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David Ian Walker B.S.c (Hons), M.A.

**Narrating Identity: Career
Soldiers Anticipating Exit from
the British Army**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Applied Social Sciences

Durham University

2010

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David Ian Walker B.S.c (Hons), M.A.

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Abstract

Career soldiers exiting the British Army undergo routine “resettlement” processes to tackle their adjustment into civilian employment. This is a transition made by thousands of leavers each year, but little is known about how coming out of the Army is individually experienced and understood, or what processes of change take place. This thesis provides a qualitative analysis of interviews with 28 (male and female) soldiers and officers who are approaching exit after lengthy careers. In particular, it foregrounds the concept of identity to investigate how such leavers narrate past service and anticipated futures beyond Army relations. The leavers continue to work in all parts of the Army and range in rank from Corporal to Colonel, with service of between 10 and 34 years. Some are leaving early for other ventures; some for medical reasons; and others, because the Army no longer accords. Most, however, are realising scheduled and pensionable endings. With reference to George Herbert Mead (1934; 1959) and Paul Ricoeur (1992) the research applies an inter-subjective conception of identity as forever a “becoming” rooted in social relations. By adopting this approach the thesis explores both gradual and dramatic processes of identity (re)construction and brings into some focus precarious and contingent aspects of identity, suggestive of vulnerability both as a kind of occupational hazard and as an inherent feature of identities-of-becoming.

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1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Each year thousands of men and women leave the British armed forces after careers of varying degrees of intensity and duration. In recent times, the most unfortunate among them have had their service terminated by service-related injury or even death. More commonly however exit from military service is a consequence of a range of predictable and mundane circumstances that can be scheduled or unscheduled (Glaser and Strauss 1971). Some will leave the rigours of military service even before they complete training, but most will go on to serve for a few years or more. A third and sizeable type of leaver however provides the focus of this thesis: a group of men and women for whom the military has become a career and a way of life, sometimes leading to pensions and middle age.

There is much to suggest that being a career soldier has far-reaching and lingering effects on the identities of those concerned. Moreover, leaving the Army is sufficiently troublesome to justify Ministry of Defence support packages¹ intended to cushion the transition. This kind of provision signals official recognition of consequences borne out of the “need” (Dandeker 2002:119) for the military to be different. Even so, little is known about how individuals cope as their careers are ending. Furthermore, enshrined in the “military covenant” (MOD 2010) is the view that society has a moral obligation

¹ Such as early pensions and resettlement processes.

to ensure that the sacrifices made by soldiers are adequately rewarded by their terms and conditions of service. In 2008, the outgoing Adjutant General (Lieutenant General Freddie Vickers) - who is responsible for Army personnel matters - spoke of his own retirement in an interview for the Army Families Journal. In the following quote he concedes the need for more to be done to prepare soldiers for life after the Army and connects transition with the extremes of modern warfare:

I'm ready for a change but even though you leave the Army, the Army never leaves you! I'll maintain contacts through regimental friends, reunions, sports and so on. I do think we need to do more to prepare our soldiers for life after the Army, to provide a framework for those who do struggle. Some find it very difficult to adjust. We as a nation, as a Ministry of Defence, as the Armed Forces need to pay more attention, because the experiences of the modern Army are beyond anything that most people have in current times (Vickers 2008).

Exit from the British Army presents a social rupture to career leavers who will eventually need to find ways to understand and account for this major change in their lives. This thesis will consider a number of issues that relate to the identity of soldiers ending careers of 10 to 34 years duration, and it is based upon research with 28 (male and female) British Army career leavers who are in their final year of service. The careers of soldiers and officers like this - who left the Army in 2007 and 2008 - have spanned an important epoch in the history of the British armed forces. No longer is the British service person involved in the kind of mass stand-off between countries that was associated with the "cold war" period. Instead, since the 1990s, a postmodern military has been engaged in tasks and missions of a flexible and international nature, commonly played out beyond nation-state boundaries in distant lands. New and

softer forms of military skill associated with peacekeeping for example have been required; but at the same time, our service personnel have also recently experienced some of the most difficult and dangerous operations in the history of the United Kingdom armed forces.

If Army service is lengthy and desired then it seems likely that the effects of this rather distinctive job and lifestyle may be implicated in the identities of exiting soldiers who at the time of the research are turning their minds and horizons to pressing matters associated with what they will do after they leave the Army. In the title of the thesis the words “narrating identity” draw attention to the ways in which career leavers understand and manage their present and anticipated circumstances; and how, by doing this, they must make continuing judgements on the kinds of person they have been and aspire to become. While the focus of the thesis is on this kind of narrative understanding, matters of the body are also present in the background, and from time to time come close to the surface in the talk of leavers, especially when bodies have failed by injury or sickness. This has been a quite unexpected finding that seems to underscore the distinctively corporeal practice of soldiering such as, for example, the wearing of uniform, saluting, physical exercise, and physical hardship. Some of the most striking features of these narratives of the body are linked to themes of availability and movement and cover both mundane and extreme experiences. This sort of availability is a key element of soldiering that involves a permanent readiness to move for postings (often including families), deployments, and action. However, as exit approaches, perceptions of availability appear to drop to a lower level as the likelihood of being called to

action virtually disappears. This can mean that during the final year of service some of the most extreme, demanding, and enjoyable aspects of soldiering have already ended for many of these leavers. These body matters are treated separately in chapter eight but are also occasionally highlighted in some of the preceding chapters. Whilst this may not be the best way to deal with the overall theme of corporeality, this approach has been adopted in order to deal with a surprising volume of talk that I have been able to relate to the idea of the body “as mine”, as it is experienced, narrated, and understood.

1.2 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight further chapters. In the next chapter, the wider literature on military exit is reviewed to introduce the contribution that this Army focussed research will make. This scene-setting chapter begins with an important discussion of the complex relationship between society and the military as a factor implicated in the ways in which leaving the Army may be experienced. The chapter also touches on some classic sociological texts on transition and status passage that are fundamental to this important social issue of leaving the armed forces.

Chapter three explicates a particular perspective on identity and introduces a central argument that identity is a process rooted in social relations; arguing that changes in self both occasion, and are occasioned by, changes in social relations, even though individuals tend towards narrating coherence and continuity. The chosen perspective combines the work of George Herbert Mead and Paul Ricoeur to form a theoretical framework that occupies the

middle ground between treatments of the self as substance, on the one hand, and illusion on the other. Joan McCarthy describes this narrative self as “a culturally mediated narrative unit that captures what it is about an individual’s life that matters most to her” (McCarthy 2007:251). The chapter also situates this theoretical framework in regard to recent and dominant poststructural treatments of the self.

Chapter four is concerned with methodological issues and describes how the research has been carried out. In the first few pages it sets out the research problems and provides reasons for the chosen research design and approach. Once the aims and aspirations of this work have been defined in this way, processes of data generation, analysis, and writing-up are then outlined and explained. This includes a very brief discussion of several ontological and epistemological assumptions and a lengthy treatment of reflexivity and related literature. This chapter also attempts to tackle the author’s place in the research and, in particular, the influences of his prior role - until September 2007 - as a career soldier. This includes a judgement on the strengths and weaknesses of the researcher’s veteran status and addresses the challenges and limitations of the work.

Chapter five draws on empirical data, especially the accounts of long serving non-commissioned officers, to discuss the important institutional frameworks that inform, shape, and frame processes of leaving the Army, and the different ways in which individuals interact with organisationally patterned narratives of exit. Of particular relevance here are well worn career structures and other

institutional exit processes such as the roles of resettlement advisers, career transition specialists, and local training providers that - owing to well-rehearsed functions - become important agents in terms of how exit can be reasonably and locally understood. Some formal categories of leaver are also described in this chapter, along with associated packages of support.

Chapter six shows how leavers - who are engaged in practical and future-orientated endeavours - come to confront matters of identity. Often this is without individual recognition and it is by way of such personal and mostly practical endeavours that identities are imagined, implicated, played-out, and performed in a process of “becoming” that can be both alarming and invigorating. Relatedly, it is argued that a wider twofold process of identity construction (and reconstruction) is occurring. This is the broader need to answer questions of “who or what will I be after leaving the Army?” which also involves a second and related process in the form of renewed attentiveness to questions of: “who or what have I become?”. This latter question is taken up in this chapter by way of some detailed description and analysis. This informs the title - “Identities-for-Fighting” - since a good deal of resultant interview discussion concerns questions about the sorts of soldiers that they have become. Eventually, this is presented as a typology that describes the contrasting ways that soldiers construct the idea and practice of being a soldier on the eve of exit.

Chapter seven takes up the future-orientated perspective of leavers and it builds on the previous chapter to describe how different types of leaver tackle broader identity matters associated with the question: “who and what will I be?”. Here

the story is privileged as the means by which leavers seek and find understanding, and come to narrate life within the context of their differing circumstances of exit. This chapter is called “Fighting-for-Identity” because it is argued that, though mostly focussed on practical tasks, leavers are shown to be quite centrally engaged in dilemmas of identity as they narrate and negotiate various ways forward and beyond the distinctive social relations of the British Army.

As mentioned briefly above, chapter eight “Embodied Vulnerability” develops a dominant theme that emerged in the earliest stages of data analysis. Specifically, this is the realisation that many final year leavers talked a lot during interviews about matters that can be associated with the body. It has been during this exploration of mundane and extreme narratives of the body that I have made a connection between vulnerability - that has its origins in the concept of a physical wound - to my treatment of identity-as-a-process. Although this sort of vulnerability of self is clear without reference to the body, the chapter recognises a corporeal vulnerability that has been a significant force in the lives of most of these soldiers as a consequence of military risk, especially for those for whom operational deployments had either been problematic or simply too numerous or uncomfortable to repeat.

Chapter nine concludes the thesis by bringing together some of the strands of the prior chapters to consider the research project as a whole. This involves looking both backwards at substantive, methodological, and theoretical issues

and forwards in terms of the future work that is needed towards greater understanding of the processes involved with military exit.

Military Exit

2.1 Introduction

Over the years, the topic of military exit has been approached in a range of studies that have articulated important, and relevant, dynamics associated with leaving the military. By way of a review of this literature, this chapter aspires to draw from this work some important and persisting themes which lay the foundations for the empirical work that will follow in subsequent chapters. In particular, the case is made for emphasising the pre-exit phase as a period not yet fully explored, despite repeated hints that “something” is occurring during this period. Under a series of section headings, military exit is considered from different perspectives. But, before these sorts of substantive exit matters are covered I discuss the relationship between civilian and military domains to make the case for military exit (in this case Army) as a distinctive social transition.

2.2 Civil - Military Relations

Traditionally, the British armed forces have occupied a “self-contained social world” (Brotz and Wilson 1946:371), located behind locked gates and bounded from wider civilian society (Morgan 1994). This separation has often been reinforced by the stationing of military personnel overseas (Strachan 2003; Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006) or more recently by intensive operational tours such as those in the Balkans, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Inside military gates,

specific social conditions are generally explained in terms that emphasise an underpinning requirement to be ready to deliver violence in the air, at sea, or on land. Such military roles are unique and are used habitually to justify an institutional difference that is grounded on the supremacy of the mission and team over the individual. More recently, this distinctiveness has been brought into question in what some have called a post modern military (Moskos, Williams et al. 2000) that is characterised by international missions involving non war fighting roles - such as peacekeeping - and increased governmental and non-governmental reach into military space (Forster 2006). This has been accompanied by a persisting governmental “expectation (.....) that the armed forces should “reflect” society” (Dandeker and Mason 2003:481).

The extent to which the military is - or ought to be (Dandeker 2002) - set apart and different from wider society is a factor that contributes to the conditions of individual transition across the “civil-military gap” (Strachan 2003) as people exit the armed forces. The size and character of this difference has been a matter of keen focus for those interested in civil-military relations both in the United Kingdom and the United States (Huntington 1957; Janowitz 1960; Morgan 1994; Moskos, Williams et al. 2000; Dandeker and Freedman 2002; Strachan 2003; Forster 2006). Huntington (1957) argues that the key civil-military relationship is that between the state and the officer corps, defined as professionals responsible for the delivery of violence for “socially approved purposes” (Caforio 2006:16). He claims that the potential threat to civilian rule posed by the military’s collective might can be neutralised by a deliberate and

managed divergence.² By allowing the officer corps autonomous control of their unique specialism they can be separated not only from broader society but crucially from politics.³ This means that the necessary autonomy and power for institutional military success can be preserved and contained within the autonomy of a military profession so that it does not overflow and threaten the “objective control” (Caforio 2006:16) of the armed forces by civilian authority. This separation of the two domains for Huntington (1957) divorces officers from politics and contains civil-military tensions through this divergence.

And yet, divergence and difference creates problems of acceptance and offence. If different military social conditions are justified on the strength of unique roles, there are times when the consequences of divergence may mean that military ways become so out-of-step with wider society that they are embarrassing or offensive. The exclusion of 363 men and women from the services between 1990 and 1995 for homosexuality (Strachan 2003), the lawful discharging of pregnant women until 1993 (Forster 2006) and issues of bullying, racism, and sexism (Forster 2006) are all examples of divergence-as-offence, and have all been described by the military in the language of unique roles and operational effectiveness. In a British Broadcasting Corporation “Panorama” programme shown in September 2008 called “The Undercover Soldier”, a young male reporter joined the Army at the Infantry Training Centre, Catterick and found alleged incidents of recruit bullying by training staff. In his response to this, General Dannatt, Chief of Army Staff at the time,

² Rolston (2007) also notes how ex-combatants who feel mistreated or come across hard times can pose a threat to the state.

³ This is a key aspect of democracy though it is perhaps becoming more blurred when senior military commanders appear increasingly willing to speak out (Sengupta 2009).

separated robust military training from bullying and promised an investigation of these cases. Implicit in General Dannatt's response seems a view that there exists some level of Army training that though unpalatable to the wider public is most certainly not bullying. This seems like a matter of degrees and perspective and appears to demonstrate the fragile, temporal, and somewhat arbitrary nature of military difference because the line between bullying and robust Army training can never be fixed or certain. There is also increasing pressure on the military to "diversify the uniform" (Dandeker and Mason 2003) by incorporating into its ranks greater representation of ethnic minorities. Moreover, the scrutiny of the "Role of Women in Armed Forces" (Dandeker and Segal 1996) is also suggestive of increased "outside" interest in perceived differences.

Contrary to Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960) argues that it is convergence - and not divergence - that promises political control of the armed forces as well as a much more desirable balance between safeguarding some conditions of military difference and achieving compliance with wider and dominant societal trends. To maintain civilian favour and prevent offence, the military must continually evolve and strive to keep pace with a constantly changing civilian society. For Janowitz, the demise of the traditional "heroic" (Caforio 2006:17) type of service person has made way for more modern managerial and technical forms of military experience together with less authoritative internal control that has brought the armed forces closer to civilian society. Taken together, arguments for convergence (Janowitz) and divergence (Huntingdon)

reflect the many tensions inherent in civil-military relations that are often connected to, or justified by, distinctive military roles.

This dichotomy has been developed further by the Institutional / Occupational (I/O) Thesis (Moskos 1976; Moskos and Wood 1988). This thesis captures a complex and contradictory coexistence of social forces, relations, and tendencies within the military. For Moskos (1976) there is a crosscutting of influences within the armed forces that are both institutional and occupational in character. Moskos uses the former term to describe social relations that he associates with the ethos and make-up of the closed and insular environment of a military ideal-type that creates conditions for selfless, all-consuming, and open-ended commitment. When referring to occupation, Moskos is describing properties more in keeping with a civilian work environment that connects finite effort with tangible and usually financial reward. The I/O thesis describes not a crudely polarised military but a crosscutting of social relations whose origins lie in sources that are both inward and outward since the military is in many ways a “janus-faced” organisation (Dandeker 2002:117) resulting in a confusing contradiction of social relations. Even so, for Cathy Downes (1988:174) “the British armed forces have proved to be institutional in their paternalistic desire to provide for the needs of military personnel”. For this author, it is only from within this overarching tendency that “occupational features have developed and can be identified, in some cases independently of the armed forces’ efforts and in some cases as a direct consequence of military policy” (Downes 1988:174).

Other ways of considering the civilian - military divide include reference to Goffman's "total institution" (1968), a concept that has often been applied to military settings. Indeed, reference is made in *Asylums* (Goffman 1968:16) to "army barracks" and "ships" as examples of such communities. Total institutions are places that are set apart and also involve a merging of barriers ordinarily found in society. In a total institution the places where people sleep, play, and work "are conducted in the same location and under the same single authority" (Goffman 1968:17). Additionally, there is an overall aim that brings together the activities of the individuals; activities that tend to be carried out together, at the same time, and in compliance with a pre-arranged schedule. The task of the total institution is to force people to become different and this is done by strict regulation and severance of previous identifications with an outside world, so that individuals may be shaped and moulded to the total institution. There are times when the modern military is closely aligned with Goffman's descriptions, particularly periods of basic training or operational tour, since these are times when individuals are almost entirely subsumed into the institutional rhythms in the pursuit of an overarching aim. However, Caforio (2006:20) claims that the theory of total institution applied only to past conscription armed forces and that even at the time of publishing it was "outdated". Biderman (1964:298) too is critical of such "ideal-typical conceptions of the military institution," referring to Janowitz's convergence thesis to support his claim even in 1964 of greater involvement in, and alignment with, wider civilian society. Biderman (1959) also points out that in respect of a total institution, Goffman was concerned with socialisation into the

institution rather than the movement in reverse associated with retirement from it. And most recently, Susi Scott tackles contemporary situations of the “reinvented self” (2010:195) to emphasise interaction and agency in arguing for less coercive interpretations of Goffman’s original concept (Scott 2010). Nevertheless, there is much in the spirit of Goffman’s total institution (1968) that retains relevance to a military career even if the theory of total institution cannot be accepted in its entirety. Regardless of how close or different civil and military domains might be, those in the military are subject to the power of a single authority and in many respects occupy separate spaces and places with indigenous rules, habits, and symbols. After all, the military continue to operate their own legal systems, use their own doctors, offer married accommodation, and extract their personnel from places of daily living for prolonged periods of time.

Inevitably then, civil-military relations involve political and institutional tensions that influence - across time - the experiences of those who are leaving the armed forces. The closer the two worlds become, the easier individual transition is likely to be (Biderman 1959). Overall, I argue in this thesis that military exit is neither discharge from a total institution, nor retirement from company employment. It is a distinctive social transition. Even though other short, full-on, and unusual careers exist in - for example - sport, the fire service, and the police, these seem different because individuals do not undergo the same sort of separation from wider society (in their living conditions for example) and are not routinely required to risk and take life. Nor do they function for prolonged periods in operational or war environments.

Nevertheless, just how distinctive the armed forces may be seems variable across time, place, service, and role. There is also perhaps some small degree of merit in a now very dated hypothesis:

One hypothesis would be that the military role is not as distinctive as popularly supposed, and consequently, that only minimal changes of life style and ideology will be required for the adjustment of the average retiree (Biderman 1959:90).

The relationship between the armed forces and wider society has been connected with real and perceived levels of threat. World Wars I and II brought an otherwise peripheral British military closer to its host society (Downes 1988). This was partially due to national service that drew vast numbers into its ranks and partially because of wider civilian identification with the war effort, conducive to the sentiment that “whole societies were at war” (Dandeker 1990:101). In regard to Canada, Deborah Cowen (2005; 2008) pays comprehensive attention to these sorts of civil-military relations arguing for greater recognition of the role of war and the military in bringing about collective welfare provision and in motivating all sorts of innovation. She argues that war is central to the emergence of a sense of social citizenship and that the transformative force of the military and war is lost in academic and public discourse.⁴ More recently in society, as the influences of World War II have receded, so too has widespread civilian experience of “receiving orders and strict regulation in the face of shared dangers” (Dandeker 1990:101), effecting a dwindling of previous military experience in the general population.

At all other times, the armed forces have been an All-Volunteer-Force (AVF)

⁴ Ronald Krebs’ (2005:531) also argues extensively for “a more deeply political explanation of changes in armed forces’ manpower policies”.

where individuals choose to join. For the Army, career soldiers exiting in 2007 and 2008 have served in a professional Army that until 1990 was relatively stable and required limited operational service, mostly in Northern Ireland. But since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a succession of operations have often taken many personnel to distant places for six months at a time, intensifying in recent years in Iraq and Afghanistan with a return to some fierce close quarter combat for soldiers, particularly in Afghanistan. All of these events shape the characteristics of the institution as a consequence of the practical and daily roles that their personnel are required to perform and, in this way, influence individual experiences of service and exit.

2.3 A Distinctive Status Passage?

About 18,000 people leave the services each year (Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005). Some will complete lengthy careers, but others will leave after approximately four years of service, or much sooner if they are unsuccessful in basic training. Unsuccessful training aside, this represents at least two types of service. "The key split within the forces is between those who commit themselves to long service and those who do not" (Strachan 2003:52). As noted in chapter one, the former group is the focus of this thesis: career soldiers who are exiting the British Army for futures of varying degrees of clarity and expectation. Relatively speaking, soldiering and military service more generally is an activity of the young and so the outflow of leavers who are aged between 30 and 55 is routine, constant, and numerous. This seems to suggest that "the decision facing service members is, therefore, when to leave the military rather than whether or not to leave" (Beland 1992:414).

There is a body of (mostly American) literature on military retirement that dates from the early 1960s that will be discussed throughout this chapter. The research was motivated by the anticipation of “mass migration” (Biderman 1959:84) into civilian life by the men who joined the American Armed Forces around the time of World War II and who were completing their twenty years of service at this time (Biderman 1959). Relatively little work on this topic has followed (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2003), although there is renewed interest in the treatment of British veterans (Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005; Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006; Browne and Ainsworth 2008). A degree of caution is needed with some of this literature due to its predominantly American origin (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2003), although there are strong parallels between British and United States military retirement conditions that in many respects remain largely unchanged. Another cautionary word is necessary since work on military retirement has focussed almost exclusively on men.

Probably the “most salient characteristic of the military retired population is its relative youth” (Biderman 1964:291). All of the services still use the “length of service principle” and physical condition (Biderman 1959:85) for determining exit dates (Giffen and McNeil 1967:849; McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983:76). Military retirees are likely to be in their forties (Biderman 1964; Giffen and McNeil 1967; Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick 1979; Strachan 2003) because retirement from the military is possible in America after 20 years of service (Wolpert 1991) and the British Army has traditionally offered its soldiers (non-commissioned) full careers of 22 years duration, although there are some important differences across the services. British commissioned officers reach

their first retirement window after 16 years. In the United States, a military retiree might therefore be as young as 37 (Wolpert 1991) and in the United Kingdom, aged 40, with British officers often as young as 37 or 38. Many UK officers will complete much longer careers until the age of 55 and there is always the chance that some soldiers will become officers. In January 2008, the Versatile Engagement (VE) was introduced for new British Army recruits (MOD 2010) extending opportunities for a full career to 24 years - and longer careers up to age 55 for some selected individuals, awarded in increments of six years duration. VE is also being offered to existing soldiers, including many of those who were scheduled to retire in 2007 and 2008. Interestingly, in the language of VE, the word retirement has been replaced by “early departure payment” for those leaving at the 24 year point. Immediate pensions have also been removed for future retirees.

In these ways, military retirement is quite “unique” (Giffen and McNeil 1967:849; McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983:76; Wolpert 2000:104), although it is noted that Spiegel and Shultz (2003:288) find similarities with “normal” retirement in that the quality of adjustment also relates to whether or not retirement is voluntary or involuntary.⁵ For Wolpert (2000), a distinct set of issues are created for military retirees by the nature of their unique role and consequent lifestyle. In the United Kingdom, Dandeker also sets the military apart from fire and police services and locates a “military uniqueness” in the

⁵ They also argue that involuntary retirement correlates with lower life satisfaction levels than voluntary retirement.

“liability of service personnel to use lethal force, to risk one’s own life but also those of others by ordering them to do the same” (2003:17).

Wolpert (2000) identifies two main rationales for the United States military retirement system. First there is a general privileging of “youth and vigour” (McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983:xii) ⁶ creating a system of rapid throughput offering varied experiences in different jobs and roles to as many as possible; this also seems to apply to UK forces. McNeil and Lecca et al (1983:22) extend Wolpert’s claim by further justifying military early retirement systems as a means to ensure that “stagnation of rank in senior personnel” is avoided. Second, conditions of retirement are viewed as providing both recruitment and retention incentives (Goldich 1983; Wolpert 2000). In the following quote Dandeker can be seen to concur with this in connection with allegations by British ex-servicemen that more should have been done for them during their service and their transition into civilian life:

Negative publicity (...) could, it was feared, deter potential recruits and lead to disaffection among those already serving, not least those about to meet the challenges of returning to civilian life (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:167).

