy do not swear the loyal oath, for historical reasons relating to the sovereign's prerogative.

I [name] swear by almighty God<sup>4</sup> that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and successors and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty, her heirs and successors, in person, crown and dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors and of the generals/air officers [depending on Service] and other officers set over me.

The transformation process turning civilian into soldier is set in motion by the act of swearing the loyal oath as a public statement of purpose and intent, binding the would-be soldier to the defence of the state. 'Then I held my hand up and swore an oath to protect the Queen...'  
(Asher 1990: 15). This point of entry is useful too for an exploration of military citizenship and participation.

Some narratives omit entirely any discussion of the decision to enlist and the transition process from civilian to soldier. Cameron Spence, for example, writing as a former special forces operative with experience in Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, has no need to introduce to the reader any information about a civilian persona he might once have had. This information, by its absence, is rendered irrelevant in a narrative contained entirely within a military life (Spence, 1998, 1999). His silence is indicative in a genre that celebrates action rather than reflection. Many narratives, however, break this silence and explore to varying degrees the decision to commit, and the meanings attached to that decision for these young men.

For some writers, the decision to enlist is presented as almost inevitable. Milos Stankovic summarises the event briskly, telling a tale of enlistment as an almost inevitable progression from leadership and proto-military success at school (head boy, head of the school's Combined Cadet Force<sup>5</sup>) to leadership and success (later thwarted) in the Army. 'The day

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<sup>4</sup> Those who do not believe in God may "solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm.. "

<sup>5</sup> The Combined Cadet Force provides proto-military, adventurous activities for senior school pupils, within the school. The implicit intention of the CCF is to encourage officer recruitment; CCF units are primarily associated with public (i.e. private, fee-paying) schools in Britain.

after my last A Level [...] I walked into the Army recruiting office on Mayflower Street in Plymouth and enlisted in the Parachute regiment.' (Stankovic, 2000: 43). His fall from grace, an investigation into his activities as an interpreter for British forces in Bosnia instigated by a suspicious US government is all the more shocking given the seeming inevitability of his chosen career. Similarly, Phil Ashby's account of capture and escape in Sierra Leone is introduced with a self-portrait of a sporting, physically resilient, brave (but not reckless) adventurous type (just the sort of man to escape capture in Sierra Leone). He is ready to leave school and is destined for Cambridge University (an elite educational establishment). He is deterred from enlisting by his age and the persona of a recruiting officer. Then a careers officer from the Royal Marines visits his school, takes a group off for a run, a swim in a river and to the pub. 'This was much more my kind of thing. Plus you only had to be seventeen and a half to join the Marines. So, at seventeen and a half and three days, I joined ...' (Ashby 2003: 7). The idea of military participation as an act of national service is absent in these narratives, which instead recount the decision to enlist as so obvious and seamless that any great introspection is unwarranted.

For many narratives, a fuller explanation of the act of enlistment is more necessary because an explanation of the rationale for joining up establishes at the outset of the narrative a starting point and context for the actions and motivations that follow. In this way, Chris Ryan, in his account of escape and evasion in Iraq following the compromise of his Special Air Service Bravo Two Zero patrol during the 1991 Gulf War, introduces himself as a man who grew up on the rural fringes of industrial north-east England. His involvement with the SAS, he says, 'could be traced back to my love of being in open country' (Ryan, 1995: 80). His enlistment was almost inevitable, following a logic established by his semi-rural background: 'By the time I was 16, all I wanted was to join the army' (Ryan, 1995: 85). The soldier who walked alone through the Iraqi desert to reach safety in Syria is seen at the outset as the boy who liked to adventure outdoors. A very different explanation, given through the same structural conventions of the narrative form, comes from Ken Lukowiak in his account of a life soldiering and smoking (later smuggling) marijuana. This narrative, shot through with ironic wit, constructs a persona able to rationalise being stoned whilst still in charge of a weapon.