In addition to the two rationales identified by Wolpert above, Lecca and McNeil (1983) summarise the military retirement literature and offer further justification for early retirement. They cite a need to retain desired people, presumably using an early pension as an incentive and they go on to suggest that the retirement system and pension act as a buffer to aid transition into

⁶ It is acknowledged that Biderman (1959) finds similarity with civilian organisations that operate what he defines as the “career employee” concept such as the civil service for example.

civilian life, working to “compensate individuals for the special institutional characteristics of military life” (McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983).

Military retirement is quite clearly an issue for all serving personnel. It is a known event. For Wolpert (1991:81) “it allows service members to know, at a relatively early age, when they will “retire””, although in the British Army, the introduction of VE has blurred this distinction by increasingly ad-hoc arrangements for continued service when exit points are approached. The distinct and structured nature of the retirement system channels successive cohorts through a prior career that is ordered and managed towards specific and pre-known retirement milestones. Retirement - or military exit more widely - provides for many an “horizon of expectation” (Ricoeur 1992:161) against which a career is given meaning. Connections are possible here with some classic sociological texts on transition. Julius Roth (1963), for example, in “Timetables” studied tuberculosis patients, from his own hospital bed to emphasise the centrality of temporal milestones for experience especially when individuals are faced with uncertainty. Roth’s patients experienced an especially long and ill-defined recovery period with few tangible events to mark progression or the passage of time to recovery. Roth showed how both doctors and patients colluded to manufacture arbitrary signposts so as to punctuate an otherwise featureless horizon. Roth’s patients drew on the experiences of others who had gone before them to break time into smaller chunks. By drawing on the “norms” of the group they could measure progress and define expectation to reduce distress. Although signs of recovery only spuriously connected with their tuberculosis, the emergent meaning, signs, and “reference

points” dominated their hopes and aspirations. The experiences of a “model group” of recovering patients who had gone before them were used to inject meaning into a frightening void, and this defined their “future expectations” and helped to punctuate and define the passage of time. Roth (...) makes the following point:

Meanings of such reference points are learned by members of the group through observations of the experience of other members and through communication of experiences, ideals, myths and hopes among members of the group (Roth 1963:100).

In a similar way, Arnold Van Gennep (1960) - in “The rites of passage” - stresses the social organisation of passage between various statuses, drawing attention to the transitional phases that occur in-between, such as for example the change of “becoming” a widower after “being” a wife. He termed the transition between such social statuses - or “resting places” (Glaser and Strauss 1971:2) - as a “liminal period” and found in ritual and ceremony surrounding these events, processes that he interpreted as working to stabilise social order and to protect society from disruptive happenings such as death. Glaser and Strauss (1971) make the point that every status is always temporary. Van Gennep’s work offered a loose schema associated with rites of passage and focussed on form over content (Hockey 2002) to emphasise patterning across different social transitions. Jenny Hockey (2002) has reproduced these ideas concisely and they are shown below:

(1) passage out of a previous phase or social status; (2) an ambiguous time and space betwixt and between fixed positions; and (3) re-entry into a new social position or period (Hockey 2002:212).

Although this sort of emphasis on social transition fails fully to show how individuals interact with various social categories these are nevertheless important social processes that are entirely relevant to Army careers and their endings.

Military retirement is generally a known event. It is when the status resting point (Glaser and Strauss 1971) of soldier comes to an end. For the British soldier this is usually after 22 years service and for officers after 16 years. Such milestones are commonly used by soldiers to timetable (Roth 1963) their service and exit, though not necessarily in a clear or unambiguous way. For Roth, timetables are most at hand as part of organisational or institutional “career” structures that provide a series of milestones that become saturated with meaning as individuals transit the same series of events in a reasonably pre-determined direction and with a recognizable end point. Becker’s (1964) concept of “situational adjustment” also directs attention towards the character of a situation and in this work he emphasises local and collective explanations about why people change, remembering that this is also experienced individually. And so, retirement as a milestone is especially noticeable among soldiers in relation to the 22 year Army career. This also incorporates a midway option after 12 years of service that qualifies soldiers for a preserved pension and some re-training assistance.

The introduction of the VE represents a new timetable that is applicable not only to new recruits but to some career soldiers. So new is this change in exit policy that this does not feature in McDermott’s (2007) work which argues that

many full career non-commissioned leavers go on to successful second careers. McDermott, himself an ex-soldier, repeatedly uses this timeframe throughout his thesis presenting the 22 year career span as the solid reference point it has been for so many years.

The consequences of the unusual nature of a service career and its especially early retirement age have been a core theme in military retirement literature. But, the relevance of the term retirement has been questioned (Biderman 1959; McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983) on the basis that service leavers - even when technically qualifying for a pension - are at an age and life stage that makes retirement, understood as “retirement to leisure” (Giffen and McNeil 1967:849), a misleading term. For most leavers aged around 40, the pension is insufficient on which to live and, more often than not, they will be married and have dependent children (Biderman 1959; Bellino 1970; McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983). Female soldiers seem underrepresented in this statement. It is also the case, that it is a general expectation that individuals in this age range will work (Giffen and McNeil 1967; McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983) and so, perhaps, the language of a second career or mid-term change is more appropriate (McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983; Jolly 1996). It is for these reasons that a surprisingly voluminous literature on military retirement starting in the 1960s offers a more relevant place to start the analysis of military exit today than does literature concerned with “on-time” (Yanos 2004) retirement. Although the word “retirement” is not carried further into this thesis for reasons recently outlined, the term is still used occasionally during this chapter when it is relevant to the work being discussed.

2.4 Symbolism and Military Exit

In more recent times, the British Ministry of Defence has so far approached the matter of military exit with the spirit of a “level playing field” (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2003; Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006). This means that policies have been designed to compensate leavers for the consequences and damage of their service, but no more. This contrasts with the United States that surpasses this to champion their armed forces as unique and special by virtue of service to their country such that veterans are afforded enhanced post-retirement social provision that is superior to services offered to other citizens. In the United States, the term “veteran” is used quite freely to symbolise a group of people that maintains a continued sense of belonging and advantage by virtue of their prior military service, generally understood as sacrifice for their country. In the UK, the term “ex-service” is more likely to be used (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:165) as a more subdued symbol leaving, in common talk, the term veteran for extremes such as ageing men involved in the World Wars (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:166).

At military exit, British ex-service personnel have been subject to “good bye and good luck” or “farewell and neglect” policies (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:169) in which they are expected to simply melt into the civilian background, perhaps reappearing on 12 November each year for remembrance services. This is changing. A recent government strategy (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006) has been designed to improve the apparent indifferent public and official treatment of “veterans” and it aspires to raise their status in British society. It is important also to acknowledge at this point a growing visibility of

the Army in general as some individuals return through Wootton Bassett⁷ in flag draped coffins or, by other means, with sometimes catastrophic injury. This sort of raise-the-status of veterans sentiment is captured in an umbrella “Veterans Initiative” built on “five strategic themes of partnership, identity, recognition, education, and care” (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:171), and this utilises an inclusive definition of veteran as: “all personnel who have served more than one day” (together with their dependants) (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:165). There are estimates (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006) that this amounts to 20% of the British population, although ex-service persons are outnumbered by their dependants in this estimate. There is also a recently created annual “Veterans Day” on 27 June designed to capture the inclusive veteran population as a celebration not only of their past service but - quite radically for the UK - as recognition of the actual and potential contribution that veterans offer to civilian communities. There is a distinct and discernable governmental effort to shift the symbolic place in society of the ex-military community to “encourage the wider society to develop a better understanding of veterans’ achievements and to invest in their status” (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006:171). Veterans are also incorporated into a recent cross-government paper (Browne and Ainsworth 2008) that lists under the heading “What We Have Already Done” the following: the appointment of a Veterans Minister; a reduction in homelessness among ex-Servicemen and women; the forming of the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency; and the issue so far of 600,000 badges for Her Majesty’s Armed Forces Veterans (Browne and Ainsworth

⁷ This is a market town near to Swindon, located close to Royal Air Force Lynham where crowds gather to show respect to service personnel killed in service.

2008). It remains to be seen what approach to these matters will be adopted by the Conservative / Liberal alliance.

Dandeker (2003) connects how a country defines its veterans to the channelling of resources. Inclusive definitions of veteran mean that resources are spread thinly across vast numbers at the risk of failing the most troubled. Such definitions sidestep more specific distinctions that could be made between those who have acute difficulties and those whose exit is best described as routine. Drawing on a Veterans Strategy Paper, Dandeker (2003) highlights at least three different ways that veterans might be defined. There are the “successful”, the “disadvantaged” whose problems are reasonably attributable to their service, and finally, the “vulnerable” whose vulnerability is defined as non-attributable to military service. The risk of the inclusive veteran term and related resource distribution is that those most in need may not receive the help that they require. The language and meaning associated with leaving the military and becoming a veteran has great symbolic importance and Biderman (1964) states that if veterans do poorly after they have left the armed forces this can act as a disincentive to those still serving. This is also important in terms of how leavers might think about their impending post-exit lives; and also in regard to how they might be received.

UK service leavers are processed in their last few years of service by the “resettlement” system which includes both internal staff such as an Individual Educational Resettlement Officer and a more detailed service from Right Management Consultants located in key garrison areas. The main task of this

process is to translate military experiences into a language for the civilian labour market and involves a three day Career Transition Workshop (CTW). The resettlement system is described in more detail in chapter five and it is sufficient for now to note its overarching ethos to return - or resettle - individuals to civilian life and especially into civilian employment. Overall, the orientation of this largely welcome provision seems to assume that service leavers, as a consequence of their service, are different and need to be changed so that a successful “transition” can be achieved consistent with the “level playing field” rationale above. If the military are to label themselves as in some way different then this requires that they reverse or at least play down their distinctiveness at military exit. Biderman noted this strange paradox in the 1960s: “in many ways the military man must stress the distinctiveness of his calling, the second-career problem places emphasis on its nondistinctiveness” (Biderman 1964:301).

In the context of mutual interpenetration of military and civilian worlds, Biderman seems to be emphasising Janowitz’s convergence thesis, and in particular the existence of at least some military roles different from the extreme “military leader” type. He seems to question the “reality” of military distinction. How far can the need for service personnel to believe in their distinctiveness be separated from what they actually do? A moment thinking about the consequences of a hypothetical military where sameness is emphasised does seem to add weight to the idea that at least some of the uniqueness of a military career is a necessary illusion needed to ensure the right sorts of attitude and outlook for combat situations, regardless of what

individuals might actually do on a daily basis. Whatever the case, the resettlement system ought to undo unhelpful notions of superiority.

British Army Regiments are well known for their insistence on supremacy and an accompanying emphasis on the “centrality of comradeship to unit cohesion” (Strachan 2003:48). The regimental group forms the basis of morale (Strachan 2003) and instils a belief in soldiers that their particular regiment is the best. For a long time these sorts of informal cohesive relations between soldiers have been emphasized as the core of the effective fighting unit, although King claims that this approach fails to grasp the importance of “formal collective drills” (2006:509) to social cohesion. The resettlement system is openly designed to undo notions of difference and offer in its place ideas and suggestions of transferability. Maintaining a serving culture of similarity and transferability seems problematic not least because ideas of indifference are unlikely to create the sort of attitudes that endure extreme hardship and fierce combat. Nevertheless, Biderman (1964) in pursuing ideas of the military-as-non-distinctive refers to a Michigan study of active duty personnel to claim that those with the most transferable skills were most likely to have longer careers, presumably because they were reasonably confident that their experiences would easily translate when they eventually decided to leave. By contrast, those who perceived their skills as difficult to transfer were motivated to leave earlier so that they could build recognisable experience bases and avoid anticipated difficulties of changing employments later in life. For Biderman (1964:302) the ““there’s really no difference approach” tends to undermine the peculiar features of professional identity and mystique on which the distinctive

claims of the military rest”. Even though it was written in 1964, Biderman’s chapter called “Sequels to a military career” incorporates countless more still pertinent arguments relating to the broad issue of military exit.

Overall, although there is merit in the idea that military exit might be, for some, a rather ordinary event, for most career leavers it seems a significant and distinctive status passage that is connected with a good deal of symbolism and meaning.

2.5 Status Passage

Early attempts to understand this distinctive status passage were dominated by work that described military exit in problematic terms. Two military Psychiatrists (Giffen and McNeil 1967), who based their research on therapeutic work with service personnel leaving the American armed forces, claimed that distinctive and repeatable problems were discernable in this group, and that the difficulties they were observing in their military “patients” were common and attributable to the unique circumstances of a military career and early retirement. This they granted a medical pathology and labelled it as military “retirement syndrome” (Giffen and McNeil 1967; Bellino 1969; Bellino 1970). They also claim that similar problems are experienced by dependents of military leavers (Giffen and McNeil 1967). Based on role theory, this work suggests that three possible phases are associated with military retirement. The first phase relates to a pre-retirement period of roughly two years in which individuals displayed signs of depression and anxiety, and often complained of physical symptoms - particularly chest pain - that could not

be traced to a physical origin, raising suspicion of psychosomatic association. Phase two was dubbed as “role confusion” or as a “transitional period” (Giffen and McNeil 1967:850) occurring in the time following exit from the armed forces when leavers confronted novel social environments. Giffen and McNeil suggest that those in this phase were:

marked by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, and the retiree does not seem to know what role performance is expected of him. Removal of the uniform and its insignia carries with it a certain loss of identity (Giffen and McNeil 1967: 851).

Leavers categorised by their presenting symptoms into phases one and two were considered treatable and could retain realistic hope of subsequent adjustment to civilian life if only they accepted adequate and timely intervention to assist their transition. But failing that, individuals were expected to decline into phase three. This final stage of military “retirement syndrome” for McNeil and Giffen (1967) was much more entrenched and irretrievable. It was characterised entirely by the failure to adequately negotiate earlier phases. Retirees were placed in this final category if they presented signs of maladjustment to non-military roles that were causing persisting feelings of inadequacy. Indeed, such individuals were labelled as “old soldiers” whose “emotional stress” (Giffen and McNeil 1967:853) at failing to adapt became inwardly directed. These “old soldiers” came to the attention of the medical profession largely because debilitating physical symptoms (again, mostly psychosomatic in origin) urged them to seek help. “Old soldiers” were thought to be almost beyond help and presented treatment challenges that urged a medical emphasis on catching leavers in phases one and two, and seems partly

to have prompted McNeil and Giffen to write about this topic. It is interesting to note here the importance of the pre-retirement period as a distinct phase that can be problematic; and it seems as if the second year of phase one of “retirement syndrome” corresponds with the emphasis of this thesis.

If career service personnel are bolstered and comforted by self-conceptions that draw on notions of distinctiveness and stoic perseverance in the face of difficult circumstances, it can be difficult to carry forward such a heightened sense of self-efficacy into civilian life, though many manage it (McDermott 2007). Early research has also shown that a certain amount of scaling down of aspiration and expectation takes place as military exit is approached and in the light of the sort and level of opportunities that are available (Biderman 1964). Jolly (1996:154) found also “that quite a worrying number of former service personnel tend not to hope or expect to derive high levels of satisfaction from their occupations and activities as civilians” and this (individual and social) need to play down a sense of distinctiveness has echoes of Goffman’s “Cooling the Mark Out” (1952). At a much more problematic level however, Milowe (1964), a United States military psychiatrist, applied Erikson’s ego theory to pinpoint adjustment problems in two specific ranks, the Coast Guard Chief Petty Officer and the Sergeant (Army or Air Force) in response to a stressful situation defined by Milowe as impending or actual retirement. This rank group comprised most of the referrals for psychiatric help for a short period between 1961 and 1962 and, for Milowe, these individuals were drawn into the military due to early life crisis and “chaotic and strenuous identification patterns” (Milowe 1964:105) that endeared the firm role structure of a military

life to them and in which they eagerly and wholeheartedly embraced a self-image as a serviceman. For Milowe, service life with its firm social roles and strong opportunities for personal identification provided a “moratorium” period during which adolescent identification problems could be paused but which returned at retirement. Quoting one of his patients, Milowe suggests that as military exit approached they “uniformly faced a plunge “from being the whale to being a minnow”” (Milowe 1964:106). Graves (2005) also uses this phrase but has expanded it more generally in a study on life satisfaction of early retirement career officers to refer to the notion of having reached a high status position relative to your own ability within a distinct culture that affords the military person a clear and known place. Military exit and its anticipation can present troubling times even for the most robust service person:

Approaching separation from the military heralds a dramatic loss of prestige, power and authority. The service gives the professional military man the opportunity to perform tasks considered important, responsible, creative and demanding. The uniform adds self-respect and meaning to what he is doing. By the time the military professional contemplates retirement, he is accustomed to deference and a panoply of military symbols that command it. He has enjoyed the upward climb, the competition, and the rewards of satisfactory service that have carried him continually higher in his profession. He now faces starting at the bottom, bereft of the commonly accepted myths and symbols of power in the military society. He fears becoming at 45 as awkward as the young recruits he now commands. He feels he is turning from a whale into a minnow (Graves 2005:33).

2.6 Military Exit as an effect on the Life Course

Many studies consider military service in terms of a disruption to the life course, which implies a comparison with what might have been, had such individuals not joined and decided to follow what might be considered more

common life and employment patterns. Teachman and Tedrow (2007) claim that military service coincides with crucial life course periods when influential decisions are required. They suggest that in general, “military service impacts key life course trajectories” (Teachman and Tedrow 2007). Research that applies a life course approach tends to frame the effect of military services as either a hindrance or a benefit to individual lives. The research includes those who have served during periods of both war and peace and often refers to those with only the briefest of service.

Elder (1986) found that young veterans born between 1928 and 1929 who served in the armed forces in the 1940s - including the Korean War - experienced their service as a discontinuity in their lives that changed the order and sequencing of other events. Most had joined the military from circumstances of hardship. Elder believed that the armed forces provided an attractive “place to be for a while” (1986:236) for many young men who feel they lack competence because it provided them with a “measure of respect and self-confidence” and a “place for sorting out self” (Elder 1986:236). He claimed that most of all it offered a useful place for facilitating turning points in the life course of those who join. For these men, short military service appeared to take them from difficult lives with few prospects into relative success and progress following military exit. Emphasizing historical epochs, Elder (1987) also found that youthful military experience during World War II was more successfully incorporated into a life course than for those who joined the military at later stages in their lives.

War stirs things up (Elder 1987) and, although the war comes to an end, the consequences continue. Elder also views military service as providing a moratorium on age graded careers by providing experience of early independence. Ineke et al (1999:213) found that German service leavers after World War II suffered initially on leaving the Army, claiming that military service “negatively affected men’s occupational careers, even after controlling for pre-war educational and occupational attainment”. This outcome was clearly skewed by a post-war Germany in which hardship was common. Negative military effects however diminished as the German economy improved. Elder and Clipp (1989) linked war experience - World War II and Korea - to psychological losses as well as gains across the life course by focussing on individual subjective meanings that veterans associate with their combat experiences in later life and how this links to the psychosocial functioning of veterans. Heavy combat veterans were more likely to have emotional and behavioural difficulties in later life (Elder and Clipp 1989). After substantial careers, military retirees earned on average 20% lower than comparably educated civilians during a five year transition period following military exit. This difference dropped to between 10 and 20% once this transition period had ended, though some of the disparity may be explained by voluntary decisions including opting to work for fewer hours. Although perhaps not taking a life course perspective per se, Jens O. Zinn (2010) does analyse military service in regard to biographical experiences and narrations to correct a declared lack of understanding about how individuals engage and respond to risk and uncertainty. In this work, a distinction is made between a

“proximity” and “distance” from military culture partly connected to pre-military experiences - a point made with reference to a story of a middle class recruit shocked by working class military culture. The author describes differing relationships to the “certainty culture” of the military such that those who fully embrace it will struggle most to adjust to civilian life. Those “less assimilated” are thought to have competing biographical projects that dilute the transformative effects of the military.

A life-course theoretical approach (MacLean and Elder 2007) has the capacity to combine individual agency with historical context and promises much in terms of discovering the effects of military service. But, still, in reviewing the literature on military service and the life course, Elder & McLean (2007) conclude that little progress has so far been made towards this end since questions asked have tended to concentrate on narrow areas and specific eras. Moreover, in keeping with their life course approach they suspect that answers may be found in the “larger social context”, “the forces that impel people to serve in the military” in addition to “political factors” and the “opportunities” available to military personnel (MacLean and Elder 2007:188).

2.7 Military Exit as a Role Transition

Military exit involves leaving a role - or a series of roles - that have been stable and dominant for many years. A role “is what a man expects of himself and what others expect of him in certain situations” (Hughes 1958:125). The military cultural role has greater prominence than individual ones for military personnel (Wolpert 2000). From this perspective military exit represents a

“role transition” that might bring about “role problems” as a stress induced by “a change in position, a change in behaviour, or the interaction of the two” (Wolpert 2000:108). This presents the leaver with many vital decisions particularly in the pre-retirement phase. How these events are negotiated will impact on the success of the transition (Wolpert 2000:104) and McDermott (2007) is right to remind us that for many this transition is negotiated successfully. Possibly for the first time, the leaver must decide where to live (Wolpert 2000:109) and the family too must often leave a lifestyle with which they are familiar and comfortable. In “Men and their Work”, Hughes (1958) showed how meaning associated with the role of a physician shaped the interaction between a person occupying this role and patients to create specific and desirable attributes in the physician such as “man of understanding” or “man of patience” (Hughes 1958:125). Hughes draws on Mead (1934) to state that the Physician was using his “significant others” with whom he identifies himself and shows how he listened to the voices of one “reference group” over another. “Role discontinuity” (Wolpert 2000:109) describes the longitudinal stance required for role transition and emphasises the change as a long term process and most certainly not a single or short event. Hughes makes the following pertinent point:

A person’s conception of himself is itself something of a stereotype, to which parents, teachers, siblings, peers and his own dreams have contributed. Some people project themselves far into the future, others operate more or less in the present. But in either case, there come moments of necessary revision and adjustment of one’s notions about what he can do and wants to do.(... ..) but no matter how sensitive the individual’s anticipation of himself in a future role, there is some gap between anticipation and realization (Hughes 1958:126).

This disconnect between current and anticipated roles and the transitional period in-between is a constant issue for military exit and - medical pathology apart - could well have been a key influence in military retirement syndrome. The gap between anticipation and realisation is especially noticeable in the pre-retirement phase in which heightened anxiety, irritability, and apprehension are notable (Giffen and McNeil 1967).⁸ Furthermore, in relation to the time after exit when realisation seems likely to occur, there is Wolpert's (2000) "role discontinuity" which is similar to McNeil and Giffen's (1967) "role confusion", both representing periods of adjustment to unfamiliar social conditions and roles. Usefully, Wolpert (2000) summarised the main issues associated with military exit in terms of role transition:

- a. there is a loss of status (this is similar to the whale to minnow analogy).
- b. most leavers cannot find equivalent levels of responsibility in civilian employment.
- c. there is a need to work for financial reasons.
- d. leavers must compete with younger people.
- e. others in the civilian environment may not understand or care about their military experience.
- f. leavers may not have strong civilian roots or role identifications.
- g. family dynamics change.

While still emphasising the dominance of military roles over individual ones, Wolpert (2000) states that the military is both an agent of socialisation and resocialisation. Of course, recruits are already socialised when they turn up for

⁸ This temporal gap between anticipation and realisation will be further developed in the course of this thesis as a vital component of the pre-exit phase.

basic training but the point Wolpert is making is a distinction between socialisation as a generally positive, generic, and desirable process in contrast to re-socialisation as a more “corrective” process such as that found in prison. In this sense, both socialisation and re-socialisation exist in military exit because of the need to unlearn prior habits as much as to acquire new ones. Military socialisation is dominant and extreme and might be described as “socialisation under pressure” (Hockey 1986:23). Under extreme conditions new skills are acquired, social interactions experienced, and communication techniques are learned (Wolpert 2000). Over the course of a career, these internalised traits are perhaps solidified and sedimented into a “character” (Ricoeur 1992) appropriate to the setting.

A look at the beginning of Army careers helps to clarify the sorts of processes involved in role transition. Indeed Jolly (1996) claims that to understand the end of a military career it is necessary go to the beginning, especially basic training. Solomon’s (1954) classic work is helpful here. Using three sociological studies of Infantry Recruit Training, Solomon applied an interactionist notion that “self-conception is formed in personal interaction with others” (Solomon 1954:89). This he claims explains how - through interaction - infantry recruits internalised the personal attributes required of them. His research demonstrates in clear terms a distinct status shift in self-identification from being “recruits” to “senior recruits” (Solomon 1954). The latter status was associated with a distinct shift in behaviour that Solomon took to be evidence that the individuals had started to identify themselves as soldiers as a consequence of the way that they were being progressively treated by their

superior - especially the corporal who for them represented the Army. This process of self - or identity - development was clearly embedded in the various stages of their training. Even so, Solomon (1954:94) is unable to confirm just “how far such felt changes in status represent internalization of the values of the soldierly way of life”. Though Solomon is cautious about the extent that internalisation can be assumed, his studies appear to show that soldiers passaged, in a very short timeframe, from one status to another and identified themselves with institutionally provided roles through which they must transit to reach the status of trained soldier which presumably follows senior recruit. Though concerned with the beginning of careers, Solomon’s interactionist approach shows the importance of context for the ways in which soldiers come to view themselves. In his example, the self-identities of the soldiers are clearly related to a quite well defined and moving Army “career” against which a soldier finds his place within webs of organisational meaning and practice, much of which has been given shape by those who have gone before. But, what to do at military exit? Wolpert (2000) wonders if re-socialisation might be needed at this transitional juncture? There is some ambiguity here since certain military traits probably translate into civilian work roles (Wolpert 2000) but Higate (2000a:99) warns that “negative capital” in the form of military “habit” can be problematic in civilian contexts. Perhaps this is a matter of degrees since few would doubt the problems of unshakable military identities that Higate associates with social exclusion and rough living among a small but significant proportion of ex-military personnel (2000a).

The view of military exit as a role transition places a heightened emphasis on the pre-retirement period and anticipatory processes undertaken - or avoided - during this time. Wolpert (2000) refers to two unpublished PhD theses. The first by McNeil (1964) involves interviews with 46 air force officers in relation to whether their exit was voluntary or mandatory but could draw no significant outcome. In the second thesis, Stanford (1968) applied the general concept of anticipation to claim a correlation between higher anticipation and higher morale after leaving. Similarly, Fuller & Redfering (1976) related active pre-retirement planning to high levels of satisfaction. Wolpert (1989) also considered 360 air force retirees who had attended a transition workshop - in a period before such workshops became common - with those who had not and had to prepare for retirement themselves. Most notable was a discovery that pre-retirement preparation on tangible matters such as employment, living arrangements, and financial issues were positively associated with greater post-retirement satisfaction. Overall then, Wolpert (2000) stresses the value of pre-retirement preparation towards transiting from military roles, and urges those who become involved with military retirees to acknowledge the loss that the leaver - and probably their family - have experienced.

For her book "Changing Step", Ruth Jolly (1996) interviewed 62 service leavers who had either reached the end of their contracts, been made redundant, dismissed, or simply opted for early exit. Jolly did not find in these leavers evidence of total institutionalisation which she defines as a complete "yielding of the self to an organisation" (Jolly 1996:39). Her rejection of this label hinged quite strongly on the free choice exercised by individuals when they

decided to join the armed forces. She does, however, concede that military personnel “have *surrendered* a large proportion of control over their lives and have pledged obedience to their superiors” (Jolly 1996:39). Jolly points to clear rules and regulations, “standardised surroundings”; “the need to subscribe to a group mentality”; and the taking of orders, as factors that do instil a degree of institutionalisation that hinder transition to an environment in which these things are absent (Jolly 1996). She discovered in leavers a distinct retrograde perspective and a degree of persisting “emotional dependence” (Jolly 1996:42) that constrained her interviewees to talk about the past even when their post-military lives were at least superficially “successful”. There might be a methodological issue here in that presumably the purpose of the interview was to talk about their military experiences in the context of their new lives. A number of Jolly’s 62 leavers expressed despondency and indifference about their present and future civilian lives, and a smaller number “displayed a sense of purposelessness, of inadequacy, of the good times having gone, of resignation to their present lot and an absence of goals for the future” (Jolly 1996:41)

Overall, Jolly finds that military exit is a substantial role change that requires insight, foresight, individual work, and introspection. She uses the phrase “deconditioning” to capture the process of adjusting successfully from military to civilian roles. The title of her book “Changing Step” is taken from a manoeuvre in foot drill used while marching by command to alter the step going forward. There are three clear phases of military exit for Jolly: confrontation, disengagement, and resocialisation. She found the middle stage

to be the most problematic and a point at which many became stuck. She also found resistance in the first year out of the military by many who seemed to dig in to the past for comfort; this occurred in the resocialisation phase. Altogether, “(d)isengagement from membership of the armed forces and resocialisation into a new role is a long and at times uncomfortable process.....” (Jolly 1996:166), often made harder because the introspection (Jolly 1996:161) needed to overcome these phases is an attribute that Jolly believes is not encouraged in a military that tends instead to privilege “action” in the sense of doing something as opposed to talking or thinking about it. She connects this to a need in the armed forces for the group to take priority over individual matters.⁹

2.8 Transitional Identity, Success, and Failure

Possibly all literature on the military articulates issues relating to the identity of service personnel but often this is subsumed into other dominant themes. Indeed for Aronovitch (2001:16) “military thinking and notions of effective soldiering are themselves often formulated in the language of virtues and character-building” and this often involves assumptions that military service invokes in its people unavoidable personal transformations that stick. Gender has also been an important theme in the literature on the military; an emphasis that highlights very well some of the civil-military tensions discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Although gendered dynamics cannot be left unremarked, my central emphasis on transition and identity precludes a detailed treatment of gender that is available in other works (Morgan 1994; Barrett

⁹ Yanos (2004) also makes a similar point.

1996; Woodward 1998; Enloe 2000; Woodward 2000; Higate 2003; Hockey 2003; Regan-de-Bere 2003; Higate and Firestone 2004; Woodward and Winter 2004; Kronsell 2005; Woodward and Winter 2006; Woodward and Winter 2007; Atherton 2009). That said, students of gender studies will be able to recognise gender patterns in the forthcoming data.

Gender is for the military a complicated and contentious issue because there seems little intention or possibility for the military to come fully into line with other occupational policies. In speaking of the American position, Dandeker (1999:182) believes that “military personnel policy must steer between a “conservative” position, in which armed forces retain their distinctive culture, and a “liberal” position, in which armed forces are pressured to reflect civilian values, (...) (that are) increasingly antithetical to military values”. Few would doubt that the Army is “widely accepted to be masculine in character” (Woodward and Winter 2007:15) and this seems connected with long standing associations in wider society of men with warriors.¹⁰ Notwithstanding huge changes within the armed forces, especially greater inclusion of women, “(t)he identities of combat soldiers incorporate a definite set of values that can be understood in ideal terms as “warrior masculinity”” that are still largely intact today (Barkawi, Dandeker et al. 1999:184). Frequently, the female soldier must present herself as “someone who is just as tough and capable as male soldiers” (Barkawi, Dandeker et al. 1999:185). And this sort of emphasis on the social construction of gender means that women in the military can be “just as

¹⁰ That said, Paul Higate (2003:39) alerts us to “multiple sites of masculinity” that work across the civil-military divide where there can be both “soft (military) clerks” and “hard civvies”.

susceptible as men to the processes of “soldierization” (..) and can be imbued with the values of warrior masculinity” (Barkawi, Dandeker et al. 1999:185). For Rachel Woodward, local discursive practices “shape() the availability and nature of the positions that it is possible for (such) women to occupy” (Woodward and Winter 2007:101).

In this way, matters of gender are an acknowledged absence from the remainder of this thesis that tackles how both male and female leavers narrate themselves out of the Army and into various futures. Gendered differences are thus only covered in the ways that such issues are made explicitly relevant in the narratives of the leavers themselves. This exploration of the temporal and narrated processes of “self”, that are associated with career soldiers expecting to leave the British Army is fully described in chapter three, and includes a detailed account of what is meant by terms such as “identity” and “self” for example.

Yanos’ work (2004) is concerned with identity at exit. She followed three United States Air Force officers and their wives in retirement, focussing on economic impact, social support, identity reconstruction, and mental and physical health. Even five years into retirement, these men continued to identify themselves in terms of a military self conception but appeared not to find this problematic. Yanos found that the retired officers struggled to establish a civilian identity and could not adequately reconcile a military and civilian self. Yanos suggests that this is due to a tendency and requirement especially of senior officers to expect of themselves the capacity to persevere in

the face of even the most trying circumstances and privilege and adopt group identifications rather than learn to attribute themselves with private feelings and emotions. She uses this notion to explain how there was often disconnect between what she described as the objective events with which the officers were presented in retirement, and the retirees interpretation of what was occurring. Yanos also found that the wives of the three officers displayed country explanations to their husbands.

Higate too emphasises the persistence of a military identity as presenting problems of personal adjustment. Though recognising vastly differing military experiences he feels it is important to “retain a sense of the transformative effects of the armed forces experience through which military identities are fostered and reproduced” (Higate 2001:445). Higate (2001) also suggests that the long term effect of military service may be more persisting than is generally thought. He draws on Jenkins (1996) to stress a reliance on social relations for our capacity to function in social life and that the notion of habit is of sociological importance since it is in habit that the social relations in which we exist become internalised and relevant at a non-conscious level to the “long-term legacy of military service” (2001:448). Higate also finds in the high numbers of homeless ex-servicemen evidence of a subconscious attraction to a life in which they can re-create social conditions that privilege a masculine and embodied existence. He claims that the military institution “dispose(s) a number of its former members to masculinised identity largely irreconcilable with a rapidly changing civilian environment” (Higate 2000b:344).

Frequently, accounts of military exit are polarised by an emphasis on success or failure where employment becomes the pinnacle of success, and homelessness its nemesis. Higate (2001) challenges this polarisation of exit outcome that channels leavers into circumstances of either social inclusion or exclusion. Jolly (1996) also warns that a “success” finding employment is not synonymous with the end of difficulty or even of transition. Furthermore, Jolly also discovered that often first post-military jobs are fleeting affairs due to first-year adjustments of the re-socialisation phase. Sparse official records are available on this because until recently Right Management has gathered data only up to six months post-exit, quoting finding employment as a success and implicitly, at least, the end of the matter.

Those who succeed - at least in superficial terms - are the majority (Biderman 1964; Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005) but McDermott (2007) complains that although this group of leavers tend, like himself, to develop new skills and succeed, they are left to brief lines in the literature such as that made by Iverson who states that the majority “do well” (Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005). McDermott (2007) has tried to add some substance to this by championing the “success” of a group of leavers who in his view have made a transition into successful employment and lives, with some reaching senior management positions.

Mental health issues dominate the military exit as a problem perspective and as we have seen there is military “retirement syndrome” (Giffen and McNeil 1967) or “old soldier syndrome” (Greenberg 1965). There are free floating

anxiety and psychosomatic difficulties (Milowe 1964; Bellino 1969), and there are reactions that are thought to be depression (Greenberg 1965). Druss (1965) too draws on psychoanalytic theory to call for health intervention to aid transition and Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick (1979) interpret retirement difficulties in the language of a grief reaction. In addition to this, there are connections between military exit and mental health difficulties that are related to the earlier - sometimes much earlier - trauma of battle, that has in the past been dubbed “shell shock”. Elder and Clip (1989) traced the heavy combat experience of 149 United States veterans of World War II and Korea to strong behavioural and emotional problems in later life, although this was not emulated in those who had light to no combat experience. There is a growing knowledge about the mental health effects of combat that are described under a term that encapsulates all trauma and defines responses as normal reactions to adverse events. This has reduced the stigma, previously associated with such adverse reactions to combat. This is called post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and can occur before or after military exit.

With the exception of PTSD, the underpinning rationale beneath most of this research regarding military exit has been the loss or anticipated loss of a distinct status and role in which individual soldiers feel that they have a place. The removal of this either by choice or time invokes a reaction that has variably been interpreted as grief, depression, role confusion, crisis and loss associated with a degree of confusion; and, in the most severe cases, dramatic and catastrophic behaviour (Milowe 1964; Greenberg 1965; Giffen and McNeil 1967). Military exit as a crisis is a trend that McNeil et al (1983) found in

most of the military retirement research. Crisis is defined as a “period of disequilibrium” that needs to be seen as hazardous but transitional. Crisis theory presupposes a relatively stable individual and defines retirement as a hazardous event (Giffen and McNeil 1967). The application of crisis theory to military exit means that leaving the armed forces and its associated disruptions are viewed in terms of an adjustment event that needs to be negotiated in the context of a longer timeframe. For most, the crisis event will be negotiated during the disequilibrium period that is potentially as long as two years before and five years after exit. In the longer term, and from the viewpoint of crisis theory, the disequilibrium period affords opportunity for a “growth experience” or in more negative cases may lead to “maladaptive adjustment” (McNeil, Lecca et al. 1983), perhaps similar to the “old soldier” stage of military retirement syndrome, or it may even result in homelessness (Higate 2000b).

The emotional influence of war has also been explained by “three societal and psychological perspectives” (Elder and Clipp 1989:313). First, the generally forward looking ways that a society often create conditions in which it is common and desirable to view the end of hostility as also the time when only the reintroduction of normal and civilian pursuits is reasonable and appropriate. This leaves no place for backward looking interpretations that describe persisting effects of war in terms of symptoms or stress. Here war veterans are channelled into viewing themselves in terms of this generalised other that emphasises the future, progress, and moving on at the expense of any trailing unresolved matters associated with combat. A second vantage point is that of war as a “pathogenic legacy” that privileges a connection between combat and

psychological problems in the form generally associated with PTSD. Third, is the option to emphasise the positive benefits of war or combat for both individual and society. For the individual this refers to the building of a form of coping capital as a result of being placed in extremely challenging circumstances such that all future challenges are compared to this event resulting in a positive approach and expectations of success. It will be important to remember the possibly ambiguous findings of Elder and Clip. They stress that one person can display signs of both gains and losses from combat experience such that a veteran might experience continued stress reactions to prior combat as well as benefiting from enhanced feelings of self-efficacy and potency in the face of contemporary challenges. Elder and Clip's work (1989) draws attention to three distinct vantage points that may be prominent in society in different epochs. Of note here is the need of the United States to play down or forget experiences of Vietnam and a connection between how a society needs to define combat and the legitimization or otherwise of personal accounts.

2.9 Summary

A review of the literature on military exit has shown a complex of social processes associated with the men (noting the absence of women) who have served and exited the armed forces over the past fifty years or so. This has included service of all different sorts, intensity, and duration and has pointed to a range of consequences that have been attributed to military service. Changing historical epochs and civil-military relations are also shown to be important in the experiences of the departing soldier. The conditions and policies of military

service are premised on a central concern for maintaining a sense of difference during service and then, at exit, for compensating for possible consequences of sacrifice (by way of early pensions for example). A core feature of this separation and difference involves the subordination of self to the task, team, or nation (Gibson and Abell 2004). Also, emerging from this review is the notion that leaving the Army takes time that can be divided into processes or phases. This temporal perspective is promising for those seeking to understand the interplay between person and service but too much emphasis on “role” has perhaps precluded proper analysis of agency and interaction. In the next chapter, it will be argued that identity is a constant “becoming” - an emphasis that makes the anticipatory phases of exit important as a consequence of novel, unknown, and encroaching civilian futures.

Identities of Becoming

“On the basis of what I am I project my future” (Taylor 1989).

3.1 Introduction

As a concept, identity is difficult to handle. It's relatively formless nature is both its strength and difficulty. Strauss chose not to define it at all, leaving it to his readers to find meaning from its use. Even so, for Strauss it was a concept worth tackling because of its promise to “look around the corners of (...) problems, and be less likely to slide down the well-worn grooves of other men's thoughts” (Strauss 1969:10). Others believe it has been forced upon us, both as human beings and as sociologists. They blame its emergence on the unstable conditions of late modern or postmodern society believed to have disrupted clear, secure, and comfortable identities rooted in so called stable traditional society (Bauman 1991; Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Lash and Friedman 1992). According to this view, so clear was our place in traditional society that we found a sense of self in the steadfast external relations so that we could feel “ontologically secure” (Giddens 1991:43) such that identity was barely an issue. The insecurity of late modernity is said to have shaken our “protective cocoons” (Giddens 1991:3), forcing identity as a reflexive issue - a need to continually work on our place in a turbulent and changing social terrain, but, of course, all of this presupposes a pre-modern clarity of self. In reply to the suggestion that identity is nothing more than a late modern conundrum, Jenkins

argues that “reflections upon identity are not a historical novelty” (Jenkins 1996:11) and refers to the substantial and very early work on such matters by Cooley, Mead, and Simmel (Mead and Morris 1934; Simmel 1950; Cooley 1962) to state his case. He goes on to say that “the proper sociological place for the concept of ‘identity’ is at the heart of our thinking about the relationships between concrete individual behaviour and the necessary abstraction of collectivity” (Jenkins 1996:18).

At military exit, leavers must carve - and have carved for them - a different future. Who and what they have become, in the moments that they anticipate an unfolding horizon of possibilities, is a consequence of the social relationships in which they have been embedded. As these relationships change, so too must they.¹¹ Who they have become is always moving into who and what they will be. The central argument of this thesis is that identity is a process; a being and a becoming and “never a final or settled matter” (Jenkins 1996:4). Identities are situated in local contexts and settings, and are constitutive of and constituted by social relations and interaction. “(T)he indivisibility of both agency and structure as well as individual and social identity” (Hockey and James 2003:21) produces a complex relationship between identity and the places we inhabit during our lives. This thesis is concerned with how career soldiers understand the process of leaving the Army and the meanings that are drawn upon to construct their identities as they anticipate and actualise the transition from military to civilian contexts. Drawing on Mead (1934) and Ricoeur (1984; 1992), identities of becoming

¹¹ This includes both military and civilian relationships.

positions social relations and interaction as prior to individuality or the self and takes the stance that the self is a social and intersubjective achievement, made possible only within language. As well as continually passing into who we will be, Ricoeur (1992) shows that to do this we must also pass into the other in order to know ourselves. Taylor too, claims that “(o)ne is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it” (1989:35). Changes in self are therefore implicated in changes in relationships and vice versa. Strauss shows how such relationship changes are “often so mundane, so gradual that it passes virtually unnoticed” (1969:93), needing an incident to force recognition of the shift. Military Exit is a liminal (Van-Gennep 1960) and fateful moment (Giddens 1991:113); it is an “epiphanic experience” (Denzin 1992:26) or “turning point” (Glaser and Strauss 1971:93). Those who are leaving the Army can never be the same again, and yet, how individuals narrate their exit can be another matter entirely.

In this thesis, the concept of identity promises access to both the symbolic collectivity of the British Army and meaning and experiences that are uniquely individual to its soldiers. In tracking “social identities across the life course”, Hockey (2003) builds on Jenkins’ work to emphasise individual phenomenological responses to age related roles (such as becoming sixty-five) to show how emphasis on identity can illuminate these sorts of transition - previously afforded centre-stage as a structural entity - to uncover both unique individual flavour and collective symbolic meaning. The temporal conception of identity - as a becoming (and unbecoming) - permits space for individual authorship, but does not deny “collective” meaning. This is only possible by

centring identity and adopting a view of “structure” as a moving process and a “product of individual thought and action” (Hockey and James 2003:13). The value of this particular view of identity is a dual recognition and interweaving of “meanings” that are both generated uniquely to individuals (but not transcendental) and also collectively embedded. The British Army comprises many practices and procedures that are saturated with historic symbolism and meaning, and the concept of identity offers insight into these social processes as military exit is approached, experienced, and given meaning by career soldiers in their final year of service.

3.2 Already Arrived?

When applied to ourselves, identity is a term often used to communicate internally and to others, a sense of who or what we are; we may do this with words or behaviour. This also depends on the validation of our presentation by others. Such common-sense usage tends towards definitions of identity as a fixed entity¹², such that a person is associated with stable characteristics and categories by which he or she is known. In this sense, our identity is made relevant, not as a becoming but *as if* we have already arrived at who and what we are¹³. We may or may not always believe in this presentation¹⁴ and interactional encounters might regularly challenge the conception of ourselves that we seek to project in what Goffman has termed “performance disruptions” (1971:236). Age too may challenge our fixed sense of self. Changes in our

¹² There are exceptions to this such as, for example, reality television programmes or various self-help books (Lawler 2008) that increasingly invite individuals to work on themselves to improve (and change) their minds and / or bodies.

¹³ Relatedly, Goffman (1971:65) talks of a “mask of manner (that) can be held in place from within”.

¹⁴ See, for example, Goffman’s reference to “cynical performers” (1971:28).

physical appearance can make an older body unrecognizable from younger versions, but still we invoke descriptions of each other that mark the continuity, whilst at the same time recognising and incorporating at least some of the changes, perhaps also mourning personal decline, or acknowledging difference with the help of social rituals. Convention has it however that we - and the people that we know - remain essentially the same; an amalgamation of experiences that are attributed to a name given at birth. Despite undeniable physical - and sometimes mental - change or decline, we generally treat each other *as if* there exists an inner continuity or self. We go on *as if* there exists a deep and inner core of self; a compass and directive force that is unique to us and that confronts an external and social world in its characteristic manner - a manner or approach by which we become known to ourselves and to others. It is to this assumed, essential, and inner self that people seem to appeal and orient themselves in daily life.¹⁵ This is similar to the generally unsupported transcendental self (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:18) which can be traced to the French philosopher, Descartes' (1596 – 1650) who thought it existed as the essence of a mental process of thinking, independent of external relations. Elias (1978:294) argues that the common belief in an inner “true self” has arisen as a consequence of a social arrangement in the West - “the civilising process” - that required individuals to control certain impulsive behaviours, consequently concealing and relegating them to an inner region of the mind, that for Elias

¹⁵ This is also the sort of self at which Army training is directed, most overtly in its appeal for correct and core values and standards: “(t)he Army’s Values and Standards are not abstract concepts whose origins lie solely in the demands of battle. Values are the moral principles - the intangible character and spirit - that should guide and develop us into the sort of people we should be”. This quote has been taken from the “Values and Standards of the British Army” (Army 2008).

(1978) formed a capacity - or habit - to make reference to an aspect of self as inner or true. This may have arisen as a consequence of “unplanned social processes” (Williams 2000:34) that brought people into greater dependence on each other, perhaps also enmeshing them in aspects of each other’s lives. Williams draws on Mennell (1994) to connect changes in social processes to the emergence of a tendency to contemplate ourselves and others as having motives or intentions that are held internally - to form a “more “psychological” view of people” (Williams 2000:34). This assignment to the self of internal directive capacities may also have settled in common thought as a link to what people actually do - their conduct - to form a cultural rationale on which identity was connected with an individual capacity to act (Williams 2000:34). Elias’ challenge to an inner self is on the basis of its social - and therefore revisable - origin. He uses the term “*homines aperti*” (Elias 1978) to describe a common sense of individualism to the point that people do not notice their interdependency. But, the self doesn’t necessarily have to be this way. Elias called for a sociological conception of a man (or woman) as “fundamentally orientated towards and dependent on other people throughout his life” (Elias 1978:294), and to view the relationships between people as “figurations”, like a dance in which each responds to the other since a “dance”, as an entity beyond people, cannot be perceived - just like society-beyond-individuals ought not to be imaginable. This interdependent approach to selfhood was Elias’ response to a powerful, but misleading, common belief that the origins of motivation and choice originated from an inner being. “The term ‘the inner man’ is a convenient metaphor, but it is a metaphor that misleads” (Elias 1978:293).

3.3 A Conceptual Framework

“Interactionists have persisted in believing in the presence of a concrete, real subject” (Denzin 1992:2). But what sort of self can be realistically continued into postmodern times? “Decenteredness, polysemy and difference” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994) summarises the poststructural attack (outlined further below) on any form of coherent and persisting self. The poststructural self, as we will see, is a free floating one, displaced by powers and knowledges located at the nexus of discursive practices. But still, the self remains a category for attaching subjective meaning to experience. Questions of central concern to contemporary symbolic interactionists are connected to some form of persisting self. They might ask: how and in what form does a self persist? And, to what extent do individuals actively construct and make roles and identities? (Reitzes and Mutran 2006). Gubrium and Holstein (1994) grant the “centred” (Gergen 1991:7) modern self a presence that they argue is authentic, not because it is an inner reality or substance, but because it remains an organising means of reference that is grounded in every day “interpretive practices of self definition” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:686). In this sense, for these authors, it achieves a “concreteness” and substantial presence even within postmodern terminology. The authors maintain, however, that the criteria of authenticity is not an analytic one but is a local contextual one that belongs to its members in which understandings of a self are subject to “local accountability structures” such that the local context provides “frameworks within which actors and actions are defined or define themselves in circumstantially relevant terms with reference to situated values” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:699).

Here, local relevancies - which for the Army are inevitably linked to operational effectiveness - are associated with notions of responsibility and responsiveness (Gubrium and Holstein 1994), and to values. This implies a moral dimension to the sort of identities that are made relevant within local conditions and this is a theme that will be developed further with reference to Ricoeur and narrative. Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides a means to interrogate locally relevant "interpretive" actions of individuals as they narrate themselves out of the powerfully local context of the British Army. Ricoeur's hermeneutics when combined with Mead's work provides a framework that takes the self as entirely social and as always a becoming and unbecoming. A detailed account of Mead's pragmatism and Ricoeur's hermeneutics is set out below.