Lukowiak's decision to enlist is linked explicitly with a search for male identity: 'my reason for joining up was that I wanted to become a 'real man'' (Lukowiak, 2000: 9). Michael Asher, with a background in the Parachute regiment and special forces, notes likewise: 'As a teenager, the men on those posters seemed to represent everything I wanted to be.' (Asher, 1990: 10) So he recounts how he becomes just that, and underscores the contrast between the life chosen and the life left behind when he recalls his feelings as he lay in his bunk and the end of his first day of training:

I was gripped by the same mixture of fear and excitement which had come and gone all day. I had become the hero of one of the adventure books I read so avidly. I was afraid, yet I had no wish to return to my dull town and its dull grammar school. I had finally broken out of the prison of my humdrum childhood. For better or for worse, I had taken my destiny in my own hands. What the army represented most to me at that moment was escape. (Asher, 1990: 10).

The idea of enlistment as escape dominates these action-adventure narratives. Sarah Ford joins the Navy (and goes on to serve with an elite intelligence unit in Northern Ireland) precisely, she tells us, to escape from the limitations of a working-class, post-industrial city where for a woman like her money is tight and options limited (Ford, 1997). Andy McNab portrays a self that survived a failed special forces mission as the same lad that escaped a civilian life of dead-end labour and petty crime that led to a spell on remand:

I hated being locked up and swore that if I got away with it I'd never let it happen again. I knew deep down that I'd have to do something pretty decisive or I'd end up spending my entire life in Peckham, fucked about and getting fucked up. The army seemed a good way out. (McNab, 1993: 20)

For action-adventure narratives, this idea of self-initiated escape is significant in setting up the narrator as an adventurer; subsequent actions stand on foundations established by the transcendent acts of their protagonists. For those less fortunate, those harmed or damaged by military trauma, the act of enlistment similarly serves as a foundation for understanding subsequent acts, although the purpose of setting out an explanation for enlistment is rather different. These narratives are stories of what went wrong, and for those who enlisted looking

for adventure, or affirmation of an identity, there is so much further to fall. Tony McNally, for example, in a memoir of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that he attributes to things seen and done during the 1982 Falklands campaign, the gulf between expectation as a potential recruit and reality as a soldier is unbearably wide:

I can always remember wanting to be a soldier from a very early age. I had a fascination for toy guns, tanks, planes, anything military, and spent hours staging my own wars in the back yard destroying whole divisions in one fell swoop with a large mud-ball. (McNally, 2000: 1)

He goes into the Cadets at school, presents himself as a keen recruit, yet he ends up handing back his medals as a protest at what the Army has done to him.

In all these narratives, then, the connections are made between a civilian life, the features of which prompted a decision to enlist, and the escape offered by a military career. Military participation as service to Queen, country and the nation is a remote idea, noteworthy by its absence. None of these narratives describe the decision to become a soldier and to enlist in terms of either citizenship rights (where enlistment will bring social benefits) or citizenship obligations (where enlistment entails serving one's country or nation). Furthermore, although we see hints in these accounts of the decision to enlist as an economically rational one – McNab and Ford both talk about the absence of other options open to people of their class and background – the idea of enlistment as primarily economically motivated (see Cowan, 2005; Bellany, 2003) is played down.

The relative silence about motivations for enlistment is significant in terms of what they narratives tell us about citizenship. One could explain this with reference to the conventions and expectations of the genre. Soldier narratives of the action-adventure type are marketed as stories of action, heroism and bravery, where an individual's actions are driven through his or her response to events unfolding (often very rapidly) around. These action narratives are not sold as introspective meditations on the meanings of military action (even though I am of course reading them as this!). Although we find passing comments on either personal or wider meanings, these are incidental. The genre demands that these stories are told using

specific conventions, and personal insight into motivations for big questions such as ‘why am I doing this? Why am I in the Army?’ is not one of them. Furthermore, British popular cultural ideas about the figure of the soldier, into which these narratives speak, are traditionally emphatic about the stoicism of the soldier (we talk of ‘soldiering on’, of being a ‘real trooper’), the capacity of the enlisted member of the ranks (the grunts, the squaddies) for sustained physical enterprise, the dangers of too much intellectual introspection when faced with a task in hand. To ponder extensively on the reasons for joining up is simply unsoldierly.

The absence of detail about enlistment, then, is understandable given the conventions of the soldier narrative genre and the wider discourses about the soldier with which these narratives engage. The act of enlistment, culminating in the swearing a public oath of allegiance of service to the Crown, a declaration of service and citizenship, merits little introspection.

### **‘Mateship’: expressing a different sort of citizenship**

I have suggested that statements such as Dick’s denial, rejecting notions of military participation as citizenship, are unusual in their vehemence but not in substance. But reading these narratives, it is impossible to ignore how although the idea of ‘national service’ is rejected, an alternative notion of citizenship – in the sense of an individual’s service to a wider group, for the benefits of that group – is both articulated and enacted. This alternative notion could be termed ‘mateship’.<sup>6</sup>

That ‘mateship’ as a bond within a group is a feature of military participation is not an original observation. For example, in his examination of the experience of National Service, David Morgan draws out how the mass conscription of young men for National Service after the Second World War relied heavily on the inculcation amongst conscripts of ideas about collective gender identities (Morgan, 1987). A current (Spring 2006) advertising campaign for

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<sup>6</sup> What I shorthand as ‘mateship’ has specific connotations in other national contexts, most obviously in the ANZAC tradition and in the myths about the military and nationhood of Australia and New Zealand. What I identify here, for want of an alternative term, as ‘mateship’ has both continuities and differences between the ANZAC idea – and comparison between the two would be a story in itself.

the Army continues this idea through a poster campaign advertising the benefits of Army enlistment as constituting membership of a bonded group: 'Stand shoulder to shoulder', says one; 'Do it for each other' says another. The idea of a bonded unit or group is a persistent feature of military historical accounts and military fiction; the band of brothers makes for a good war story, as Spielberg recognised. Contemporary soldier narratives share this; the articulation of this idea is common to these narratives and constitutes a key structural feature of the stories within the story. Just as we have the enlistment story, the close-combat story and the drinking story, so we also have stories about mateship. These cluster around two main themes; regimental identification and unit or group cohesion, and it is to these that I now turn.

Stories within these narratives about regimental identification are significant in British soldier narratives, reflecting the fact that the regimental system is a distinctive feature of the British Army, organisationally and culturally (French, 2006). Within the infantry, where the majority of soldier narratives are located, regimental affiliation reflects and signifies all sorts of things, from regional identification (many regiments are historically identified with specific parts of Britain, and many still recruit primarily from these areas) to battle roles, from class connotations to elite aspirations. Love for and loyalty to the regiment are worn visibly through cap-badge, enacted through regimental rituals, embodied in tattoos. It is learnt: although many soldiers will join a specific regiment because of family connections, many others will not, and regimental loyalty is inculcated, encouraged, enforced and trained. The regiment becomes many things: a marker of collective identity within the Army; a source of pride; a surrogate family and a source of wider support for the soldier's own family.

Given the significance of the regimental system to the British Army, it is not surprising that regimental affiliation and identification is discussed throughout these soldier narratives. Asher, Ely and Lukowiak, all former members of the Parachute Regiment, celebrate explicitly in their memoirs the idea of this particular grouping as a warrior elite of resilient men and the glory and traditions of what Lukowiak calls 'the maroon machine' (after the claret berets the Paras wear). McNally, whose narrative is one of trauma and recovery written out of betrayal

and vindication, still speaks of his inculcation into the regimental culture of the Royal Artillery with pride. He is aware of the intentionality behind practices that promote regimental identification, so talks, for example, of small things like being tormented into buying sips of pop and bites of chocolate bars by his superiors in the ranks: 'Eventually, when we became Senior Gunners, we would continue this profitable tradition.' (McNally, 2000: 4). He talks of his pride in wearing white lanyards, a symbol of regimental identification. Years later, being treated for PTSD he appears on television to talk about his case, and although he has handed back his campaign medals as a mark of protest against his treatment, he still wears his regimental blazer and campaign ribbons on television. In soldier narratives, to fight, and to fight well and bravely, is an action undertaken not for the good of the wider nation, but for the glory of the regiment. McNab talks repeatedly and proudly of patterns of organisation and behaviour in 'the Regiment', the SAS. Ely reflects on this when he is taken on a tour of the regimental museum of the Scots Guards, and he finds himself moved by the displays of medals and paintings of past conflicts:

From Waterloo and the Somme through to Tumbledown in the Falklands, men had laid down their lives for their mates and their Regiment and, quite possibly, for Queen and Country as well. That visit reminded me of the feeling I get when I hear the bagpipes play on Armistice Day and I give a thought to all those mates I have lost too.' (Ely, 2003: 346).