George H. Mead (1863-1931) is famously connected with the University of Chicago where he was involved with the course, "Social Psychology". His intellectual roots lie in both pragmatism and psychological behaviourism and his connection to symbolic interactionism is clear in his insistence that thinking and the self are processes and not a final accomplishment. In many ways Mead's version of the self is rather mundane. This is unsurprising given his commitment to pragmatism and a desire to stay close to every day social phenomena. Unquestionably and centrally, Mead asserted that the "mind and the self are without residue social emergents" (Mead and Morris 1934:xiv). He believed that individuals are born with very basic capacities to adjust to each other and this they do through gesture. Mead used the sport of boxing (Mead and Morris 1934) to emphasise this and to describe what might have been the

character of interactions in early society. In the boxing ring, not every movement is pre-fixed by thought and boxers will frequently react instinctively to the other's movement. Although each boxer has the capacity to think about his next action - and will often do so - his bodily movement sometimes occurs without such prior thought so that one boxer's gesture can be compared to the beginning of a social act (Faris 1936) in which a response is prompted in the other boxer; once the response has been delivered the act will be complete. The concept of stimulus and response is noticeable behind the notion of gesture and this is clear in the two boxers when they respond to each other with instinctive moves devoid of prior thought. When the stimulus - response relationship of gesture occurs in early society it means that one individual's basic gesture acquires the power of stimulus and can invite a specific response from another human being. For Mead, the genesis of social relations and the self lies in the gesture which can over time come to predict intention.

Eventually - through time and experience - the gestures of early human interaction are expanded into stable associations between stimulus and response or meaning. When the same gesture invokes repeatable but different ideas in two individuals, this can be considered a "significant symbol" (Mead and Morris 1934:45), but eventually when the meaning that is prompted by a gesture is stable and the same for two individuals the gesture may be called language. The gesture for Mead stands as the rudimentary origin of all social acts and processes. Social relations that grow from this early but persisting means of communication are prior to individual consciousness and begin at the instinctual level as previously described with reference to boxing. The

resources from which a thinking self may be constructed are available exclusively in the communication that evolves when individuals interact. There can be no self as a reflective thinking entity until external gesture and meaning has taken place between members of society. This is because social relations are constitutive of our internal conversation (Mead and Morris 1934), and thinking emanates completely from such interactions that are grounded most fundamentally on the gesture. For Mead, therefore, consciousness must always be consciousness of something.

Quite clearly then, gestures only achieve meaning through interaction and thinking is a consequence of these social processes and interactions: “(t)he essence of the self (.....) is cognitive: it lies in the internalised conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking” (Mead and Morris 1934:173). As societies develop, the interrelation between symbols and gestures becomes ever more complicated and importantly the association between gesture and meaning held in language is also anticipated, remembered, and generally retained in a mental capacity (Gergen 1999:123). Thinking is no more than the mental representation of the social processes that are going on - or have gone on - in the world as it is experienced by individuals. This is what Mead means when he claims that the self is entirely social. There is no prior self other than the capacity to connect gestures to meaning. Importantly, then, interaction produces consciousness.

It is because we can note our own existence in experience that our selves emerge. We are unable to notice ourselves directly and instantaneously, instead

we take the roles of others and can reflect upon our interactional performance by hearing and viewing ourselves from this imagined perspective (Mead 1913). We can also do this alone by imagining scenarios in which we are present and can “try on” the responses of others in different roles. (This is particularly clear in chapter six where respondents imagine themselves from the perspective of civilian employers). As we act and engage as integral parts of social processes we become capable of being both an object (to ourselves and to others) and an acting subject; it is only as an object that we can know ourselves. Mead termed this the “me” and the “I”. The “me” is “the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes” (Mead and Morris 1934: 175) and the “I” is the acting self - the agency - that confronts presenting experiences with necessary innovation and adjustment. Though separate, the “I” cannot be known itself and achieves expression only in terms of the socially internalised gestures and symbols manifest in the socially informed “me”. Mead (1934:174) made this point quite clearly: “I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself.” It is only in the memory of the trail of our actions that we can learn about the “I” as the acting force, but what we learn is quite definitely inseparable from the “me” as the means to know ourselves as acting agents; for Flaherty (2001:155) we can only see the “I” through “memory images” and “both “I” and “me” must wait, as it were, for the activity of everyday life to unfold in order to exist empirically” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:30). The “I” and the “me” are in a constant conversation with each other and this is made possible by language developed as a result of interaction; although language is a refinement on gesture since consciousness for Mead has a pre-lingual but social origin

(Jenkins 1996:35). The earlier distinction between gesture, symbol, and language supports this point.

Mead's social self is not static nor is it ever a final achievement, and this temporal aspect has also been intrinsic to the treatment of the self by some symbolic interactionists (Glaser and Strauss 1971; Denzin 1982; Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983; Charmaz 1991; Charmaz 1994; Ezzy 1998:241) inspired by Mead's work. The self is a dynamic process. It is always a becoming, involving the creation and re-creation of different selves as individuals negotiate diverse social settings and interactions. Mead believed that different interactions call different selves into being and he referred to the "normality of a multiple personality" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:30). The self "is formulated in relation to the very conditions it responds to and, in this regard, it normally divides into different selves" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:30). When we enter social situations and interaction we have the capacity to observe ourselves as we negotiate the novel and mundane experiences of the present. As we do this we take the role of the "other" to anticipate how they may be receiving us; and as a consequence we regularly adjust our performance (Mead 1910).

When our performance is novel, we might even surprise ourselves in our reaction (Flaherty and Fine 2001). We observe our own performances and we come to know the "I" as it becomes "me" in the immediacy of the present interaction (which becomes the past by the time we are able to take notice). We also know the "I" in the memory of experience. This is an ongoing and

necessary process that is needed for us to negotiate and develop a trajectory in our various contexts. “Over time (we) come to develop a sense of *generalized other*”, that is, a composite of others’ reactions to (us) across situations” (Gergen 1999:124). This means that through reflection we notice ourselves in our varied interactions and in so doing we come to get a sense of ourselves as we are embedded in our various social relations. It is important to emphasize here that it is Mead’s view that a sense of self cannot be found in any other origin and that there is no immediate subjectivity such that we can act and perceive in precisely the same instant. This reflexive role-taking process is therefore a central factor in Mead’s social self as the means by which we can monitor and adjust the self that the interaction hails and in so doing get a sense of identity whose stability lies not within us per se but in the consistency of the generalised other as a symbol of our experience in varied interactions (Gergen 1999:124).

As the agency of self, in the form of the “I”, confronts situations inevitable in the unfolding nature of the present, there will be both novelty and routine to negotiate. Choices are needed about how to proceed during interactions. Options about “what to be” in these unfolding interactions are scanned and reflected upon and hypothetical “what-if” scenarios can be played out in thinking. This requires a capacity to bring into the present meanings from the past and anticipated meanings that belong to the future (Mead and Morris 1934; Ricoeur 1984). We must ask “(w)ho am I in this situation?” (Strauss 1969:47); a question that is much more noticeable to ourselves when situations are problematic (Mead 1913) or without prior template (e.g. anticipated post-Army

lives) since, as we have seen above, instinctual responses are often stimulated in familiar and routine moments to a point that we stop noticing ourselves as we move through time. As we think in the space between stimulus and response, we take the role of different players to consider possible outcomes. This is a more advanced process than the immediate instinctive connection between gesture and response but this is different only because time (history and life span) and experience provides us with a menu of interactional ways of being, that we must sift in order to select how to go on in this and that situation. This is a crucial factor in understanding the innovative and creative potential of selves as they apply meaning to their identities of becoming. But so as not to take this emphasis too far, we must remind ourselves of Mead's clarity that the self is social "without residue" (Mead and Morris 1934:xiv) and so can never be more than that which the resources of social relations offer. Nevertheless, in mature societies our "responses are the product of interpretive activities, not of a mechanism of stimulus followed by response" (Williams 2000:94). Flaherty (2001) makes the same emphasis.

Mead's contention that the self is a process, whose origin is entirely social, is therefore realised through interaction and language: "(t)he human experience of time is one of process: the present is always a "becoming" it is always coming up as the future moves towards us, or it is moving away as present action recedes into the past" (Strauss 1969:31). This notion of becoming is central to the use of the word "anticipating" in the title of the thesis since it seems like a routine human orientation to life that is ever more pertinent when present endeavours or immediate futures are disrupted. That said, individual

levels of anticipation will vary: some will tackle Army exit over a number of prior years and others will do so only when pressed by unfolding circumstances. This is discussed further in chapters seven and nine.

For Mead “all being is becoming” (Flaherty and Fine 2001:150) and so movement and process across time has a prime position in Mead’s theory of the self. Even so, this temporal aspect has been a much underemphasized aspect of his work (Strauss 1969; Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983; Ezzy 1998) and Maines (1983) has sought to correct this neglect by importing Mead’s ‘Theory of the Past’ into Sociology. His close reading of Mead shows the subtle complexities of the relationship between the past, present, and the future in connection to our identities of becoming as they take shape across time and place. Undoubtedly, process and time is fundamental to an understanding of Mead’s “I” and “me” because the “I” is permanently concerned with the unfolding and anticipation of reality, with “emergence, novelty, surprise, and becoming” (Mead and Morris 1934:177). This fleeting character is mirrored in the constantly vanishing present that is so central to Mead’s stress on temporality as intrinsic to the self. The fleeting nature of the present may be contrasted with a more stable and consistent “me” that is at least partially rooted in social convention and might almost be acting as a social stabilizer for the “I” as it tackles the tricky unfolding issue of the present, mindful of what is yet to come. *Mind and Society* (Mead and Morris 1934) has attracted greater notice than *Philosophy of the Present* (Mead and Murphy 1959) in which Mead sets out his treatment of time in much greater detail.

Identities of becoming are forever moving in time and place. The interpretive gap between stimulus and response, and the continually unfolding nature of life, mean a separation between event and meaning, creating space for changing emphasis and meaning across time. This might better be described as 'perspective'. Baert (1992:76) also makes this distinction, and claims that "(t)hings can remain the same while their representational form of meaning changes. It can change from one person to another or from one culture to another, or alternatively it can change through time". For Mead, the social world is characterised by inherent change and "the existence of events is beyond doubt: the meaning of those events, however, is problematic" (Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983:165).

Conditions for a variable self are set both by this disconnect between event and meaning and an emphasis on the "now" (Mead and Morris 1934) as a continually unfolding juncture where the past and anticipation of the future are made relevant. The inevitability of novelty in the present moment, and the agency of the "I", together locate emphasis on the "specious present" (Mead and Morris 1934) as the point forever before us urging our immediate interpretation and attention. This is the fleeting moment between event and response, a window for drawing upon our reflexive capacities to assess options and decide how to proceed or what to be. But in so doing - and especially if faced with problematic situations - we may by the characteristics of the new event find ourselves reflecting upon our past from a new perspective. We may also resurrect memories that have become relevant by a trigger in the specious present. For Mead, the future too is vulnerable to the same sort of revision or

“reseeing” (Strauss 1969:67) which until “that moment” held a certain clarity and focus. This is what Mead is referring to when he states that both our past and future are hypothetical (Flaherty and Fine 2001). Identities of becoming seem especially noticeable at junctures of novelty such as the ending of an Army career, and this process of review (of the past) and anticipation (of feasible futures) will be highlighted most in chapters six and seven where leavers appear drawn into acknowledged and unacknowledged questions of identity by tackling what they will do after the Army. Paul Ricoeur’s work by virtue of its emphasis on narrative identity and, to a lesser extent, its partial emphasis on the future, is a significant resource for explicating how leavers understand military exit.

3.4 Narrative

Like Mead, Ricoeur also treats the experience of being and acting in the world (Ricoeur and Valdés 1991) as the starting point for the analysis of identity, and claims that the event is “the touchstone of the analysis of the self” (Ricoeur 1992:141). He uses the term discourse to stress a dialectic between event and meaning but he always retains a firm attachment to lived experience that for him is brought to language as a means of reference (Ricoeur and Valdés 1991:4). To be clear, Ricoeur believes that although the event and experience must come first, meaning is all that can be communicated, leaving the actual and complete lived experience to those involved. Ricoeur’s narrative theory of self operates in the space between event and meaning but its contribution reaches far beyond the mere representation of experience because as Somers notes: “social life is itself *storied* and (...) narrative is an *ontological condition of*

social life” (original emphasis) (1994:613). This “already storied” aspect of life is prominent in chapter five where locally dominant narratives concerning Army exit seem to operate across careers, but perhaps take on a different personal emphasis in the moments that career soldiers come to anticipate their own imminent exit from the British Army.

Narrative embellishes the interpretive processes between event and meaning by placing individual actions and thoughts in the temporal context of a story - or a series of stories - in which an event becomes an episode. For Ricoeur, life is always already symbolically mediated (Wood 1991:30) and we cannot approach life anew because we become who we are by placing ourselves in “social narratives rarely of our own making” (Somers 1994:606). Ricoeur uses the term “pre-narrative” to describe such pre-existing networks of meanings and symbols that make up our social world and that are understood in narrative terms. These meanings can be multiple, flexible, and changing as well as stable, fixed, and traditional. Stories work at different levels and the notion that lives are lived enmeshed within them provides the first part of a process in which individual attempts to narrate or to tell their own story are secondary or are “grafted on” to a readily available network of narrative (Wood 1991:30). Narrative is more than a representation of experience because it structures, orders, and provides the rules for our participation, it can determine what we will notice and what we might remember or pursue. One of the attractions of Ricoeur’s work is this capacity to capture processes of meaning that are at once collective and individual; narrative identity “can be applied to a community as

well as to an individual” (Ricoeur 1984:247). Ezzy too, recognises the scope of Ricoeur’s work and calls for a:

synthesis of George Herbert Mead's conception of the temporal and intersubjective nature of the self with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of narrative identity. Combining the insights of Ricoeur's philosophical analysis with Mead's social-psychological orientation provides a subtle, sophisticated, and potent explanation of self-identity (Ezzy 1998:239).

For Ricoeur, the self cannot know itself directly but is known only through relationships with others and the narratives of everyday life in which we are all located. Plummer too advocates story-telling and in his research on sexual stories he finds “story telling (...) at the heart of our symbolic interactions” (Plummer 1994:20) as a process that takes place in conjunction with others. Not only are others needed as the characters in the narrative but “producers”, “coaxers”, and “consumers” (Plummer 1994:21) are necessary for stories to succeed. Therefore, story-telling is first and foremost a “joint action” (Plummer 1994:20) that takes place intersubjectively, although it also continues in an intrasubjective way (Williams 2000:84).

In ‘Oneself as Another’ Ricoeur develops his work beyond the descriptive account of action in his book ‘Time and Narrative’ to a focus on identity in terms of the prescriptive and ethical influences that he locates within the story (Ricoeur 1992:114). Ricoeur seems to position the self in a mediating role that is based on narrative and which oscillates between description and prescription. In the first instance our actions are described by ourselves and others and this for Ricoeur is developed into the form of a story that places action within a timeframe and provides a sense of movement and intention, often including a

beginning and an end. Narrative theory of identity promises improved understanding of the processes by which meaning becomes associated with action and that incorporates both a temporal and prescriptive element that is also implicated in the self as the source. For Ricoeur, the advancement from description to prescription via narrative provides an ethical dimension because in the story there is always an implication about what sort of action ought to be taken. Ricoeur proposes the triad of three processes of “describe, narrate, prescribe” (Ricoeur 1992:114) which each specifically relate to “the constitution of action and the constitution of self” (Ricoeur 1992:115).

Direction and intent of movement across time is most clear in the theme of emplotment which offers a means to synthesise and order events as episodes in a continuing story and is also a means to know ourselves over time. Emplotment is central to narration and together both terms create an image or concept of a socially ordered whole, but unlike fiction or history the ending is uncertain and the story subject to unexpected events (that may not be part of the anticipated story) that have to be tackled. In ordering events across time, decisions are made against the plot about how to cope with concordant and discordant happenings (Ricoeur 1992). Discordant events continually challenge existing plots and the endeavour of emplotment helps to mediate between permanence and change as we order our lives and so shape - and have shaped - who or what we are. This tension between concordance and discordance has been incorporated into Ricoeur’s notion of narrative identity. For Ricoeur our sense of self is not found in the events of life (Wood 1991) so much but in the stories we tell about them; and as such, a view of ourselves as persisting or

enduring across time as the same person is maintained as a concordant discordance. Rogue events are often accounted for in a way that sustains coherence and permanence. It seems as though soldiers anticipating exit increasingly encounter rogue, novel, or unexpected events as they apply for jobs, find new living arrangements, or cope with changes in immediate social relations. These changes will, at some point, have to be incorporated into their ongoing sense of self and this is explicated in chapter six in relation to practical exit plans or “prominent ventures”.

For Ricoeur, it is the “narrative that constructs the durable properties of a character” (Wood 1991:193). He seems to use character in two ways, first as a depiction of who does what within the story - in other words to refer to the person ascribed with the various action in the roles that make up the plot. In this way the person acquires an identity from narrating a story or “history of a life” (Ricoeur 1992:147) that is rooted most firmly in the contingency of events (Ricoeur 1992:142) that are recounted and configured into episodes crucial to the continuance of the story. In this sense identity acquires a fundamental and unavoidable dialectic of concordant discordance since it is only through the continual emergence of contingent events that the story can continue. “The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her “experiences”” (Ricoeur 1992:147). Secondly, Ricoeur uses character as a term to emphasise sameness in identity, as will be developed further in a moment.

Dealing with identity as a process throws up a problem for Ricoeur caused specifically by the belief that identity endures as a “permanence in time” (Ricoeur 1992:117).¹⁶ For Ricoeur, identity consists of two distinct but contradictory definitions. There is identity as sameness (Latin ‘idem’) and identity as selfhood (Latin ‘ipse’). It is to the sameness of identity that a continual threat is present in temporality because events and people change across time; they age and experience different, new, and unexpected situations. A rupture to sameness of identity occurs simply owing to small day-by-day changes that together over time mean that people can become quite different such that their resemblance to a prior self might be difficult to notice by those who have not witnessed the incremental changes. Ricoeur copes with this with the notion of “uninterrupted continuity” by finding in connection or linkage a degree of sameness, but Ricoeur recognizes this as a weak solution that cannot remove the persisting “factor of dissemblance, of divergence, of difference” (Ricoeur 1992:117) that inclusion of time brings to identity. In addition to this weaker account of sameness are two other more solid definitions. First there is sameness as numerical which refers to a number of “things” as the same that are described by a word or words that can be accurately applied to them all. And second, there is qualitative sameness which invokes a less absolute criterion where extreme resemblance will suffice.

The question that Ricoeur poses himself is: how can the permanence of self be accounted for without recourse to a “substance” or “substratum”? And “Is there

¹⁶ This difficulty is a consequence of rejecting the idea that the self can be an immutable substance.

a form of permanence in time that is a reply to the question ‘Who am I?’” (Ricoeur 1992:118). This is where Ricoeur’s second use of the term character becomes relevant as half of his answer to this question; the other half of his answer is provided by an individual’s capacity to keep their word or to make and keep promises. Here *idem* can be equated to character and *ipse* to “keeping one’s word” (Ricoeur 1992:118). Character for Ricoeur is (1992:121) “the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized” that are developed either by habits or by “acquired identifications” (Ricoeur 1992:121). Habits are built up to become traits from which a person might be distinguishable from another and which are more likely to be as a consequence of “sedimentation” rather than “innovation” (Ricoeur 1992:121), because in the historic development of habit moments of “innovation” are unlikely to persist. Acquired identification as an aspect of sameness seems to account for a tendency for individuals or whole communities to notice or recognise themselves in - and by - the common values and norms that surround them (Ricoeur 1992:121). Ricoeur (1992:122) refers also to the process of “internalisation” as the means by which external norms and ideals are taken as aspects of the self and the origin in “otherness” of these characteristics or identifications is forgotten and they are taken as a means to recognise oneself. This for Ricoeur proves that by internalisation individuals can take on characteristics from “otherness” which they come to see as aspects of themselves. This shows Ricoeur a human capacity to develop moral and loyal commitment as an inherent part of stable character such that a person can habitually identify with “a “cause” above (their) own survival” (1992:121).

This is clearly pertinent to the concept and practice of soldiering where self-sacrifice is necessarily connected with a cause beyond the individual requiring identification with a regiment, unit, Army, and/or country. This kind of individual internalisation of collective morality, sentiment, and character is far from straightforward and is discussed in chapter six where leavers seem, on the eve of exit, to construct a variety of relationships with a range of personal properties that may be associated with being a soldier.

When character has become a sedimented and relatively secure collection of habits and identifications that enable a fit between context and the dispositions of self, it can be said that *idem* and *ipse* overlap. This means that the acquired character as the sameness of identity coincides with selfhood. For Ricoeur character is the answer to “what am I” and *ipse* the answer to “who am I”. When they overlap, a person’s selfhood is located in character. Narrative for Ricoeur is the mediator between “the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide and the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness” (1992:124).

The capacity for “keeping one’s word” (Ricoeur 1992:123) demonstrates both the achievement of permanence in time and the breaking away of selfhood from sameness. To keep one’s word is to potentially defy the events of time, to cling to a line of action despite that which may challenge intention. This permits the clear isolated emergence of *ipse* or selfhood as separate and independent from *idem* identity. This drives a wedge between permanence in time and sameness and is why Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity must encapsulate the

irreducible poles of sameness and selfhood that are mediated by narrative. Between the two poles an “interval of space” (Ricoeur 1992:124) is opened up that is to be the domain for narrative identity to mediate “between two limits: a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit; where the *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem*” (original emphasis) (Ricoeur 1992:124).

From a reading of Ricoeur and Mead it seems that people find meaning and search for understanding mostly in a narrative form (Atkins 2004) and this emphasis underpins chapters five, six, and seven in the context of the anticipation of an unknown future. More generally, the social sciences have taken this forward in a swell of writing that treats identity and self as a narrative construction and this is sometimes referred to as the “narrative turn” (Maines and Ulmer 1993; Smith and Sparkes 2008)¹⁷ which includes many writers who emphasise the place of stories in this process (Bruner 1987; Polkinghorne 1988; Taylor 1989; Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992; Josselson and Lieblich 1993; Maines and Ulmer 1993; Maines 1993; Somers 1994; Polkinghorne 1996; Ezzy 1998; Eakin 1999; Maines 1999; King 2000; Jarvinen 2001; Fivush and Haden 2003; Jarvinen 2004). Narrative is internal (Athens 1994); communal (Maines

¹⁷ In Smith and Sparkes’ (2008) terms this thesis takes a view of the person that is “thinner” than a psychosocial perspective whose emphasis is entirely the internal construction of understanding and selves. In this thesis, it is accepted that a person is entirely constituted by and constitutive of the social through interaction; but, at the same time, is nevertheless capable of “artful” and nuanced narration within available and local resources. This inter-subjective approach is supported by the theoretical framework of Mead and Ricoeur. Smith and Sparkes have attempted to impose order on narrative work by dividing approaches into five types ranging from the “psychosocial” perspective that adopts a thick conception of the person to the thin conception of a person noted in the “performative” perspective where narrative schemas dominate, working upon and through people who themselves have little part to play in the process. An “intersubjective” perspective is towards the middle of their typology.

and Ulmer 1993; Evans and Maines 1995); and interactive (Davies and Harre 1990); and so stories (in this case of exit) cannot be understood as the sole production or possession of individual authors. Instead, they belong to a swirl of communication in which persons are better viewed as narrators who select and construct stories for themselves from the resources that surround them (this communal characteristic of exit stories is explicated in chapter five). Stories in any aggregate are denied and enabled by a “community of interlocutors, either directly through interpersonal dialogue or indirectly through the communicative networks implied in the meanings that constitute our languages” (Atkins 2004:346). It is within and between these sorts of stories that individuals can come to describe their situations and themselves. Narrative is a pivotal resource that is central to meaningful interaction (Maines and Ulmer 1993), and for Maines (1993:23), it is the very process through which a person becomes a “self-defining organism”. That said, we have already noted that life has a pre-narrative quality. It is “an activity and a passion in search of a narrative” (Ricoeur 1991:29). It is a sentient “raw experience” (Maines and Ulmer 1993:117) which cannot be completely shared and so must be squeezed into available language where it becomes subject to grammatical conventions (Davies and Harre 1990:59; Polkinghorne 1996:365), “narrative structures” (Evans and Maines 1995:304), and “sanctioned forms of telling” (Gergen 1994:90). Given this incomplete and communal translation of life into communication it is likely that we learn what stories to tell, what to play down, and what to emphasise. We learn which aspects of our (complete) experience

we can communicate¹⁸ and which must lay silent.¹⁹ Crucially, this “shapes the knowing or telling we can do” (Davies and Harre 1990:59) and points towards locally specific (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:699) forms and styles of storytelling (Maines and Ulmer 1993:116) that are limited both in the types of stories that can be told and in the types of character it is possible to be:

While the self remains an emergent descriptive project-an "artful" congeries of qualities and traits, as Garfinkel (1967) might put it - characterizations are parsimoniously formulated (Sacks and Schegloff 1979), tending to revolve around a limited number of well-known, locally-sanctioned categories or typifications. Using a particular category implies a constellation of ancillary features commonly associated with the category, such as the "grandfatherly gentleman" implying harmless (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:696).