Although national service is invoked, regimental loyalty wins out. Soldier narratives may not express citizenship with reference to a wider civilian social group, but they certainly do with reference to their regiment.

Similarly, at the sub-regimental level, citizenship as 'mateship' is expressed with reference to group or unit cohesion. 'Mateship' runs as a distinct thread through soldier narratives, which tell of group solidarity, of teamwork, of reliance on others, of mutual dependence. In these narratives, there is an over-riding sense that this is where citizenship resides; not in the idea of service to an abstract notion of nation, or a collective of faceless individuals, but with the immediate unit. This bonded, cohesive unit is celebrated in these narratives, for its existence as well as for its actions, from McNab and Spence's tales of elite infantry performance, to

Lukowiak and Mervin's hard slog in the ranks. Ely and his patrol, as they advance towards Goose Green on the Falkland Islands, come under sustained small arms fire and are separated from the rest of their platoon, caught between friendly and enemy fire:

None of us was in a position to put rounds down on the enemy. So we had to move. It was our job. The passion and the aggression which we all had for getting on and finishing the job did not come from a loyalty to Queen and country or to the politicians who had sent us here, or from the thought of another power taking over a part of the United Kingdom. The officers might have thought about this Queen and country bollocks, but we blokes didn't. We were doing this for ourselves and for the Regiment. (Ely, 2003: 187).

Advancing towards Teal Inlet during the same campaign, Bramley, also a Para, explains his motivation for continued endurance in terms of what it would mean for the bonded group if he gave up:

We set off very slowly, spaced out in one long line. We hobbled over the hill in front of us only to see more hills and marshes. I began to become conscious of my toe, and the more I thought about it, the worse it felt. However, the thought of dropping out at that stage seemed a fate worse than death and so I fought the pain. It *is* funny, looking back, but the further we went into the campaign, the less I thought of my home or family. I wasn't thinking of Queen and Country either. I thought of myself and the lads around me. Letting the side down was my biggest fear. That fear kept me walking. (Bramley, 2006: 73-74)

But for two reasons, there is more to this notion of 'mateship' – and its function in soldier narratives – than merely romantic notions of a bonded fraternal group, willing to sacrifice the self for the benefit of immediate others.

First, group cohesion, under the label 'unit cohesion' is a deliberately inculcated outcome of military training. Seeing it as such is not to dispute the existence of genuine emotion about group loyalty in these narratives. We should be alert, however, to its existence as an intentional product of the military training process. Military training establishments, from the

elite Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for officer training, down to the Army Training Regiments for infantry establish through instruction, example and manipulation the idea in the soldier that unit cohesion is inextricably linked to the successful achievement of military objectives. But the development of the capacity in the soldier to cohere and bond with his or her unit<sup>7</sup> is not only understood as a tactical military necessity. As Rodgers argues, with reference to the use of extensive training for US Army recruits during the Second World War, such training was used as a deliberate compensatory mechanism to substitute for missing organic social bonds that in other times and places might have provided sufficient impetus on their own for soldiers' motivations to fight (Rodgers, 2005). There is a wider, strategic purpose to the inculcation of unit cohesion. The inculcation of motivation with reference to the nation and one's fellow citizens is a diffuse, abstract idea; loyalty to the unit (from the regiment down to the platoon) is not. Identifiable individuals – the members of the group – stand in lieu of the nation, and loyalty to this group provides something that rationalises participation. I would argue that soldiers, in their narratives, 'do' citizenship, but through service to the unit, rather than to the nation. Furthermore, this is a practice in which soldiers are trained, a deliberate outcome of Army policy, as much as it is a 'natural' response of a group of people under pressure. Whilst dominant state-military discourses might emphasise in public statements the idea of military participation as national service (and I return to this below), at a more practical level the more attainable objective of group motivation is inculcated with reference to the immediate social group, rather than civilian society or the nation.