Ricoeur claims that we “learn to see a given series of events *as* tragic, *as* comic, and so on” (Ricoeur 1988:185). But these sorts of learned storytelling habits and conventions that privilege a wider theme or genre are not experienced or used as the rigid templates this statement might imply rather we alter, adjust, and “take on the discursive practices and story lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences” (Davies and Harre 1990:59). This is an extremely important point that gives due weight to the inherent instability caused by the passage of time and to Ricoeur’s belief that we continually employ “imaginative or configurational act(s) of narrating” (Ezzy 1998:244) capable of individual agency and the generation of new forms

¹⁸ King (2000) and Eakin (1999) argue that this shapes the way that our memory works either because we have learned not to notice certain aspects of life or because means of description are locally unavailable.

¹⁹ This is discussed in chapter four in terms of institutional frameworks that are connected with the rather routine and predictable process of leaving the Army.

of meaning. This thesis foregrounds the story as the apparatus of understanding whose structure mediates (and explains) character and action:

(t)he person shares the conditions of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character (Ricoeur 1992:147).

The story is privileged in chapter seven as a means for understanding military exit including the implied question of “what will I become?” after leaving the Army. This seems thoroughly embroiled with communal knowing, unfolding novel experiences, and individual processes of meaning making.

3.5 Communal Knowing

Familiar stocks of shared knowledge exist in all communities and are implicated in the sorts of meaning it is possible to develop. Although these apply to all aspects of this thesis they are discussed in more detail in chapter five with regard to institutional frameworks of exit. Also, in his analysis of institutions and experience - and with his notion of “making up people” - Hacking (1986) accentuates a complex relationship between meanings that are socially available and the ways in which they are applied, altered, rejected, and understood. He connects the naming of objects, events, and persons with what it is possible to say. This emulates Somers’ claim that “social life is itself storied” (Somers 1994:613) and, by the same argument, it seems feasible to also claim that some of our experiences continually escape notice or description because we have not yet developed the capacity or language to include these other possible happenings.

For Strauss, “(a)ny group of people that has any permanence develops a “special language,” a lingo or jargon, which represents its way of identifying those objects important for group action” (1969:21). He goes on to claim that “to name is to know, and (..) the extent of knowing is dependent upon the extent of the naming” (Strauss 1969:18 paraphrasing Dewey and Bentley). All of this points to the existence of localised descriptive limits to logic and motivation of action (Hacking 1986:230). For soldiers leaving the Army it is likely that during the final year of Army service “... only some possibilities are intelligible” (Hacking 2004:284) as a consequence of a ready stock of communal meaning already firmly embroiled within the regularly shared process of leaving the Army. For Hacking, different “kinds” of people are made up within these sorts of communal vocabularies that establish and define different categories of person that become the available means of self-description.

Although Hacking’s work is underpinned by Foucault, he does not pursue generalised discursive creations of subjectivity, but takes a “liberal” (Farell 1994; Williams 2000:61) reading of Foucault in which individuals interact not only with each other but with localised discursive practices, and in particular, with the ways in which they have been classified and classify themselves. In such a way, Hacking’s approach seems compatible with the possibility of a persisting self that is being argued in this thesis. “(W)ho we are is an effect of what we know ourselves to be” (Lawler 2008:59) and we can only know what kind of person we are from available descriptions that may or may not grant us moral worth. Hacking’s concept of “dynamic nominalism” explicates these

sorts of dynamic processes and raises the likelihood that kinds of people arise at precisely the same time that they are named or categorised. This is noted in chapter five in terms of the “discharging soldier” as a type that seems thoroughly well known by all soldiers across whole careers - a type with which leavers must interact when anticipating their own exit from the Army. But this is not the end of the process since Hacking contends that there is a “looping” effect such that as people interact and respond to the category (e.g. discharging soldier) this often feeds back and changes the category in the first place. This treatment of “types” and “kinds” complements the work of Ricoeur and Mead that has been set out in this chapter as the dominant theoretical framework underpinning this thesis. The idea that individuals interact with known varieties of self to negotiate and develop amalgamated features that they feel can be applied to themselves is especially useful and is clearly shown in chapter six when leavers actively describe themselves as different types of soldier.

The conceptual framework that has been set out above occupies the middle ground between treatments of the self as substance and as illusion. There is little contemporary agreement about how identity or the self ought to be conceptualised (DuGay, Evans et al. 2000:2), although a recent dominance of a poststructural treatment of the self has pervaded. In the final section of this chapter it will be necessary to explicate this more dominant perspective so as to situate the interactionist basis of this thesis. But before doing so, it is necessary to note that a career soldier’s understanding of leaving the Army is also very much connected to their embodied experiences, both across careers and during the final year of service. Individuals feel and sense the world through their

body and the “I” of the present moment is always embodied. Corporeality - though not the main focus of the thesis - is nevertheless an ever present feature that surfaces from time in the talk of leavers who seem to refer quite frequently to mundane and extreme matters that can be related to the body as it is personally experienced and sensed. This is addressed in detail in chapter eight.

3.6 Another Way of Becoming

Poststructuralists offer a very different treatment of the self that is rooted heavily in the work of Foucault and emphasises the changing relations, powers, and knowledges in and through which individuals and their ‘subjectivities’ are constituted. The idea of a human being as a ready container of sense and meaning is avoided by this alternative focus. For Foucault, what is required is ‘not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice’ (Hall 2000:16). This is not to say that the individual ought to be forgotten (Hall 2000; Williams 2000); but instead that a decentring occurs as a consequence of such an emphasis. For poststructuralists, discursive practices permit, encourage, and entice the emergence of specific and necessary types of subject that are brought into existence in different contexts and for specific reasons. Hall (2000) calls for a reconceptualization to consider the subject in its new and decentred position. Here, there is no necessary connection - or stable relationship - between the kinds of self that are brought into recognition and any form of tangible self as an object. “Truth” is always linked to power and meaning is arbitrary. Dominant discourses can grant or deny forms of identity that are always contingent, fluid, multiple, and vulnerable to revision. Discourse as a concept refers to a certain dominant currency of knowledge that

achieves common and largely supported ascendancy about what is the “truth”. Discourses are defined as a “set of practices that systematically form the object of which they speak, (and) practices which obey certain rules” (Foucault 1972:49; Williams 2000:60). Lawler (2008:59) adds to this assertion the view that discourses differ from the concept of ideology because they are thought not to conceal any relationship to a “real” knowledge, and so too are they always subject to challenge and change.

Unsurprisingly, language is central to this approach, and “text” is a pivotal term employed to capture all forms in which discourse - and so identity - may be communicated, such as books, advertising, films, visual, and auditory production; indeed, any possible means of communication using speech or language. For Derrida, “(t)here is nothing outside of text” (cited in Gergen 1999:24). There can be no solid reference point to which text ultimately refers and so meaning is achieved only with reference to other forms of meaning that are equally unfounded by an inherently connected substance. Derrida’s concept of “deconstruction” has been a vital component of poststructuralism and is a procedure that he used to analyse text so that he could uncover and demonstrate an absolute rupture between signifier and signified. This is a step further from Saussure’s ([1915] 1959) seminal work on signs because Saussure found a degree of unity in thought present in an arbitrary but stable relationship between the word and the thing. For Derrida, they can never be one: signifiers and signified are always untangling to challenge Saussure’s version of sign (Sarup 1993:34). The concept of deconstruction:

entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed (Derrida 1981; Laclau 1990; Butler 1993) (cited in Hall 2000:17).

For Derrida, and poststructuralism more widely, language is constructed as a series of binary opposites, and knowledge of identity is possible only as a matter of difference. The theory of deconstruction claims that all of our efforts to explain, or give reason to the choices and moves we make, can never be supported by any certainty, and always involves a “*massive suppression of meaning*” (Gergen 1999:26). This free floating language of difference is the terrain in which identities are made relevant. The subject and its “identity with itself, its self-consciousness” is brought into existence only by language as a network of difference (Derrida 1972:91).

But how is this done? If poststructuralism does ‘remember’ the individual, then how do people relate to themselves? Expectedly, a poststructural treatment of individual choice is overcast by the powers of discursive practices whose cross-cutting influence contains a rather depressing account of individual agency, akin to selecting either death by hanging or by firing squad. “Subjectification” is one means by which individual’s turn themselves into a subject and form identities - they are interpellated (Althusser 1969) to identify themselves with common or dominant discourses which transform them into subjects within the engulfing range of local - and wider - discursive practices. Choices about what to be are necessarily power-related.

Foucault used the term “technologies of self” to describe the sort of self-scrutiny that individuals increasingly employ in the pursuit of contentment, and the sort of subjects that they seek to become; the sorts of subject that they are interpellated to desire (or avoid) by discursive practices that are rooted in “scientific classification” and “dividing practices” (Foucault and Rabinow 1986) as a means by which self-definitions are made imaginable. For Rose, the pieces from which a self-knowledge can be built are increasingly partially constructed towards a “psyche”, urging internal scrutiny, care, and reprimand, forever vigilant for signs from within about who or what we really are; and what things really mean to us. Given clear doubt about any “truth” or substance to an inner self, Rose’s link between governance and the soul (Rose 1999) or “psy disciplines” (Rose 1985) - as well as their overspill into other contexts (Fraser 1989; Lawler 2008) - suggests a chilling connection with governmental requirement. This for Rose has been especially apparent after World War II and emerging thoughts that “...in modern warfare it is no longer a question of “measuring Guardsmen by the yard” (Rose 1999:10). This quote for Rose marks a shift from an official definition of servicemen - and as a consequence people more widely - as single entities to be managed by behaviour control towards a discovery (or perhaps invention) of subjectivity as an aspect or outcome of group conditions of solidarity and comfort; and therefore something that can be manipulated.²⁰ For Rose: “(t)he expertise of subjectivity has

²⁰ See Stouffer’s (in Rose 1999) study of the psychology of servicemen involved in World War II.

become fundamental to our contemporary ways of being governed and of governing ourselves ” (1999:10).

A genealogy of subjectification traces the different ways that people have related to themselves. Foucault (cited in DuGay, Evans et al. 2000:311) connects the relations that we variably established with ourselves - and the particular types of subject that have transpired - with what we have been governed to produce. This is not to say that the government has brought it about, although this may be so from time to time, but rather that people identify with themselves and “‘give meaning to experience’ (because) (d)evices of ‘meaning production’ - grids of visualization, vocabularies, norms and systems of judgement - *produce* experience; they are not themselves *produced* by experience (original emphasis) (Joyce 1994; cited in DuGay, Evans et al. 2000:312).

Lawler draws on Foucault to note a shift in the period since the late nineteenth century from a juridical power towards a normalizing regulatory power that works through an emphasis on subjects assumed to have high levels of autonomy from which they are encouraged - or brought to encourage themselves - to pursue health, self-sufficiency, and normality (Lawler 2008:56). Rose (1996:313) uses the term “human technologies” that he defines as “hybrid assemblages of knowledges” that form a web across all of the places in which we function. They imply and command to people a certain statement about what are human beings and what ought to be their objective. Different

contexts, connect different ways of being to variable underpinning “presuppositions about, and objectives for, human beings” (Rose 1996:313).

The Army, itself a technology from this perspective, explicitly, openly, and unashamedly works both by discipline and regulatory power to create in its personnel a type of subject compatible with the task of the organisation. The “manly warrior pursuing a life of honour through a calculated risking of the body” (Rose 1996:314) is a crude description of a human outcome against which individual soldiers have little option but to measure their conduct, since judgement is embedded in the vocabularies and practices of the spaces of the organisation. A depressing reading of this poststructural approach however shows that identities are a becoming in the sense that we become what we are governed to discover - or induced to look for - in the technologies that belong to the places and spaces that we inhabit. This account may however be slightly less oppressive than it at first appears because if different discursive practices operate in different places across which individuals may pass, then resistance may be given a footing in the discursive practices of an alternative place, space, and technology, but may never reside outside of discourse. Remaining for just a little bit longer with this poststructuralist perspective, identities - in some sense at least - are also a series of momentary becomings (and unbecomings) as we transit across different spaces and practices in which different identities are addressed and made relevant. Individuals become - perhaps only for an instance - a certain subject with a given objective means. This opens the possibility that technologies for relating to ourselves collide and conflict (Rose

1996:319), rubbing up against each other at the site of the person or even location.

Poststructural identities overspill the body and work across the misleading boundary of the skin of a human being. As we have seen, discursive practices generally carry within them an account of the sort of subject that is favoured, and in recent times this has alluded to an internal space from which we conduct ourselves. Rose invokes a Deleuze's metaphor of the 'fold' (Williams 2000:62) as a descriptor whereby subjectification practices (Williams 2000:62) are folded into us - as opposed to being gathered into an internal holistic mass of a self from which we operate. Interiority therefore is "not that of a psychological system, but of a discontinuous surface, a kind of infolding of exteriority" (Rose 1996:321). The folds retain within them surfaces and edges on which a formulaic, learned, and judgemental means of being is retained. These infolded practices are stimulated by the various situations we encounter in which external signs and relations make up as much of the final identity display as do the internally infolded practices. From such a stance, this metaphor breaks the inside - outside error because it sources habits, knowledge, and judgements from which we appear to draw, in powers and subjective practices that we have experienced and infolded into ourselves. As Rose acknowledges, however, this metaphor of 'folds in the soul' fails to adequately express his complete intention because it cannot fully incorporate the important idea that the 'assemblages' and 'machinations' comprised of thoughts, vocabularies, practices, approaches, embodied habits and practised responses, are operating across and through individuals in the places in which they operate; and not only

within the folds of the interiority. They work beyond the boundaries of the skin.

This alternative way of becoming describes a self that is in constant flux as a sort of discontinuous by-product of changing social influences. This is a self that is in an endless process of becoming in different places and spaces as altering powers and knowledges pass through individuals, drawing and redrawing the sorts of person that it is possible to be and that individuals are brought to desire.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter I have argued that identity is a process of becoming that though thoroughly grounded in experiential living is generally communicated and understood in narrative form that is both communally available and individually nuanced. If we are to maintain a version of continuous identity, then disparate events need to be grasped and understood in relation to a wider story (or range of stories) in which we find our sense of self or character. The combined work of Mead and Ricoeur emphasises the social as the origin and stabilizer for a person's sense of character and self achieved in spite of - or because of - the inescapable passage of time. This theoretical framework is used in the remainder of the thesis to work out how present and anticipated alterations to social relations are implicated in the identity processes of career soldiers who are on the verge of leaving the British Army. But this notion of a self as a becoming seems also to suggest that all selves are inherently vulnerable; an important point that has emerged as a kind of "side effect" of exploring, in

chapter eight, personal narratives that seem related to the body as it is experienced on the verge of exit. For the moment, however, it will be necessary, in the next chapter, to explain how the research has been carried out, and precisely what this has involved.

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the purpose of the research and how it has been carried out. I begin by briefly restating the research problems and go on to show how I have used a number of open research questions to sustain realistic parameters for the project. Once this is done, I explain the research design, and describe the lengthy processes involved in carrying out this work, ranging from data generation through to analysis and to writing-up. Also included is an important discussion of some of the methodological difficulties associated with interviewing. Afterwards, I provide a brief discussion of several ontological and epistemological assumptions and I discuss - in the context of relevant literature - how I have confronted my own place in this research to negotiate a way through what Finlay has termed the reflexive “swamp” (2002). Finally, I note some limitations and challenges associated with my chosen methodology.

4.2 Research Problems

In Chapter one, I noted that there is a rather uneasy relationship between the military and society that generally escapes notice until surfaced by occasional matters of contention.²¹ This suggests that the world of the career soldier is - in some ways at least - a rather separate one. Exit from the British Army presents

²¹ Pressure in the late nineties to permit homosexuals into military ranks is an example of disparity between military and civilian culture.

a social rupture to career leavers who will eventually need to find ways to understand and account for this major change in their lives. Little is known about how this is done and what is involved (see chapter one), and so this thesis focuses on leavers who in their final twelve months of service are beginning to make - or are putting into action - plans for their future after the Army. In particular, the following key questions are related to issues of identity and have provided the focus of this research:

- How do career leavers understand impending exit from the British Army during the period of their final twelve months of service?
- How do leavers describe this experience and what sorts of identity changes are occurring - noticed or not - during this anticipatory period?
- What sorts of relationships exist between “who” and “what” they have been and projections of “who” and “what” they will become;
- What are the implications of the different circumstances and types of exit for leavers’ identities?

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Developing a (Theoretical) Sample

Twenty-eight (22 male and 6 female) career leavers of all different stages, ages, ranks, and employments were interviewed for this research. A list of Army ranks is at Appendix one and a complete list of those interviewed is at Appendix two. This sample was achieved by informal means and personal contacts, and I shall take a moment here to explain how this was achieved. On leaving the Army in September 2007 I became acutely aware that there was literally no going back for me because once I had returned my identity card I was denied access through various camp gates. As the weeks passed after my

own exit I took the decision to capitalise on my best practical asset - my own internal knowledge and especially my personal contacts. Although I had applied to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) for ethical clearance six months earlier I could see that if clearance was to come at all, it wasn't going to happen quickly. I was justified in this thought because MOD clearance and sponsorship was finally achieved only after a delay of more than twelve months, and following significant "chasing" via e-mails and telephone calls. As a consequence of my previous role, I had personal connection with almost every unit in a large garrison. I knew that this would soon be lost as individuals moved-on in the natural round of postings and promotions. I decided to act on this informal insider contact by approaching soldiers as individuals via people I knew. In this way, I took the decision to gather my sample of leavers by a process of snowball sampling via previous colleagues. Most of these colleagues were reasonably senior personnel in different units who came into contact with leavers in the course of their work. They were asked to approach leavers on my behalf to see if they would be willing to be interviewed. As I started to interview individuals I also asked them if they knew of friends or colleagues who were also leaving and might be willing to talk to me. This was a much more difficult process than my insider status might suggest. Not only were leavers very busy but also at any one time there can only be a handful of career soldiers in each unit who are leaving the Army. Nevertheless, I eventually built up a sizeable sample of different types of leaver. Ethical implications of this approach are discussed later in this chapter.

I have defined a “career leaver” as a soldier who has served for more than ten years - a period that I argue is sufficiently long for a person to have developed at least some sense of identification with soldiering and a timeframe also sufficiently lengthy to exclude soldiers for whom the Army might occupy a more fleeting, less entangled, relation to their sense of self and identity. This is not the same as assuming compliance since I suggest that even a resistant soldier will have built up a sense of identity in relation to local dynamics. Even so, anyone who has remained in the Army for ten years or more must have complied with the demands of service, even if this is superficial for some. I have excluded from this research reservists and Territorial Army members because - though equal to regulars in all sorts of other ways - these soldiers live quite different lives with often short, sporadic, and condensed exposure to Army life which creates different conditions for processes of exit. Also excluded are very senior officers (Brigadier and above) and those injured in combat. Admittedly, these broader sample distinctions are in some sense arbitrary and practical but still they seem sufficiently open to include vastly differing experiences associated with exit ranging from, for example, a Corporal who is leaving after ten years to a Colonel who retires after a career that spans some 35 years.

Out of the 28 leavers, 18 were interviewed once (for between sixty and ninety minutes) and the remaining 10 were interviewed twice (more usually for about sixty minutes).²² Semi-structured interviews took place between October 2007

²² This arrangement emerged as a downgraded outcome of a prior intention to access “process” by interviewing everyone three times. After a number of early interviews I realised that process

and July 2008 within a single geographical region close to a major garrison area. Private homes, Army quarters, military units, cafes, and even prison cells were the venues for interviews. The purpose and scope of the research was explained to participants and signed consent obtained. The form used for this purpose is reproduced at Appendix three and includes the notes used during interviews to describe the project.

Compatible with a grounded theory approach, this sample of 28 subjects was gathered gradually and incrementally in order to generate data representative of the experience of leaving the Army and this procedure has actively invited some deliberate bias into the process. For example, in order to push and stretch the boundaries of the experience of exit, I used “purposive” selection to gather both “bastard” and “angelic” (Becker 1998) cases and this has meant actively seeking those for whom exit was problematic in addition to those for whom exit seemed like an effortless transition. Even so, early stages of the sampling processes were dominated more by practicalities (“convenience sampling” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:53)) than anything else since the need to grab interviews as they arose, in case others did not follow, seemed paramount. Eventually, when I could be sufficiently confident that more interview opportunities would arise, I was able to be more selective about whom I interviewed, turning down meetings with some categories of leaver in favour of others so that I could increase the variety of exit experience, or pursue theoretical and conceptual developments such as, for example, my deliberate

and temporality were being continuously displayed in all interviews. Those who have been interviewed twice are shown at Appendix two.

efforts to locate and interview those leaving for medical reasons. This was a sampling decision that was to prove important - though not exclusive - in the development of concepts associated with embodiment and vulnerability (see chapter eight). Moreover, often such leavers, by virtue of their problems, had found themselves on the periphery of some Army norms and as a result were able to provide a different perspective on routine identity processes discussed in the thesis.

Interviews tended to come in “fits and starts” depending on the efforts of multiple gatekeepers who collectively threw-up batches of four or five interviews at a time. Each batch was transcribed within a reasonable timeframe and very rough thoughts, themes, and concepts were used to develop or drop themes from further interviews, and to inform further sampling decisions. An example of a dropped theme concerns questions relating to ideas of serving Queen and Country. This idea was incorporated into early questions as a consequence of an article (Gibson and Abell 2004). But, in practice, not only were such questions embarrassing to ask since it is a topic rarely discussed, the notion of service to the country found almost no resonance with leavers and achieved at best a polite attempt at an answer. This sort of later stages “purposive” and “theoretical sampling” was used to actively seek “pertinent data” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:96) that fitted with my own knowledge of Army life and exit - and also to pursue the emphasis being made in progressive interviews. In the end, the 28 leavers cover a broad range of Army and exit experiences, including both unusual and common employment categories.

4.3.2 Process

The process of data generation and analysis followed the stages that correspond very loosely to Cressey's (1953:16 cited in Symon and Cassell 1998) procedures for analytical induction. There has been much disagreement about what is analytic induction (Goldenberg 1993) and although there are a number of different versions many researchers adapt it as a useful methodology for managing data. This is how I have used the structure of Cressey's approach as a means for guiding the gathering of data and for shaping developing ideas and themes. My use of Cressey's structure briefly comprises of five (adapted) stages that are overlapping, merging, and not entirely linear.²³ They are described below.

- a. A rough idea of the issues associated with leaving the Army were established from a reading of the literature on status passage and military exit; from informal discussion with colleagues; and from my own experiences. Initial interviews were guided by this in terms of a loose interview guide that allowed significant scope for alternative themes to emerge. A copy of the rough initial interview guide is at Appendix four.
- b. Very rough themes, codes, and categories were developed in tune with the data as they were generated. Early ideas and codes centred mostly on how leavers were describing themselves and their

²³ Many studies that use this approach have focused on turning points in people's lives such as for example the classic study on Marijuana use (Becker 1953).

situations. Examples of such coding are themes of: “giving too much” or “being a cut above”.

- c. The data generated in open interviewing were systematically analysed in tandem with continuing to gather more data and in following-up emerging themes in the literature for patterns of similarity, difference, and categories that could be created and connections tested. Nvivo was used for this purpose and also for recording ongoing ideas and thoughts in memos and a journal. This process began to significantly challenge the way that I had initially conceptualised exit and indeed my view of what is a person in relation to time.
- d. My original orientation to the “experience of exit” altered to incorporate the data that was emerging and the literature that I was reading. Once all of the interviews were complete I became engaged on analysis, reading, and memo-writing. During this time, I periodically telephoned colleagues and friends to remind myself of the priorities and imperatives of the world about which I was writing but from which I was now significantly isolated. This was particularly helpful in grounding further my developing thoughts and analysis back into the lives of “real” people who were leaving the Army. Once the interviews were complete, this constant movement between data, ideas, and the literature became extremely demanding and took much longer than expected or planned (nearly fifteen months). This process has generated explanation, meaning,

and description from an “intensive examination of a strategically selected number of cases” (Symon and Cassell 1998:28).

- e. This constant movement between the data, ideas, and literature resulted in a reviewed account of the experience of exit that is grounded in the interview data. Just as intensive and time consuming have been the processes of narrating these experiences of exit in the written chapters of this thesis and this process also merged with the prior stage above. This has involved yet another dynamic of clarification and interpretation as ideas are committed to a final and coherent written form. This stage has been equal - probably greater - in significance and time to prior stages of data generation and analysis.

4.3.3 The Choice to Interview

If I could have used an alternative method to interviewing I would have done so. For my masters degree research on soldierly subjectivity in 2003/4 I found interviewing quite limiting in the sorts of data I could generate and, at the time, I became acutely aware of the differences between what people say and what they do. The starting point for this research has been a series of questions relating to understanding and meaning. This emphasis on interpretation urges a methodology to address the ways that individuals experience themselves, and others, across time. I needed to generate data on leavers’ interactions with past and present embodied experiences, and with local or wider discourses. Personal attempts to find meaning and understanding at times of transition seemed likely to be of a narrative - and possibly internal - form. Furthermore,

in the timeframe when decisions had to be made a number of local factors were impacting upon my choices of method. For example, it may have been useful to attend official resettlement interviews and transition workshops to observe leavers engaged in exit processes, but in practice this proved very difficult for reasons of access (although this excludes my own attendance at these events). Early on, I approached various gatekeepers to the military resettlement system where I was greeted with a cold reception and an apparent reluctance to “be researched”. Despite some informal help, I struggled to formally engage with the service-delivery end of the resettlement system, and especially in my attempts to make contact with leavers by this means. In retrospect, I suspect that this is a response I should expect from any large organisation, especially one dealing with people.²⁴ In the end, their insistence that I access this organisation only via the Ministry of Defence effectively delayed this option beyond feasibility.

More promising methods that might have worked are diaries (video or written). However, in hindsight, I believe that the individual use of diaries could have been patchy. More importantly though, it seems intrusive to ask leavers undergoing challenging transitions to regularly record this in contrast to a usually single interview. Furthermore, low literacy levels among recruits hints of at least some possible lingering aversion to written expression. I also think that soldiers are mostly comfortable communicating verbally. This, and high levels of confidence, seem to support the video diary option. The incremental access (e.g. perhaps weekly inputs over twelve months) of this method may

²⁴ Some of the tri-service leavers are vulnerable, especially those being medically discharged.

have better described processes of change. It may also have enlightened the “story flipping” issue described in the following section. But still, the intrusion matter remains and, in all honesty, I didn’t consider video diaries as an option when I started to gather data because, by then, speed had become the overriding imperative to capitalise on my access to career soldiers. In summary, the decision to interview was taken rather reluctantly but still it was a method that provided the most pragmatic and sensible means of generating data around the chosen research questions. It too was a reasonable way to approach an employment group in which face-to-face interaction is privileged. This method also capitalised on my own experience of leaving the Army. In particular, I was able to establish almost immediate rapport during interviews that, though themed and semi-structured, often replicated a discussion between two soldiers (even though I was technically an ex-soldier). Issues relating to my own place in this research are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

4.3.4 Circumstances of Telling

The process of interviewing risks funnelling a person’s life into one or two discussions and this ought to be acknowledged. This is especially pertinent, I think, during periods of significant change. Interviews, too, tend to emphasise narrative forms of meaning. People generally use narratives to help cope with the passage of time and to bring together disparate and heterogeneous strands of lived experiences into a conceptual whole often comprising a beginning, middle, and end. But “many stories can be told, even of the same event, (so that) (...) we each have many possible coherent selves” (Davies and Harre

1990:59).²⁵ When dealing with interview generated narratives it seems necessary to acknowledge that the circumstances of telling can influence which - and how - stories are told. Although fluctuating versions of self are a feature of modern life, a sense of choice, option, and confusion seems particularly pertinent to soldiers anticipating Army exit.

Interview generated life stories have been constructed under specific interview conditions. If we accept (and I think we must) that there is some form of relationship between the stories told and the circumstances in which they are produced then it follows that the resultant narratives of exit are probably co-authored between the two interview participants (this point will be expanded below). More generally, circumstances of telling matter in terms of audience (Plummer 1994) , social convention²⁶, and timing or context, where narrative can sometimes be a reflection of quite immediate experiences that are granted significance - even prominence - while telling, but dwindle to insignificance soon after. This is not to say that individuals are necessarily changing from moment to moment but that the constant need to tackle and narrate the ongoing process of life cannot be excluded from the interview.

People tell and perform different accounts of themselves in different contexts (Goffman 1971; McAdams 1997:64). There are ever-present social conventions that signal what sorts of performance ought to be given. In terms of telling stories, this is most clear in the division between narrative detail that

²⁵ This is not intended to undermine the importance of a self being argued in this thesis, but instead acknowledges that different versions, slants, even momentary creations might be made relevant by different spaces and places of telling.

²⁶ When we comply with this in the various settings of our lives we may or may not identify with what we tell or present (Goffman 1971).

is commonly restricted to intimacy - usually our closest friends and family - that in other less intimate circumstances of telling is filtered out as information thought too “deep” or personal. Tellers are thus forever deciding which and how much of a story to tell in the varying interactions that they encounter.²⁷ But, “neither the private musing nor the public manoeuvring is any more “real” or “authentic” than the other” (McAdams 1997). Different conventions belong to different communities about where - and on which issues - these sorts of divides are drawn.²⁸

Soldiering takes place in an institutional setting where from time-to-time all aspects of a life are drawn together such that intimate narratives between “mates” coexist with harsher ones associated with fighting and discipline. Soldiers are commonly very open with each other and often disclose information that in other communities might be retained as intimate. It is a fundamental part of soldiering that leaders at all levels must take an interest in their soldiers and this includes enquiry - sometimes involvement - in their personal lives. It is not uncommon, for example, for the Army to become involved in a soldier’s marital problems and this openness has been carried into the interview setting.²⁹

Timing matters for telling too. Uncertain and unpredictable futures can induce a tiring kind of personal flux and fluidity where events in the present cast either

²⁷ We have already noted in chapter three the potential to surprise ourselves in the immediacy of the moment.

²⁸ This is the same social process because for Mead thinking is an internal conversation (Mead and Morris 1934).

²⁹ This can work in other ways too. For example the dynamics between the interviewer and a leaver of similar status created a different relationship than one with a higher status (rank) leaver as a consequence of normal Army relations. This is despite attempts on both parts to manage the now civilian status of the researcher.

hope or disappointment into the future which is then read backwards into varying interpretations of the past. This relates to Ricoeur's claim that "in reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards" (1984:67-68). This does raise questions about the sorts of stories each would tell on different days of the week as numerous options about their futures are considered, trialled, discarded or adopted and this needs to be related to the interview context. The term story-flipping seems to capture this dynamic which is applicable to two scenarios. The first is the situation just described where alternating events that give hope or disappointment present different endings that are read backwards. The other scenario involves instances when alternative endings (usually job possibilities) are created as "imaginative variations" or "thought experiments" (Ricoeur 1992:148) and this results in the same narrative effect.

Story flipping seems like a vital process for people facing substantial change and is a likely consequence of the struggle with uncertain horizons. Story-flipping might also be more common than convention would have us believe and each narrative version implicates quite different relationships between past, present, and future. This is a narrative process where leavers generally strive for coherence. Different story lines may exist for leavers depending upon the circumstances of the unfolding present, and dynamic happenings in ongoing lives can affect the way that circumstances are recounted. It is worth noting that individuals are not necessarily noticing these changes in emphasis as they tackle significant changes. These issues relating to the circumstances of telling need to be acknowledged.

4.4 Ethics

The British Sociological Association has stringent ethical standards (BSA 2002) and I have tried to comply with their criteria. Of course this includes confidentiality guidelines and the need to ensure that individuals know what they are participating in; and that they do so voluntarily. Two ethical issues - personal trauma and access - deserve particular mention in this section and they are raised here in the spirit of the BSA assertion that the “binding force” of their ethical standards “rest ultimately on active discussion, reflection, and continued use by sociologists” (BSA 2002:1). Operational trauma was always a real possibility in the biographies of these leavers and significant operational experience was found to exist among a few. This was identified as problematic for one leaver who was undergoing ongoing professional intervention, but this was not known prior to the interview. Although the opportunity arose to interview injured exiting soldiers, I did not pursue this because I could not justify this ethically. The interviews would have been at Selly Oak hospital in Birmingham, too soon after injury. I concluded that a soldier trying to accept the loss of a limb(s) or facial disfigurement for example had enough to contend with and I could not contemplate questioning such a person about exit from the Army.

More generally, there was a persisting risk that a reaction to operational trauma might occur or be triggered by an interview that involved the scrutiny of past careers; I had to be vigilant to this possibility. Each applicant was warned that the interview would involve a discussion that might remind them of past trauma and that although it would be helpful to hear about these experiences, it was not

expected. If an adverse reaction had occurred I had plans to connect the individual to appropriate agencies if they so wished. In following these steps I was making subjects aware of this risk hopefully to avoid harm. These issues were not new to me since I had been employed in numerous personal welfare roles before I left the Army. I was used to counselling individuals in difficulty and in managing situations of risk. Nevertheless, although I was trained and experienced in these matters, this was not now my role and I did not have a remit or intention to work with any of these leavers in such a way. My experience counted in these circumstances only by equipping me with the skill and knowledge to recognise and respond to this unlikely but possible scenario.

More broadly, the final year of Army service can be a difficult personal time. This was obvious from many of the discussions. Again, vigilance for signs of stress was called for. I believe that my interviews did “stir things up” a little because leavers were drawn into discussions that brought a lot of disparate aspects of their lives into one narrative encounter (e.g. see the discussion of Sean in chapter seven). I am aware from subsequent discussions that the interview became, for some, an event in their transition. For example, one individual told me that it was as a result of the interview that they realised exit was real and that they ought to do something about it. I suspect that this was a common reaction and it needs to be acknowledged. In hindsight, follow-up telephone calls might have been prudent perhaps one week after the interview. I am sure many of these calls would have been pointless, even embarrassing, but I also feel sure that a minority would have benefitted from the enquiry into their wellbeing.

I want to discuss access in relation to ethics because of my informal approach. This was not a decision taken lightly but it is one that might prove contentious. Specifically, this is my decision to request interviews from soldiers individually rather than via official Ministry of Defence clearance (MOD) and access. I defend this decision on the basis that I was grasping a presenting and obvious opportunity and, more importantly, that my work was unlikely to harm participants who were all willing volunteers. These leavers were the same as me and I felt justified in talking to my peers about an experience that we had shared, especially if collectively we could generate information that would improve the conditions of future leavers. Perhaps the most troublesome area is my use of prior colleagues to access leavers (I was also helped by some quite senior personnel). I justified this on the basis that it was their decision whether or not to help me. Indeed a significant few did not help, usually by way of avoidance. I was quite clear in my communication with the MOD that if I was not granted official clearance quickly, I would be forced to proceed informally. Clearance was granted but was too slow for the research timeframe. I have since informed the MOD that the research is done and that I will produce a practical report as was the arrangement if I had operated under formal clearance.

4.5 Questions of Epistemology and Ontology

My chosen research questions direct attention to issues of meaning as recounted and understood by individual actors, and my interest in these have been developed partly as a result of my own time as a career soldier and partly on the basis of a literature review on military exit (see Chapter two). When

posing earlier forms of these questions I believe I held some limited notion of the social as “out there” but as the thesis has progressed and as ideas of identity-as-a-process have been developed I have come to recognise that the social world is not ‘out there’ awaiting discovery; but rather, is created and re-created in the minds, perceptions, language, and discourse of individuals and their interactions with things, persons, types and kinds (Hacking 1986; 2004). Such a relativist ontology emphasises local and specific co-constructed realities (Denzin and Lincoln 2008) as part of a wider constructivist paradigm. This places significant emphasis on shared and social meaning and identity in any institution, and my focus is on how individuals interact, work with, and apply meaning to themselves and others as they tackle their own exit from the British Army. However, soldiers are, at one and the same time, agents and subjects of power and so in analysing the meanings that they give to their experiences “(w)e have to reckon with the social origin of meaning and the social character with which it is inevitably stamped” (Crotty 1998:52). Culture and institutions heavily determine templates for interpretation, not only by shared language and signification, but also in the sheer habit of doing and being a certain way: “(s)ocial reality is, therefore, a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life” (Greenwood cited in Crotty 1998:54).

Within the constructivist paradigm, answers to the epistemological questions “how can we ‘know’ and what constitutes knowledge?” are addressed in recognition of the absence of a fundamental truth and reality awaiting

discovery. This places emphasis on interpretive processes as described by Smith and Sparkes in the following quote:

... gaining access to a real world, 'real' selves or 'real' experiences independent of our fallible knowledge of it is considered a chimera. Similarly, lifting the veil of the social and claiming the discovery of some sort of self inside the mind, or lived experience beneath in correspondence terms is viewed as untenable (Smith and Sparkes 2008:13).

Chapter three has already explained why, within the overall interpretivist repertoire, symbolic interactionism was chosen to explore ideas of self and identity at the point of social rupture. This and the constructivist paradigm have inspired a 'grounded theory approach' (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and a treatment of the social as "in-process", a continual recreation, and an interactive negotiation that is implicated in the ways in which individuals come to discuss and understand themselves as a central character in life.

4.6 Reflexivity

The options available to the qualitative researcher are vast, complex, and sometimes contradictory. Gradually, qualitative research has come to shed its footing in "scientific presumption" (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:517) to confidently assert that "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin and Lincoln 2008:7). This has not been an easy journey³⁰ and the prediction of a "fractured future" (Denzin and Lincoln 2008:550) along the divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies is suggestive of significant challenges still ahead. One of the most important developments in qualitative research occurred in the late 1980s in what has been termed a "crisis of

³⁰ See Lincoln and Denzin's (2008) eight stages of qualitative research development from "traditional" through to the "postmodern turn".

representation”. This marked a point when a number of authors (Geertz 1980; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz 1988; Haraway 1988; Denzin 1989; Atkinson 1992; Hobbs and May 1993; Denzin 1995; Denzin 1997) started to challenge the possibility of completely “voicing” (Hobbs 1993; Pearson 1993:xviii) the experiences of the researched. These authors took issue with a tendency to play-down - or worse - to conceal the effects of the researcher in a haze of professional mystique. For Mauthner and Doucet (2003:416) “(t)he problem arises through recognition that as social researchers we are integral to the social world we study”. This translates into a situation where the researcher’s presence can be problematic or useful in all sorts of ways. What is becoming certain however is that the researcher’s place, during all stages of research, can no longer be ignored (Atkinson 1992; Mauthner and Doucet 2003). Feminists have been particularly adept at outing such problems and in the “feminist critique” (Cotterill 1992) they challenged male domination of sociology to forge new agendas championing the perspective of “women” as subjects. Views of the personal as political (Stanley and Wise 1983) reject non-reflexive research as oppressive and complicit in the concealment of the experiences of the powerless. Instead, “participatory models” (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984; Cotterill 1992) seek non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships that are increasingly orientated to emancipatory ends and “social justice”. Notions of “*being with and for the other, not looking at*” (original emphasis) (Denzin and Lincoln 2008:543) have come to the fore in a new ethical emphasis

on “interpersonal responsibility” (Mieth D (1997) cited in Denzin and Lincoln 2008:542).

The modern qualitative researcher has dropped “the pretence of looking at the world directly” (Geertz 1988:141). Knowledge is partial, generated, and “situational” (Haraway 1988) and as a consequence reflexivity is a vital tool for tackling these challenges of representation. There is greater acceptance that the way in which knowledge is gained and interpreted is connected with what claims can be made (Mauthner and Doucet 2003). For Lynch, reflexivity has become an unavoidable feature and not a “virtue” (Lynch 2000). In its broadest terms, this “reflexive turn” (Mauthner and Doucet 2003:416) refers to the idea of “turning back” (Gray 2008:936) and contemplating one’s place in the business of meaning making:

Reflexivity here involves a turning back of inquiry on the formative conditions of its production by variously addressing questions of the researcher’s biographical relationship to the topic, the multiple voices in the text, different potential readings and the instability between the research text and the object of the study or representation. Indeed, particular perceptions of reflexivity are becoming the index for judgements regarding what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ research (Adkins, 2002: 332). (Gray 2008:936).

So, what to do about reflexivity? Some advocate a thorough exploration of every twist and turn in the research process in a kind of “confessional” (VanMaanen 1988) act intended to lay bare decisions made and routes taken so as to expose its dynamic. Finlay (2002) suggests five different ways to negotiate the “swamp” of reflexivity (introspection, intersubjective reflection; mutual collaboration; social critique, and discursive deconstruction) that are implicated in the researchers aims. In a similar vein, Lynch (2000) develops an

even more complex inventory of “reflexivity” (mechanical, substantive, meta-theoretical, interpretive, ethnomethodological, methodological) to expose an endless diversity of the term. But, both authors warn against the simplistic idea that reflexivity is a process that alone can be conducive to good research. They seem to imply that there can be no final sense of getting reflexivity “right” and that the endless pursuit of this is no guarantee of successful research. Indeed, for Finlay (2002:227), researchers “are damned if they do damned if they don’t”. The challenge, it seems, is for each researcher to negotiate the “swamp” in a way that best employs the undeniable processes of reflexivity for the project at hand.

Lynch (2000) claims that there can be no guaranteed “academic” virtue in extensive reflexive efforts and points to matters of “communal reception” and research execution as defining characteristics. Issues of reception resonate for this research highlighting the realisation that as an ex-soldier and postgraduate researcher I straddle at least two communities and must communicate in both. Meanings connected with this written thesis are partially dependent upon those who read it and so being reflexive means grasping this dynamic and recognising that the writing process or “burden” (Geertz 1988:140) is a means of communication that is integral to the complete research process.

Conducting research involves, for most qualitative researchers, the challenge firstly of submerging oneself in a new environment, and secondly, the requirement to report back what has been learnt to one’s own - usually academic - community. Associated difficulties are well known and involve the

perils of for example “going native” or more commonly the challenge of moving from “being there” in the field so to speak to “being here” on the page (Geertz 1988; Hobbs 1993:53). If, as I argue, meaning lies in the interactions, language, and imperatives of a particular community then it is in the act of writing about another community that a person (researcher) comes also to find a commentary on their own community from the position of a newly manufactured juncture between the two worlds. A construction emerges that cannot belong completely to either community. During his work with the working classes of the East End of London that he had come to call home, Dick Hobbs found that his challenge was in getting to know the academic community into which his work would be received and he discovered a challenge in presenting a world he knew so well into an appropriate academic format. In discussing this Dick Hobbs makes the following assertion that resonates with my own position: “(i)n my attempt to perform an ethnographic ventriloquist act (Geertz 1988, p. 145) I was using two dummies, and the voices were getting mixed up” (Hobbs 1993:56). By the time of the research my initial proximity to soldiering seemed increasingly filtered by an ongoing need to adjust to a university environment. Not only did this affect my relations with data but it also significantly shifted interactions with my own prior career. Academic learning and a new environment had thrown my own interpretive capacities of the present into unexpected flux, shattering what I now came to recognise as a comfortable prior sense of belonging. This is why Hobbs’ work resonates. I believe that by the time the data reached written form the voices of the soon-to-

be-leaving soldier and the veteran researcher had become thoroughly mixed-up. I shall develop this point further in the next section.

This idea that something new and different emerges from the “intersubjective relation” (Finlay 2002) of the research offers one passage through the “swamp”. In the same vein, Corbin and Strauss suggest that “the constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are *constructed* by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and makes sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves” (2008:10) makes some sense in this context and so it is in this spirit that I have chosen to tackle the challenge and bonus of reflexivity.

With regard to military research Higate claims that, despite the involvement of many ex-military personnel in research, scant attention has so far been given to related reflexive issues as a consequence of a misplaced belief in the possibility of interviewer neutrality (Higate and Cameron 2006). Well into the writing of this thesis I too had intended to exclude myself from all but cursory acknowledgement. But very soon, I began to sense that I was somehow implicated in the emerging data. Not only had I underestimated this influence but I had also been caught out by the unexpected challenge of my own adjustment to civilian and university life where for the first time I found myself in the minority as a consequence of my age, background, attitude, and gender. It is a paradox that I had to deal with my “insider status” while feeling more of an outsider than ever before. Even though it is difficult to decide from which world I am most distanced - university or Army - I can see that, in research

terms at least, I am an “insider” in regard to the British Army. I joined the Army on 17 February 1985 and left on 13 September 2007. I began my research in October 2007. This means that I experienced the official Army resettlement system only months before interviewing other leavers about the same process. I have been helped to orientate myself to this by the work of Kathy Charmaz in a way that retains at least some of the complexities surrounding the category of “insider”:

Constructivists study “how” - and sometimes why - participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations. (...) (W)e do so from as close to the inside of the experience as we can get but realize that we cannot replicate the experiences of our research participants (Charmaz 2006:130).

4.6.1 Insider Effects on Data and Process

In the next few pages, I shall address the influence of my “veteran status” on the complete research process. I am writing this section (4.6.1) in October 2010 and in constructing this retrospective account I have drawn on much earlier drafts of a similar focus, research diaries, other notes, and also on literature concerning “insider research” (Roseneil 1993). If Jolly’s (1996) work is to be believed, I occupy a different stage of exit transition, and from this new perspective I can reflect on my own place in the research.

It is well documented that some tricky issues can arise when a researcher has significant personal and emotional connection to the research setting, and after reviewing some of the common pros and cons of this dynamic I will look back over my relationship with the complete research process. This reflexivity incorporates a dynamic where by increasing civilian experiences I seemed less of an insider as the work progressed, but this distancing also brought a “warm

glow” effect where - due to the distorting effects of time and ongoing challenge - I seemed ready, at some stages, to identify with soldiering in a way that I had resisted my entire career. I started the research with a fairly ambivalent attitude towards my taken-for-granted world. Eager to leave the Army behind, I approached the work with nonchalance, as only someone comfortable in their surroundings can. Indeed, I wrote the research proposal as a soldier with more than 18 months residual service. Once out of the Army, I began the work in a fairly detached way, frequently depicting leavers as “they” and not “we”. But as the strangeness of my own post-Army life ensued, and the work progressed, I seemed at times to construct a stronger sense of belonging to my past. And by the end of 2008, I wrote a section for this chapter that declared my renewed connection to admired soldierly qualities (now re-drafted from this retrospective perspective). This strengthening sense of connection with leavers may have been a reaction to the alien world of the university which prompted me to write the following sentences in 2008: “I am (was) one of them” and “Many leavers have shared with me not only some personal information during interview, but a similar lifestyle lived at virtually the same time”.³¹ At this time I was perhaps beginning to recognise my entanglement with the data and especially my position as a leaver who could not leave because of a research project that kept me forever focused on Army exit. This shows an ongoing interplay between the research and my own unfolding experiences as an Army veteran which resonates with Amanda Coffey’s notion of “the ethnographic

³¹ However, I did not know personally the majority of those interviewed. I had had minimal professional dealings with one of the leavers and slightly more involved (brief work-related meetings and telephone calls) professional dealings with two of them.

self” (as) thoroughly implicated in the way we collect, understand, and analyse the data (1999) such that the researching self is often presented as a kind of “medium through which fieldwork is conducted” (1999:122).

Questions of familiarity and distance are central for all researchers and are often associated with the polarised categories of “insider” and “outsider” that are connected to certain strengths and weakness. Merton (1972) finds this too simple a distinction and Hodkinson (2005) and Labaree (2002) also question these dichotomised terms that, for them, conceal more complicated processes of identity and status construction. Deutch (1981:174) claims that “we are all multiple insiders and outsiders” and Labaree elaborates this in an account of his research on the academic senate to which he belongs. Although Labaree accepts his “insiderness” he usefully points out that there are aspects of the university and senate about which he knows very little, and in these regards he is an “outsider”. These are all relevant qualifications, but by dwelling too much on matters of definition, misses a significant, albeit rather general, point that:

.. in spite of elements of complexity and multiplicity in their individual identities, a set of respondents are strongly and consciously united by the high overall importance to all of them of a particular distinctive characteristic or set of characteristics (Hodkinson 2005:134).

Although related to features like race and class this also describes how my own biography connects so fundamentally with the career soldiers interviewed and to the issue of Army exit. In the literature, “insiderness” is a feature that researchers are encouraged to both embrace and resist. They might embrace their access to “local and esoteric knowledges” (Coffey 1999:27) which for the “standard fieldwork model” requires a research journey from “ethnographer-as-

stranger, progressing towards a familiarity and eventual enlightenment” (Coffey 1999:20). But the “insider” has an “initial proximity” (Hodkinson 2005) that resonates with Coffey’s assertion that “(f)ieldwork always starts from where we are” (1999:158). This is a statement about identity and for the insider the starting position is one of personal immersion that brings for many a “definite advantage” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). In reviewing this literature Labaree has divided perceived advantages into four areas: “the value of shared experiences; the value of greater access; the value of cultural interpretation; and the value of deeper understanding and clarity of thought” (Labaree 2002:103). The bonuses of these areas - while apparently quite clear at one level - are also potentially problematic in a number of important ways. Consequently, making “insiderness” work seems to depend on an adequate treatment of a range of well documented pitfalls.