There is a second observation to make here. The celebration of group cohesion, of mateship, is also a strategy of self-affirmation, used in these narratives as a counter to popular public discourses ambivalent or outright critical of the pursuit of military violence for political ends. In a post-1945 context where the conduct of military operations involving armed, organized violence has frequently been subjected to widespread public condemnation, representing the meaning of military activities in terms of the immediate group with whom those actions are

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<sup>7</sup> There's an irony here, of course: women's participation in infantry and armoured units is currently justified on the grounds that the presence of women within the fighting unit would undermine unit cohesion (MoD, 2002; Woodward and Winter, 2004).

performed is, perhaps, a logical response. The wider nation or civilian society may be perceived by the soldier-writer as uninterested or resistant to the offer of service and sacrifice by the enlisted soldier; many of these narratives in effect 'other' civilian society, talk in derogatory tones about civvy street. The soldier-writers who perceive themselves to be marginalised by civilian society despite the possibility of the supreme sacrifice, identify instead the mates, the unit, the group, as the recipient of their citizen-soldier service. Kevin Mervin's narrative about his experiences as a Territorial Army soldier in Iraq is a good example of this. The narrative is framed with what reads as hurt and anger, that his actions in what he sees as the liberation of an unfree society might be dismissed by the British public as irresponsible and inexcusable violence. He quotes from a diary entry, written as he waits to enter Iraq on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2003.

It'll be our turn soon to go across the border and into a war, and for what? Freedom, fucking freedom? This better be worth it, that's all I can say. They better appreciate it, the Iraqis, and the people back home, moaning about the war. Do they actually realise what we're going through? Have they been told?

Nah, they won't listen anyway; they couldn't give a shit. (Mervin, 2005: 13)

His narrative is shot through with the contrasts he draws between what he and his fellow vehicle recovery drivers think they are doing – the logic of military action – and what he perceives to be the ignorance and rejection of this action by the nation he purportedly serves – he frequently refers to 'tree-huggers', an amorphous cluster identified as anyone back in Britain remotely critical of the military actions of Operation Telic. He rationalises his actions as a soldier, and his participation in the war, in terms of what he and his fellow soldiers can achieve and celebrates this as a rejection of and in opposition to a civilian discourse which he perceives marginalises him as a soldier. This is a familiar story, of course; accounts by soldiers written post-1918 vent this anger too at the misunderstanding of civilian society of the reality of military participation. In its late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century expression, the celebration of the bonded, cohesive unit in these soldier narratives could be read as a celebration of citizenship, when the nation (the potential object of citizenly actions) is uninterested. In Mervin's narrative, as in Ely's and Lukowiak's, the civil-military divide is a yawning chasm.

## **Conclusions about narratives and citizenship debates**

State-military discourses around the meaning of the figure of the soldier, and the meaning of the participation of that soldier in military activities, are adamant and persuasive that military participation constitutes national service. The idea of individual military sacrifice for shared national benefit is quite fundamental to this dominant discursive representation of the meaning of war and militarised violence. The two major mass mobilisations of conscripted British personnel, during the First (1914-18) and Second (1939-45) World Wars relied on explanations of enlistment as a patriotic duty and national service by the individual for the nation. The UK's sole experiment with peace-time mass conscription, following the end of the Second World War, was named precisely to reflect the idea of military participation as national service. The continued dominance of this idea was evident in the deliberate statement of the British Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, at the outset of an appearance before the British House of Commons Defence Committee in November 2005. He chose to preface his remarks and answers to a range of defence questions with a statement explicitly linking military participation with national, public service:

I cannot think of any group of people for whom public service is more serious, more dangerous and more comprehensive than the men and women who serve our country. To have a contract that says "I will serve my country even until death" is a very exceptional and rare thing and I am honoured to be able to play some part with them in defence. (HCDC, 2005: npn)