For many, researcher reflexivity is the preferred means for achieving this since it “expresses researchers’ awareness of the necessary connection to the researcher situation and hence their effect on it” (Davies 1999:7). Insider “cognitive (..) predispositions” (Gergen and Gergen 1991:77) that affect how the world is apprehended can escape notice and may limit what we might experience, and the questions we ask. This is why the need to continually induce levels of “strangeness” is sometimes advocated (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) where familiarity either pre-existed or has set-in. In educational settings, researchers as teachers are often insiders and Delamont (1992) calls for strategies to deal with this to establish a workable tension between “strangeness and over-identification” (Coffey 1999:23) to avoid total

absorption and maintain some degree of professional distance. For Hammersley and Atkinson this is because “feeling at home” must be avoided (1983:115) for a critical and analytical perspective to flourish. For these authors, too much familiarity can hinder analysis and enquiry. At worst it can produce uncritical work based on flawed analysis. Coffey (1999:31) argues that this was the case for Willis’ *Learning to Labour* (1993) where he did not adequately consider his “ethnographic self” and so failed to reflect upon his over-identification with the boys, undermining the work somewhat. This kind of unreflexive over-identification is likely to disqualify a researcher from an area of work since a non-reflexive stance rather emulates members of the subject group, producing work that is non-critical, and perhaps based upon common-sense observations. Indeed, as Coffey notes “(a) researcher who is no longer able to stand back from the esoteric knowledge they have acquired, and whose perspective becomes indistinguishable from that of the host culture, may face analytic problems” (Coffey 1999:23). A more political criticism of interpretive research - and by implication of insiderness - is considered by Hammersley. This is the critical argument that “ideological common sense” (1992:103) is reproduced by the approach and that this neglects “the effects of macro-social factors on people’s behaviour” (1992:103). For these authors, “values” ought to be explicit; especially those that motivate areas of study, since if “value neutrality” is unachievable, there must always be political or ideological implications of the chosen work. Inevitably, the position of an insider reflects a certain balance of power that may not be directly addressed.

Disqualification from an area of work is also justifiable when common insider pitfalls of self-indulgence and narcissism (Davies 1999:179) are given free reign. This seems more likely with autobiographical style research which carries related perils of emotionality. This is a delicate and difficult matter, especially for researchers who approach projects from a position of “knowing” (Coffey 1999:33) that draws to some extent on biographical experiences. Even so, “emotional connectedness to the processes and practices of fieldwork, to analysis and writing, is normal and appropriate” (Coffey 1999:158). More than that, if done well it can produce excellent work such as John Hockey’s “Squaddies”; an ethnography that draws on his own Army experiences for mediation (Hockey 1986; Hockey 1996). Coffey urges advancement beyond polarised accounts of familiarity and strangeness to embrace continually changing characteristics of self and identity, and to think about the researcher in terms of “positionality”. This allows for a range of researcher selves and interactional performances, including (hopefully fleeting) moments of self-indulgence or too much emotional attachment. Positionality draws attention to the process of research from phase to phase and, in the case of interviews, from person to person. This requires from the researcher an awareness of the self as researcher and a willingness to “critically (..) engage with the range of possibilities of position, place and identity” (Coffey 1999:36). Insider researchers are part of the research process and their sense of self is drawn into the work in different ways across the entire process.

In this work there is much to be said about this. I conceived the research idea and plan as a participant-researching-self. I later left the Army and soon started

interviewing others about the same experiences. This progressed to an extended period of analysis and writing, whilst also attempting to adjust to a non-military lifestyle, the loss of status, money, and authority. A significant tension emerged from this arrangement as a continual interplay between my veteran-researching-self and the data. This has been a very challenging but largely positive development since the tension has forced a critical perspective, not only on the data, but on my own sense of having been a soldier. The complete contrast from Army to university provided an almost daily challenge to assumptions from my prior world. This is a far cry from the comfort of over-familiarity. On the contrary, I quickly detected a potentially dangerous mix as the featureless terrain of the PhD student jarred with my past. Since the age of 17, and for 23 years, I had been a soldier. I was ill-prepared for lost familiar social relations, despite a somewhat diluted Army career incorporating 14 years out of uniform, with 6 of them in the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence. This dynamic between my ongoing veteran experiences and the topic of Army exit was set to play-out over the course of the research, entangling my own processes of “becoming an Ex”(Ebaugh 1988) with the work. It has been from this general sense of unease that I have found an enforced critical insight - a dynamic that first showed itself to me during the interviewing phase. But before discussing face-to-face interviews I shall consider how I came to select the topic and sample.

Topic and sample selection. Sometimes the “selection of a setting for study hardly arises” because an opportunity presents itself (1983:36). Paradoxically my topic selection (and related funding application) resolved my own attempt

to leave the Army. Decisions were made well before my own exit in September 2007, and if asked “why this topic?” back then, I would have stressed improved funding chances. As it was, I faced a dilemma: I was sure that the strongest case for funding (for me) was Army research, but I was keen to do something totally different. As I prepared the research proposal and thought about the setting and topic, I was also experiencing my own pre-exit period and I became re-connected with some of my previous research³² on subjectivity and resistance. All of this combined to re-ignite a career-long fascination regarding identity and the work place, which for me meant the Army. My biography seems so obviously entwined with my chosen topic that it perhaps suggests a poorly considered decision. Nevertheless, I was sure that something of sociological importance was going on in the pre-exit phase, as I experienced it myself and thought about friends and colleagues going through the same processes. I see now that this inevitably drew me into a challenging reflexive research situation. I had no intention to live out my experiences through the research and this might explain why I began the work in a rather detached way. But predictably, the choice of topic drew me into the work in a way that other topics would not: I often wish I had made a different decision.

Sample selection was similarly practical and opportunistic. I have already discussed how this was achieved and in the next few paragraphs will consider the effect of my veteran status on my selection. The most striking issue is access: I knew key people who found leavers for me. It seemed obvious and

³² A Masters dissertation, written in 2004, entitled: “Soldierly Subjectivity: does the career soldier resist?” The exploration of this question brought me to realise how much a person - in this case a soldier - is constitutive of and constituted by the social relations in which they exist.

straight forward to me at the time. I needed to speak to as many different leavers as possible to get a broad database of experiences. I was rather unthinking in my definition of this since I used internal Army categories as a basis for differentiating people. I don't think this is a problem, but as I look back it does show that at these early stages of the research I was thinking about exit with distinctly insider knowledge. Paul Higate notes that in military settings research subjects might be "captive" (Higate and Cameron 2006:222), unable to resist the researcher who is perceived as more powerful. This has made me think a lot about my sample. I don't think this applies in an obvious way but reference to power seems relevant since I continually wonder how might they respond to what I have written and did they really sign-up to that? The word "captive" also makes me think about the "wilco" (will-cooperate) tendency of soldiers towards one another that I surely benefitted from during this phase. I heard of fellow researchers paying people and negotiating access and I realise how easy my task was in this regard at least.

Face-to-face interviews. Positionality alerts us to interactional meaning, which I relate here to the interview. Although "insiderness" might bring easy rapport this cannot be guaranteed as Paul Higate found when his RAF background afforded little purchase with a veteran sample (2006:228). Moreover, the manner or demeanour of the interviewer will shape the image created of him by respondents who will "use that image as a basis of response" (McCall and Simmons 1969:80). Along with other factors, differences of gender and rank, might influence face-to-face interactions in ways unnoticed by the researcher, perhaps sustaining local power relations of gender and subordination (Higate

and Cameron 2006:222). For McCall & Simmons “observer’s data are conditioned by the basis upon which subjects respond to him” (McCall and Simmons 1969:82); and interviewers, too, may find themselves reacting in unforeseen ways. For the last 8 years of Army service I interviewed (or managed those who interviewed) hundreds of soldiers and officers. Before this, I worked close to senior commissioned officers. This meant that I had established ways of communicating with all types of soldier and officer, compatible with the various roles I had. By the time of the first research interview I was 3 months an Army veteran and the last interview was approximately 9 months later. During this time I still had a prominent awareness of my own experiences of the final year of service and exit. In face-to-face encounters I capitalised on my background and presented myself with a “just-left-the-Army” sort of story. Indeed, on one occasion this went too far when I was placed into my previous Army role by a passing Captain who recognised me and requested advice about an ongoing personnel situation. Connection was eased by my knowledge of local personalities, places, and events. Most seemed able to place me in Army terms. One or two knew me. Most were “bursting” to talk about leaving the Army and seemed to relate easily to me. One or two had little to say and I noted at the time that I found interviewing commissioned officers most challenging - a factor perhaps implicated in my limited analysis of this group. Inevitably, I connected easily with full career non-commissioned leavers who joined the Army in the mid 1980s, as I did, and needed to re-invent themselves at the age of about 40. Many of my questions were framed from within that world, motivated by my

shared concern about exit as a force in my life, as in theirs. I can now look back on a prior interviewing self that was thoroughly at home among others going through Army exit.

I was moved to write in 2008 (an earlier draft of this section) about my interview with Don, an exiting major. Don represented for me a position of authority since he occupied a role that was significant to me as an 18 year old soldier. But this was contradicted by his interview where he seemed to be unravelling in the face of exit. I can now see that Don's interview connected with my veteran status both during the interview and in subsequent analysis. His interview brought me to tackle my place in the research. Immediately after the interview I wrote the following in my research journal:

Met Don for interview - very odd experience talking to him - he seemed so military and (I was) strangely nervous about interviewing an officer in a position I remember as important and senior, and occupied by a man of a very different lifestyle - he kept convincing himself he is a top bloke and that he had lots to offer... (Research Journal, 10 Jan 08).

I find the temporal aspects of this important. During the face-to-face encounter with Don I related to him in a way that displayed the effects of my own recent submersion in that world, but the interview also sparked for me a realisation that - compared to my new social situation - the basis of this connection was distinctive. Sometime after the interview I wrote, in an earlier version of this section, the following:

Don tells me that humility is central to leadership, and I believe him. As he talks I am in his world. I know what he means. I draw on the same social relations for meaning. I can see that I latch on to his talk of

service,³³ his notion of giving-back, and his idealised, embedded speech about community and team.

This was an early veteran-self reflecting on the face-to-face interview, attempting to declare the embedded knowledge that in this case bound us together in interview such that we understood each other (paradoxically, internal know-how also separated us due to the officer / non-officer divide). Eventually I related this to Wittgenstein's notion of "seeing-as" (Ricœur 1978:251) as I began to understand that my biography was implicated in my understanding because "seeing as" is "half thought and half experience" (Ricœur 1978:251). I went on to say: "I don't receive Don's words as an empty receptacle takes water. I hear and experience Don's words at the same time".

Now, 2 to 3 years later, I recognise that throughout the interviewing period I was still very close to a prior world, and that my approach was informed by a deep personal understanding of the experiences of Army exit, but, at the same time, I was also finding distance from a prior connection as numerous post-exit encounters forced strangeness onto the past. Not only this, each time I entered a barracks or location, I did so as an outsider. This was often disagreeable, but usefully gave me a sense of strangeness now my rank and belonging were gone. Denied the interactional comfort I had previously enjoyed, on one occasion my veteran (lack of) status left me standing outside the guardroom in a manner reminiscent of my recruit days - I noted this at the time:

Interview: Nigel - had to meet outside guardroom; long time since I had waited outside a guardroom - lots of young lads in and out of uniform small boy racer type cars passing by and young soldiers mostly. Got on to camp no problem - just had to wait for someone. Car parked across

³³ Defined here as the devotion of self to public or community benefit.

the way - someone (of my prior status) coming into camp in car asked who I was (Research Journal, 19 Feb 08).

Mostly, I managed my personal reaction well, searching for insight from discomfort but once or twice, I reacted personally. In preparing the retrospective account of this section, I was surprised to come across the following journal entry that shows a strong personal reaction, entirely connected with my career long resistance to unthinking Army ways:

I felt the despondency of the guardroom - provost sergeant polishing pace stick - he will be out (of the Army) mending heating systems in a few months - the pointlessness of polishing a pace stick!. What a fucking shit place to be. I hated going there - in the cells. (Research Journal, 19 May 2008).

My sense of alienation from a prior world increased as the interviews ended and I began a lengthy and intensive period of analysis and writing. By now I was quite envious of those I had interviewed because they had probably moved on, but I was to remain trapped in the process of Army exit for another two years.

Data Analysis. The researcher is a “research instrument *par excellence*” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:19) whose influence is perhaps most pronounced during specific phases of analysis. Crises of representation, objectivity, and value-neutrality have for qualitative research “served to empower or celebrate the ethnographic self” (Coffey 1999:154). This is not a retreat from systematic, consistent or stringent research strategies but rather is a concern to offer “transparency, honesty, and openness” (Higate and Cameron 2006:223) about inevitably personal, artful, and elusive aspects of research. The structured phases of this work are outlined in Section 4.2 above and include, for example, early organisation of transcribed interviews into codes

and categories close to data. But in the next few paragraphs I will discuss the influence of my “veteran-researching-self” on research stages of analysis and writing.

By the time all of the interviews were transcribed, more than a year had passed since I had left the Army. A number of unforeseen factors combined to influence how I approached this task. Firstly, I had read a good deal of literature on self and identity and I recognised that my orientation was of an interactionist persuasion. I became interested in the temporal conditions for identity and especially the “hypothetical” properties of the future and past that emphasised the “now”. My own post-Army existence brought a succession of experiences that allowed me to consider this idea, and so the more I found myself in social relations at odds with my prior self, the more I learned about the temporal situated aspects of identity more generally. At first I reacted against this, but the more the ideas settled, the more I was able to observe connections between social and self in other settings; insights that I am sure fed into my treatment of the data. The contrast between university and Army seemed so “loud” and offered me a clear connection between the organisational needs of each as related to desired and admired personal properties. Occasionally, my Army background prompted negative reactions and through this I could recognise that I was not politically motivated and probably accepted far more about Army life than was helpful. Instead, I was motivated to explain what was going on during the final year of service. I approached the work in terms of meaning as understood by exiting soldiers, and certainly this approach was motivated by my biography. My ongoing veteran experiences, and my

reading, helped me to realise that identities made relevant during interview and constructed during analysis and writing were quite specific, not only to the interaction but to my own experiences of exit and the questions I asked while still close to the experience. As the analysis developed, I am sure that my veteran status equipped me with a persisting awareness that identities are granted or denied by social relations, but that the extent, to which this is anticipated, noticed and incorporated into a narrative was extremely complicated and nuanced. Nevertheless, this central message of the thesis - that identity is a (vulnerable) becoming - has been mediated by a veteran-researching-self. Consistent with the approach, my researching self has been an underpinning process moving from a position of fairly uninformed Army insidership to a position of detachment and alienation that has been brought about by reading, learning, and the passage of time. The more distant I became from Army relations, the more I began to emphasise external relations, losing some faith in the force of agency and the narrative capacity of the individual. This aspect is clear in chapter nine as I review the work and revisit post-structuralism. I don't want this to be interpreted as a retreat from the argument of the thesis, but instead I believe that this is a process and shift in the work that reflects the journey that the leavers (including me) will variably encounter.

A Final Reflection. Life in the Army is often fast. Sometimes it ruins or ends lives. In my garrison wide welfare role, I was constantly aware of the extreme effects of Army service. I worked in “grey” areas where lives clashed with service. Injuries, deployments, marital breakdown, lone parent deployments all showed regularly contradicting priorities of private and Army domains. Such

personal conflicts were laid bare to me as the person who had to recommend a course of action, and my memory of these sorts of situations, especially the sacrifices and suffering connects me to prior colleagues. I am not detached or neutral, and I maintain an ethical and moral sensitivity to the real and continuing effects of soldiering.

My veteran status and personal position of perpetual Army exit has, over the course of the work, brought me to reflect on the characteristics of unnoticed ethical and moral principles of social relations. These are arguably at the centre of whom and what we believe ourselves to be. Army encouraged personal attributes became for me more and more strange as time passed. Half way through the project, I linked this to the good life (Ricoeur 1992:179) and wrote about identity and ethics. Now, from my end-of-research-perspective, I believe that the discomfort of my research situation (veteran status), together with my reading of Mead and Ricoeur, forced me to tackle notions of communal values taken into oneself in a personal way. I was granted a new perspective. Rather inevitably, this challenged my own taken-for-granted sense of self.

It would be naive to think that my connection to soldiering will go away, and failure to recognise this would bring inadequate analysis. But there are limits to the possible contribution of self-reflection. I agree when Corbin and Strauss claim that “something occurs when doing analysis that is beyond the ability of a person to articulate or explain” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:9). For Ricoeur - noted in Chapter three - actual and complete lived experience is only known fully by those present at that specific and individual moment, and that beyond

this the generation of meaning is forever a partial construction. Reflections on the research process suffer the same temporal force. A pragmatic balance is needed to avoid endless introspection. I hope I have adequately acknowledged my own changing place in the generation of meaning. For Amanda Coffey, “(i)t is totally necessary and desirable to recognize that we are part of what we study, affected by the cultural context and shaped by our fieldwork experience. It is epistemologically productive to do so, and as best naïve to deny the self an active, and situated place in the field. However, it is not necessary to make the self the key focus of the fieldwork..”

4.7 Limitations

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. A number of limitations are apparent in the closing stages of writing-up this thesis with regard to my methodology. As I look back I am forced to concede that I could have been even more selective in my use of the powerful process of purposive sampling by using it to better generate ideas and themes. The problem was that, as a consequence of my inexperience and lack of confidence in research, I failed to be sufficiently swift, focussed, and clear in recognising when I had saturated a particular theme or type of leaver. Hindsight also tells me that my early interview stages were too heavily influenced by the literature (especially Jolly (1996) and Ebaugh (1988)), and this has been an unhelpful distraction. Again, greater confidence and experience might have helped me to recognise this sooner. Fortunately, my adoption of a loose interview style permitted leavers to easily override my themes to tell their own stories.

It needs also to be acknowledged that the absence of non-commissioned leavers in the rank of Warrant Officer Class I might affect the findings in relation to matters of ambition or “re-invention” since it is likely that the most ambitious of soldiers will have reached this - the top non-commissioned - rank either en-route to commissioning or as a precursor to alternative civilian employment. This in-house ambition (in the sense of employment progression) may or may not translate into the civilian environment. This is a potentially important sampling issue because it may adjust findings that career leavers are somewhat limited in their ambition. Overall, my aspiration to incorporate officers and soldiers has only been partially successful because I have been unable to fully develop narratives of exit for long serving officers. This is work that could be completed at a later date.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter I have described the research problems, design, and process of this project. I have explained how early experiences and academic literature have helped to alter some starting assumptions and how these changes have been significant in terms of the work that follows, and especially in regard to the sort of knowledge that it has been possible to generate. In particular, I have been drawn to recognise my own role in this work along with inherent ethical issues associated not only with doing research but also implicated quite simply with being human. As I explain, this work has been motivated predominantly by my own curiosity emerging both from watching soldiers around me and by leaving the Army myself. The research problems, as set out in this chapter, have been the starting point for the research and are fundamentally concerned

with the nexus of person and service involving an emphasis on meaning and understanding in terms of the identity of exiting career soldiers as the central character leaving the Army. In many respects, Army exit is a well-practised process involving many expected and routine aspects that might collectively be termed intuitional frameworks, these are discussed in the next chapter in order to explain and analyse some of the communal frames or narratives notable among many leavers.

Institutional Frameworks

When you are young (...) you think (...) 22 years - it'll take forever, (...) but (...), before you know it - it's there (Mark).

5.1 Introduction

Exit talk in the final year of service seems, to some extent, correlated with a reasonably structured set of circumstances that have become stabilised in the form of institutional habits and routines. The most obvious clustering of such processes is in Army career structures, including planned endings. It is unsurprising that those who leave the Army at predefined junctures often discuss this in partially patterned ways. Careers, like lives, happen incrementally and the division of Army service into short - sometimes challenging - tours or postings often means that by the time career soldiers reach exit they have spent little, even no, time considering their Army service as a whole, or at least from a perspective outside of the virile currency of communal and internal exit logics. Alternative ways of narrating exit - associated with civilian lives and commercial or non-military working practices - are deliberately discussed in resettlement programmes;³⁴ and preparations for the future often bring for leavers increasing non-military contact. Multiple internal narratives are attached to the topic of Army exit. And this perhaps contrasts with civilian indifference to the matter, perhaps because, for many outside of the Army, changing jobs is a routine aspect of working lives, and

³⁴ For example, participants are encouraged to look at themselves as a civilian employer might.

also because the conditions of Army exit are distinctive in ways previously discussed in chapter two.

In focussing on institutional processes of exit, this chapter outlines a substantial collection of formal and informal arrangements that have become quite embedded - though not static - aspects of Army life. This emphasis on career practicalities, resettlement processes, and discourses is necessary, not only to portray the distinctiveness of Army life and its endings but also to foreground the “already storied” (Somers 1994) features of an Army career. The intersubjective self set out in chapter three, and based on Mead and Ricoeur, argues a middle way between poststructural and essentialist treatments of the self. It posits that the self cannot be known immediately but only via available discourses. This kind of internal “exit-knowledge” is an integral ingredient of complete Army careers and so how career soldiers understand exit is difficult to investigate without contextualising it in this way. Individual positions, motives, and logics have been built-up over time. For example, Edmunds and Forster claim that Army policies of early retirement “build (..) uncertainty into a military career” (2007) by fabricating a continual awareness of the need, at some point, for a second career. During service, individuals are exposed to multiple narratives of exit that are tied to practical facts such as promotion rules, postings, pensions, age limits, financial rewards, and possible future employment. Such communal frames of exit are learned not only in relation to the status of discharge as an event, but perhaps more importantly, by its continuous prior incorporation into a projected career. This seems to fashion a constant attentiveness, and for some anxiety, about when - and under what

circumstances - they will eventually (choose or be forced to) leave the Army; a factor that is demonstrated by countless stories about when they either “signed-off” or seriously considered doing so.³⁵ When, finally, the time comes to leave the Army, it is an event that is partly known from watching others go, hearing their descriptions, and considering themselves in relation to this sort of shared meaning. It should be no surprise that scheduled leavers in general, and the 22 year leaver in particular, approach exit with informed expectancy. In this chapter, some of the wider, routine, and predictable aspects of Army discharge are appraised. Collectively, these are referred to as “institutional frameworks” and by drawing especially on the 22 year leaver it is suggested that although common or shared frames of exit are noted, these are encountered in nuanced, individual, and developing ways.

5.2 Types of Leaver

Discharge from the British Army is also an administrative function achieved under various largely pre-known categories. For the career soldier there are a number of possible ways of leaving the Army depending on circumstances. A brief overview of the formal categories of exit and associated entitlements is necessary as a backdrop. At any time, spontaneous but not immediate, exit is possible both for officers and soldiers under certain restrictions. For soldiers this can be achieved by premature voluntary release (PVR) and for officers by resigning their commission. PVR will secure exit twelve months later and resignation dates can be negotiated by commissioned officers but are unlikely

³⁵ This is a local term for formally declaring a wish to leave the Army. Usually, it will take twelve months from this date until exit.

to be within three months of the date of resignation. Both of these options can be risky, potentially involving the loss of benefits. More generally, for soldiers and officers leaving in 2007/8, relatively short careers are connected to retirement benefits. For example; “(i)f you have completed 16 years’ reckonable service as an officer from age 21; or 22 years’ reckonable service from age 18 as an other rank you will qualify for an Immediate Pension” (AFPAA 2007:2). This first immediate pension point shapes the exit aspirations of many career soldiers who expect that their careers will end at this point after 22 years service. Many commissioned officers will serve beyond this first immediate pension point to the age of fifty-five. A resettlement grant provides another financial incentive around which exit is conceptualised to form a kind of departure generally defined as mid-way exit. Specifically, “(a)ll officers who have served for 9 years, and other ranks who have served for 12 years and who do not qualify for an IP (immediate pension) will be eligible for a Resettlement Grant(...), the Resettlement Grant is a fixed sum” (AFPAA 2007:2). Exit at these financially connected junctures are routine within Army narrative and expectation. Nevertheless, confusion is noted in available terminology. In general discussion, the word “discharge” is common and “retirement” is a term notably absent from both talk and from official documents, despite immediate pensions. In the authors’ own exit certificate the word “termination” is used and such clumsy terminology does seem suggestive of a disconnect between internal and external logics of exit.

Compulsory (Army 2002) and medical (Army 2005) discharge are two further categories of exit, reserved for exceptional circumstances. The first category is

often connected with circumstances in which a soldier can no longer perform their duties. This might be due to disciplinary reasons or a range of pre-defined situations listed in Queens Regulations, chapter nine (MOD 1976). Usually, this applies to failing or struggling soldiers and none of the respondents are in this category. Medical discharge is the result of a long and complicated bureaucratic and medical procedure. The most significant aspect of this procedure is the Medical Board where a soldier's fitness to serve is assessed and decisions made about discharge. A medical discharge often brings benefits including advanced pensions for those close to completing their service commitments. There are some respondents in this category which tends to bring a good deal of uncertainty about when and how a career is to end.