Honoured he might be, but the ideas that these contemporary soldier narratives express take issue with this notion. More specifically, they engage with this discourse over the meaning of military participation, as they do with other popular and public discourses around this issue, as part of on-going and perpetual negotiations over what it means to be a soldier. Soldier narratives, whether talking into arguments about citizenship, or talking to other concerns about meaning (such as, for example, the presence of women in the armed forces) take issue the simple equation between military participation and national service; they are strategic interventions. I want to conclude with a couple of observations, about what these narratives

indicate for our understandings of the soldier-citizenship debate, and about the utility of narratives for understanding citizenship.

These narratives underscore just how contested and negotiated the idea of military service as citizenship is. These narratives express citizenship, in that they talk about the idea that military participation is undertaken for the benefits of a wider group, but they do so in ways that make that service make sense to the soldier. I have suggested here that 'mateship' might be a better term for what soldiers do when they are performing and practicing citizenship. Military participation is understood as service, but for the small unit, the identifiable group of fellow-soldiers, and the regiment, rather than for more abstract notions of the Crown, the nation or the state. The expression of mateship still, however, engages with dominant ideas (what I have termed a state-military discourse), even if to contest it.

These narratives also emphasise the significance of cultural context for understanding how soldiers perform and practice citizenship. The narratives discussed here, as I have emphasised, have been written by British soldiers, writing about British army experiences. Although undoubtedly some of what these authors write would resonate with the experiences of other soldiers, in other places, at other times, they remain as powerful engagements with the discourses, cultural constructs and political contexts which frame their production and distribution, and their origins with the armed forces and military engagements in which their narrators are bound up. As I have already suggested, the military actions with which the contemporary British Army have been engaged in the post-war period have not been about nation-building as their primary intention (whatever the discursive framing of those conflicts for domestic and international political ends). For this reason, I suggest, these narratives are largely silent on issues of citizenship and territory, citizenship and nation. For example, there is little in these narratives that deals with the figure of the enemy soldier as foreign, other, non-British, relative to the narrator. The enemy is described – see, for example, Lukowiak, Ely or McManners' descriptions of Argentinian soldiers on the Falklands islands – but he is invariably explained as just a soldier to, with the same fears, loyalties and bonds as the narrator. Similarly, soldierly identity, when read from these narratives, seems to

have little to do with country of origin. Foreign-born soldiers, primarily from the Commonwealth, have always served in the British armed forces, and there are hints and suggestions from these narratives that many of those soldiers are present in the contexts that the narrators describe. Yet they rarely discuss differences of national origin as an issue, are largely silent on questions of national identity and citizenship. We can only speculate about this, and about the consideration of this in future narratives, of the Iraq invasion, for example, given that at the time of writing, 10 per cent of soldiers serving in the British Army are foreign nationals.<sup>8</sup>

My final observations concern the utility of soldier narratives as a textual source. Like any source of data, they have benefits and drawbacks. They have been useful for this investigation for the degree to which they articulate not only ideas about citizenship and national service, but also because of their status as communicative and strategic documents. They tell us what their writers, soldiers, think is important that we know, and they do so according to the prescriptions of the soldier narrative. We can read them for what they say, how they say it, and why they present the ideas that they do. What we cannot do is probe their silences for detail, investigate in further detail their explanations. They have utility as cultural texts, talking primarily into wider contemporary cultural and political debates. However, they stand as a proxy for access to the thoughts and understandings of a wider group of soldiers. In stating this, the intention is not to undermine their utility for understanding military participation, but to reinforce the point that the complexities of intention and comprehension in any large social group require a range of approaches and methodologies. Narratives may not provide the empirical context for detailed probing of individual intent, and nor do they provide any ideas about representativeness and pattern. What they do give us, though, are points of engagement with a wider cultural context, and the nuances, subtleties and detail that illuminate that context just a little more. And they also give us, of course, some cracking good stories.

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<sup>8</sup> Figures from *Daily Telegraph*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

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