The official descriptors of exit, set out above and affecting those interviewed can, for ease, be condensed into the following terms: "full-22 (or 16) with option", "full-22 no option", "half way exit", "medical discharge", and "limit 34". The "option" refers to those soldiers who despite coming to the end of their careers have been offered extended service as a consequence of changes associated with Versatile Engagement (see chapter two). "Limit 34" defines those officers who have served for the maximum time taking them to exit aged around 55. Career soldiers do leave at other times and some of the respondents are slightly outside of these timeframes such as Nigel who leaves after 14 years, but these key groups are sufficient to capture important differences (and similarities) since such points of exit are significant in the sorts of conditions that have to be tackled. There are differences associated with age; choice versus compulsion; finance and pay; qualifications; future aspiration, and career

experiences. For example, soldiers and officers who leave, aged around 30, have generally opted to curtail an otherwise progressing career to pursue either work or lifestyle choices that have been sufficiently strong to reject stable employment whereas those in the “full-22” group, aged around 40, are leaving as an expected, planned, conclusion to a career, and so appear to present with quite different circumstances or conditions of exit. Similarly, those leaving for medical reasons often have health related issues that override all other considerations and are more specific to each person.

The most distinctive, numerous, and collective kind of discharging soldier interviewed in this research is the full-22 group and the remainder of this chapter will focus on this category of leaver as a way of describing the sorts of institutional frameworks that are pertinent to Army exit. As a kind, the full-22 is known to all soldiers, even those who leave early recognizing that they do not wish ever to be this kind of leaver. Often these soldiers are at their best, having climbed to the highest rank that they will achieve and have gathered a significant level of Army experience. They might be in key roles, although non-commissioned officers in high status prestigious positions such as Regimental Sergeant Majors often pass these roles en-route to commissioning.

Sometimes, those outside of the Army system find it hard to understand why the Army discards these individuals mid-career after they have had extensive training and development. This sentiment is periodically expressed by the individuals themselves but seems to be generally neutralised by the normality and expectancy of this organisational routine that has always been known. The

self ascription of motive and choice at exit is a complicated business, since for these leavers in particular the conditions of their exit have become quite specific by virtue of their positions at the end of well established organisational arrangements that have persisted over many years, with only marginal changes. This affects not only soldiers but families too. A focus on conditions of exit for this group emphasises in important ways how many of the outcomes that confront the full-22 group are predictable manifestations of the utility of their career-long labours. Of the 13 individuals in this group, 5 were invited to extend their service and 8 were not (2 were being medically discharged). All 5 declined the invitation and shared with most of the remaining 8 a surety that, despite a fine career, they could not be persuaded to stay. Notwithstanding very complex and mixed reasons for this sort of end-of-career apathy, it seems difficult or undesirable to alter this just because terms and conditions open up unexpected alternatives. We ought not to make too much of this point since, anecdotally at least, many others have adjusted to the idea of incrementally extended careers. But the common sentiment among the thirteen full-22 leavers is compatible with Mark's characteristically blunt statement: "(...) 13 Sep 1984 I knew exactly when I were leaving - so I've had something like 23 and a half years (to prepare)" (Mark).³⁶ As well as showing a merging between a career and wider life Mark also suggests that the future was always partially conditioned and known:

³⁶ The 22 year clock only starts ticking at the age of eighteen, so the extra service here is due to junior soldier experience before the age of eighteen. Equally common is a suspicion, among those interviewed, that extended service favours the organisation and just makes eventual exit more difficult, perhaps when a person is older and at an unwanted or unplanned timeframe.

When I joined up, if I were with the RAF (Royal Air Force) I could serve until (aged)55 then you are mentally prepared for that so you'd be quite happy - it's just another step - you just carry on with your way of life, whereas myself and yourself, we've known its 22 years (...)

Interviewer - so if you had joined in (19)84 and you knew your career was until 55 is that likely what you would have done?

Well, yeah, because obviously at your 19 year-point (.....) I'd still have a promotional career I wouldn't have probably bought an house, I would of stayed in quarters, the kids obviously would be settled in the Army life whereas now they've got their own friends and their own way of life and things (in preparation for exit). That's all different because that's what we would have done and we've now set up a new life for ourselves because in the end we have had to - and that's a progression. If you carry on until 55 then obviously I'd still of been on a career path, obviously the wife would have followed us around ...

Interviewer - and you could quite happily see yourself doing that?

Yeah, I mean if they'd changed that from the start - but as time went on obviously I was gearing myself, and I knew I were leaving, I knew what I wanted to achieve, I know what I want to achieve in life now (..) - what I want to do and that's why I wouldn't take any continuance or anything else... (Mark).

Des also retained his expected exit date despite possible continuance, and in the following quote he captures a common attitude towards the conditions of extended service:

... for me, the caveats that come with it - like we'll give you an extra three years, and then maybe an extra three years (.....). It's either (aged) 55 (perceived as the oldest it is possible to still be in the Army) or not. (.....) I couldn't - I wouldn't - sign up for 3 years thinking now I've got to try and resettle at (age)43, and find a job at 43, and maybe at 46..... (Des).

5.3 Creeping Careers and the Pension Trap

Although some knew they were in for the long haul, most reached the end by a certain amount of stealth, especially in the early years. Eventually, as early

reasons to leave are overcome and family commitments grow, individuals find that they have nudged themselves into places where premature discharge becomes difficult:

....when I first signed-on the dotted line it was for (..) the old 3 years and then after a year and a half it was like the old open engagement (.....). So it was a case of you will sign-on for three years, see how you go for the first year-and-a-half, and if you like it, leave it open, which I have done since I joined the Army..... (Mike).

The longer you leave it (exit) then you get into the trap - well I suppose it is a trap - you get married and you have a family and you realise well now I'm going to have to make sure I get (promoted) if I want my family still to be (..) living comfortably, have their own house, and just that bit longer you leave it, and leave it, and you're like gosh (..) I can't just jack it and (..) try and see what it's like on the other side of the fence because you've got a family, a wife, and children (..) (Bill).

Army careers are deliberately embroiled with family life since Army managers have long recognised that it is necessary to provide for families in order to keep soldiers happy (of course this implies certain assumptions about the way service families live their lives). This is a logic built into Army life in which service families accommodation (SFA) allows for communal living, centred around this unusual employment. Soldiers who marry (includes legally recognised same sex partners) are entitled to SFA that is thought necessary as a consequence of constant postings, and building supportive communities that will sustain families while soldiers are deployed. This provision of housing, frequent family moves, and the related need to eventually buy a house (or to find housing) are all institutional practicalities that can present significant - and predictable - hurdles at Army exit. These factors often draw into exit, issues of work for spouses, children's education, and wellbeing that become entangled with decisions about how and under what circumstance soldiers will eventually

leave the Army. If soldiers do not make incremental exit preparation - such as for example buying a house, then by the time they come to leave, whole family lives will also have to be re-invented.

The more a person throws themselves into Army life, the harder exit might be. For example, Ted, has lived in SFA, and moved with his family his entire career. They have been fully embedded in a holistic Army provision such that exit becomes all-consuming, so much so that his first attempt at exit prompted rapid re-enlistment. Ted, his wife, and their youngest son all live and work in a garrison area. Of his two elder children, one has joined the Army and the other works and lives away from home. The end of Ted's career is also the end of service accommodation. He will return to his home town in Scotland and has applied for a council house, but this, if available, can only be allocated when the need is immediate. The creeping insularity of Ted's career and his total reliance on its provision has brought him - and his family - to a rather predictable set of circumstances that many leavers work very hard to pre-empt and mitigate. He is quite calm notwithstanding his precarious conditions of exit:

... it is geography - I'd like to be settled in Scotland (.....). It is (..) quite frustrating, the big thing I'll have now is my wife is working here (...). It's not just me I've got to think about getting a job - the wife's got to get a job, and my son also works here so he's got to go and find a job (....). It's not just me resettling here - there's three people resettling and to try and do that from this far away, it's almost impossible. And, I guess because of housing, it's all going to happen at once isn't it (...)
(Ted).

Ted's circumstances show that whole lives are implicated in conditions of exit in a creeping and incremental way. By the time soldiers reach the twelve year

point, most - but not all - have families and are settled into Army provisions, especially housing. All of this combines with what is mostly known as the “pension trap” that has become so entrenched in thinking (and practical arrangements) that it is rarely mentioned, subsumed instead within the term “doing 22”, known locally to incorporate matters of pension. As Bill, above, hints the “trap” lies as much in the creeping nature of people’s lives as it does in the carrot of a pension and lump-sum. The force of the immediate pension as a retention incentive needs to be recognised because changes in terms of service mean that no longer will such leavers earn immediate pensions so early and this seems likely to influence exit choice and behaviour in the future, especially if high levels of operational commitment persist.

5.4 Hurry-Up-and-Wait

Army careers of 22 years are well ordered and managed at least in terms of promotions, postings, and performance, with notable differences between cap badges or trades. There are seven non-commissioned ranks and if a soldier spends an average of 3 years in each rank, a 22 year career is accounted for. This creates a sense of urgency for the most ambitious soldiers who must excel quickly in each rank to earn the next promotion. Until the recent introduction of incremental pay awards, only promotion could bring more money.³⁷ Visual and unequivocal success is vested in rank worn on the chest and pursued by almost everyone. It may be difficult for soldiers to accurately imagine what

³⁷ This excludes other allowances connected to living circumstances such as local overseas allowance, parachute pay etc.

working life might be like when this visual status is gone.³⁸ Worthiness for the next rank has to be proven in each job or posting and competition is tight within the constraints of a 22 year timeframe. In Corps or Regiments some jobs or roles are considered prestigious and become linked to progression to high profile jobs, such as for example Regimental Sergeant Major, a position virtually impossible to reach without movement through the ranks and via the right sorts of experiences. Timing and performance is everything in such cases and progress is understood within the 22 year timeframe. Often, this is supremely pressured, and draws immense effort and focus from individuals who wish to succeed. This sort of communal meaning is most noticeable on those who have come to struggle with meeting its demands and need to establish with it alternative relations so as to maintain a sense of esteem and worth:

... when you see people that were the same rank as you 5 or 6 years ago are now may be sergeant major, or whatever, and you think Christ (..) had I not been injured, had I not been ill, had I not been downgraded (..) I might have been in there with them, or maybe, I don't know, a Sergeant or something like that... (Mike).

.... when I got to Sergeant and I saw my peers around me I thought to myself I can go all the way here (...) I can make (Warrant Officer Class II) and possibly further. My CR's (confidential reports) have said I will make minimum (Warrant Officer Class II), and then to be stopped at (...) effectively my 17th year, because obviously with my sickness and now coming into my 20th year... (John).

³⁸ Although choosing to remain in one rank indefinitely is not a legitimate career choice, this can happen to those who do not display promotable qualities, such as for example Ted's laissez faire approach. But, because it is not a valid or approved option, it can create quite uncomfortable situations such as living in the corporal's accommodation, aged 40, surrounded by youngsters out to prove themselves and engaged in energetic social endeavours. Arguably, efforts to create conditions for ambition and progression are enhanced by visible signs of what happens to those who do not make it.

In the second quote, John's constant reference to years of service shows the pressure and calibration of time (22 years) and, although not stated overtly, John is expressing this in fractions of the 22 year whole that is the ticking clock for the ambitious soldier. In its purest form, this system is supposed to enable the most competent to rise to the top (and it seems remarkably successful in this). Overall, it ensures a perpetual throughput of youthful vigour endlessly motivated to progress through the ranks. A sense of this temporal competing and striving for promotion is shown below. Here, both Bill and Ian are complaining about the unfairness of promotions but in so doing display how rank is for many a central motivating force that shapes, structures, and orders time and effort, especially when there are still ranks to climb.

..to get promoted you have to be (age) 18 (..) to be a Lance Corporal and then 19 (..) to be a Corporal. So when I finished my training (...) I (had) (..) just turned 17, then did 4 months at Worthy Down, so getting into the big bad world it was January '87 and my first Unit was 1 PARA and (..) whereas guys who had got out with me, some of them were probably near 16, 17, and they were getting out of training and within so many months were full screws (Corporals) so (...)I had to wait another year after that (..) where's the justification in that..... (Bill).

..... I had been a corporal for 5 years with all O grades (outstanding on confidential report) (..) Everybody above me knew I was better than them, but because they were a different manning and records, (..) because I was out of trade (..),out of the mainstream RLC (Royal Logistic Corps) unit, they didn't class that as a proper report (.....). I got Sergeant to staffy (Staff Sergeant) within 4 years and then 2 (..) years later I was a (Warrant Officer Class II) - it was bang, bang, bang after that (....) It was a bit demoralising to be that low down (..) So you weighed up the pros and cons and the financial aspects ... (Ian).

These conditions of service encourage, perhaps demand, a thrusting, pro-active, striving, competing, and sometimes ruthless career person sufficiently

determined to push through the ranks.³⁹ Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to suggest that every career soldier complies readily with this; instead the descriptions of “hurry-up-and-wait” in this section are intended to describe a major institutional dynamic against which career soldiers need to continually position themselves.⁴⁰ But, for what and why? It can take a career of striving only to spend 2 or 3 years in the pinnacle non-commissioned rank of Warrant Officer Class I before being promptly discharged to start all over again, hence the phrase “hurry-up-and-wait”.⁴¹ The move from promotable soldier to discharging one can be quick and abrupt. A person can transit from mainstream soldier to “over-the-top” in months. Roger expresses surprise at just such a rapid change in status:

I knew it was my last posting when I came here (...). Normally I'd be sort of in everything, mucking-in, doing absolutely everything I possibly could (...). This time I (...) said right I'm doing the job, and I've done a couple of little things extra, (but) I'm not pushing myself out of the way to go and do the other things (...), partly because a) I am getting out, and, b) I know I am out of the promotion bracket. So it's, sort of like, a switching-off mechanism going on. It's quite annoying when you know you can't get promoted anyway (laughs), so you (...) switch off a little bit from that (...). I certainly think (that) I have changed (from) how I used to be (Roger).

When Roger talks about “mucking-in, doing absolutely everything” he is referring to the sort of behaviour expected of a thrusting promotable career soldier and this includes all manner of activities beyond a person’s stated job -

³⁹ A soldier that is overtly doing this is likely to be unpopular since looking after your team might be thought a more worthy and higher aspiration than promotion - and, of course, key characteristics needed for promotion are teamwork and leadership.

⁴⁰ An example of this sort of positioning is noted in chapter six when Samantha measures herself against the soldiers she has known at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. In doing this, she decides that, owing to her lack of confidence, she will never be a top soldier, promoted to the highest ranks. Nevertheless, she is completely aware of the force of ambition.

⁴¹ However, many of the most capable and successful soldiers will become commissioned officers.

activities that will contribute to the wider unit or community. This is a significant feature of Army life where individuals compete to go - and be seen to be going - "the-extra-mile". Cynically, for some, this can be about being seen in the right light by reporting officers, but for many it becomes a habitual way of going about business. Here, Roger is tackling his rapid change in status from "soldier-going-up" to one that is "going-out". It is not easy for him to adjust to the new "kind" of soldier that he has become. He is interacting with what he has become: that well known type - the "discharging soldier" on his last posting. His prior striving and goal-orientated effort was rewarded and validated by Army relations and perhaps offered him some surety of action and direction that is now lacking:

...you teach yourself to be positive and drive forward, and again, it's quite hard when everything has almost been handed to you on a plate (...). You've only had to do a few little bits of driving (being pro-active) in certain areas to make sure you've got what you want for your career - but now (after exit) - this is your career, no one else is going to help you. You've got to drive it one 100%, the Army aren't going to say wouldn't it be a good idea if you did this course and you can then go into this opening in your military career. (...) And you're like, oh shit, (laughs) is this the way I want be going - if I drive in that direction am I shutting that door over here? (Roger).

After hurrying through the ranks, many discharging soldiers must then wait in the final year for exit when their hard-earned status seems likely to evaporate in different social relations with altered priorities and conditions of worth. Like Roger, Bill's emphasis on speed and progression has gone and it is hard to imagine him ever having the sort of drive associated with his earlier ambitions. Aged about forty, he waits for pension and exit and he too is adjusting to being

a discharging soldier, since despite one rank to go and offers of further promotable service, Bill has no intention to stay

..... yes you can keep going on and on with the career but (pause) (..) it's - I wouldn't even say it's a career - it's just a job. That's certainly turned in the last I would say, probably the last five years, it has kind of moved towards that way more a job than a career (Bill).

This sense of hurry-up-and-wait, the shift from career to job, and the extinguishing of (Army) ambition are implicated in institutional frameworks. These fairly predictable aspects of being a career soldier are connected with the organisational need to harness and motivate youthful energy, a point not lost on some of those who wait. Ian claims that:

It's all a focus on retention of the younger lads where everyone from I would say 8 years plus (until exit) they (the Army) are not interested in you because (...) they think they've got you by your short and curlies because of the financial aspect (pension trap). (...) Young lads - lets do this for them, let's lay this on for them. (...) They are so much more mollycoddled now, z type accommodation (new build single accommodation), en-suite room. I was at (named unit) where all the junior ranks (Corporal and below) had en-suite rooms and z type accommodation and yet the guys in the mess (Sergeants and above) were living in a pooh hole (..) What incentive have they got to become a senior rank when they are living in squalor? (Ian).

Ian then goes on to talk about his current living arrangements as a consequence of purchasing a home in his intended civilian location and settling his family in that area while he lives in the Warrant Officers and Sergeants' Mess⁴² and works in the garrison area.

.. everything down to the telly reception; my sink leaks, and the cupboard underneath it - the wood is sodden (and) smells of rotting wood. The toilets are never cleaned properly, the shower doesn't work properly, (and) the tiles are falling off. I mean you see it all on telly y'know yourself why a (Warrant Officer Class 2), nearly 40, am I living

⁴² This is accommodation for senior non-commissioned officers including social facilities.

like that when I've got a three-bedroomed-semi I should be in at home (Ian).

5.5 Turbulence Together or Alone and Apart?

Housing and family factors are integral aspects of Army life and exit. And decisions made in these areas influence the kinds of life it is possible to lead in the closing years of a career. A soldier has to do a job until the very end and so both the Army and a soldier's family might be described as "greedy institutions" (Segal 1986) that make tough demands on the soldier that can pull in contrary directions, perhaps more so when the end is known. Family and housing decisions are predominantly a reaction given form in response to what the Army wants from the soldier and what sort of life individuals are able - or are inclined - to carve in response. Some families, like Ted's, will live in Army accommodation until the very end, clustering all practical exit issues together until the last moments while most will purchase property early and ready, like Roger:

If I get into the property (market) I'm not going to be panicking for when I do get out, so yes, I was probably planning that ten years ago but wasn't really thinking about it. I just wanted to get on the property ladder, get a house while I can, and I rented it out when I am moving around the world and this sort of thing which is what we did, and we are back here as a final base and we are looking to settle in the area, still with the same house. Well, yeah in a way, I probably was planning again for (..) when I am getting out (Roger).

Many, however, wait and purchase houses only in the closing years. By 2007 there was still a package of allowances called the "over 37 provision"⁴³ designed to support those who settle their families in a chosen location while serving "unaccompanied" elsewhere. While some families reject Army life

⁴³ Here "37" refers to a person's age as the age individuals are likely to be three years before discharge.

early, opting for stability, others avoid it altogether, leaving the soldier to serve alone. The main choice for whole families to make both during careers, and towards the end, is between “turbulence together” that is associated with constant postings, housing, and schools or serving alone and living apart.⁴⁴ Most of the 22 year leavers are male and married. All but Rob have dependent children and Samantha is the only female (lone parent), living alone in SFA at her work location, where she intends to settle. Mark is typical of those who lived entirely within the Army environment until purchasing a home for his family in the closing years. He is certain the time is right to leave and discusses his practical arrangements for exit:

..... I don't want to disturb my family again, my daughter who is only (aged) 8 (..). Until we settled last year, she had been in 6 houses and she was only 7 years old, and do I want to continue doing that for (unclear) - it's not fair for them.

Interviewer - How long have you been unaccompanied?

(..) I've been unaccompanied around sixteen months.

Interviewer - (..) why did you choose to do that?

Cos I were leaving the Army and I needed to buy my own property. (..) I've been married for 13 years and my wife has followed me around for 12 (Mark).

5.6 When the Full-22 Becomes “You”

After careers of ambitious striving, or quiet survival, along with regular disruption, 22 year leavers are often coming out of the other end, wrestling with all sorts of basic and predictable practicalities that have been mentioned in this

⁴⁴ Some regiments are more stable than others, and in these cases soldiers often remain in one region for long periods, even whole career. In these relatively rare circumstances soldiers will often purchase property locally where they can live very settled lives. This is the situation of a very small number of respondents.

chapter. Careers - and exit - can be all-consuming endeavours, uniquely known among those involved. Living apart from family and making the best of situations is an inherent part of soldiering⁴⁵ and is repeatedly tested during operational tours, courses, and in just maintaining a “normal life” despite service.⁴⁶ Exit resembles service and is, in many ways, yet another posting to be tackled. Six (Bill, Arthur, Ian, Mark, Rob, Ed) of the full-22 are living long distances from their families for their last tour (usually 2 or 3 years duration). These six are all “late unaccompanied” in that they have spent a prior career in a situation of “turbulence together”, shifting to “alone and apart” at the end. Ted is alone in his “resettle together” circumstances of exit. Of the remaining six, five have achieved “own home together” by way of a posting and house purchase in the same location and within commuting distance, although John and Alf have come to this arrangement as a consequence of fairly extreme medical difficulties. Samantha, is posted to where she intends to settle but as she has no home beyond her Army accommodation she will be categorised as an “irregular occupant” when she overruns her entitlement to housing. She intends to do this because, from her work as a welfare worker, she knows only too well the rules of irregular occupancy and has perhaps become immune to the stigma of this status. She intends to “work the system” until ready to buy a house locally.

⁴⁵ However, it is not uncommon for some soldier to be pleased to be away from family and that potentially living together poses problems when couples who are unused to sharing a life are forced to do so. My own experience, interviewing hundreds of families supports this view and there is much anecdotal information to suggest that marriages often collapse after exit as a consequence.

⁴⁶ This inherent disruption of Army life is officially known as the “X factor” or unofficially as the “fuck-about-factor”.

Soldiers know the discharging soldier as a type by these sorts of circumstances and conditions. He - and it mostly is a he - can be seen in the Sergeant's Mess - a place he might be forced to live by the needs of his family to be located elsewhere. Here, in the mess, he waits for exit. The discharging soldier is ubiquitous. He can be witnessed doing his final job; or noticed taking time-off to attend resettlement events; he can be heard discussing his plans for exit or saying goodbye, handing over his work and then finally, he is to be known only by his absence. Consciously or not, all career soldiers have experienced him. The constant, repetitive, and embedded process of Army exit means that the preparations and departures of a succession of relatively young men (and women), mid-career, is an unremarkable and mundane happening; except, that is, when "he" becomes "you" because when "he" becomes "you" the normalised narratives and repetitive rituals of exit may seem to have betrayed the novelty and magnitude of the process of leaving the Army that have become so real and immediate in your unfolding and novel present:

I'm keen to get out, start my new job, new beginning really, even though it's half way through my life so to speak but a new beginning - but it's also utterly terrifying wondering where that money's gonna come (from)because - money doesn't make you happy - no, but it makes the world survive, it makes your survivability. If you can't pay your rent you lose your house, you can't buy food for your kids (Roger).

.. coming out into civvy street - coming out of this environment of big umbrella, everyone together, and helping out, (to) being on your own basically (Rob).

22 years in the Army, I mean you do get looked after, you are sort of life-cocooned or kept in that bubble - there are (..) massive amounts done for you so when you actually get a bit of paper saying yeah that's it you are getting out, umbilical cords are getting cut, off you go sort of thing, breath by yourself (Mike).

The full-22 can be at once a sad and respected figure. Aged around 40, he might share with young, thrusting, newly promoted Sergeant's the high spirits of Mess life, he may lead, shirk or tolerate the discipline, the order, the tradition, the fun, the drinking; and he may again revel the life of a single man. Perhaps, however, he will just "do-his-time" living for Friday afternoons when along with so many other soldiers he can drive long distances "home". All versions of this type - the discharging soldier - are forever known, gradually, differently, personally, and long before "he" *becomes* "you". And, so, it is, inevitably, expectedly, thankfully, frightfully, that it becomes your turn to wait for exit in this sort of limbo between two worlds. It becomes your turn to find your solution in tackling the inevitable conditions of exit as a consequence of your place as a career soldier in the British Army. Each leaver must negotiate these conditions of careers and exit that have brought a person to a partially predictable nexus between soldier and civilian. This was always going to happen and if individuals were not too busy incrementally living their lives and responding to the demands of service they could have taken detailed note of the discharging soldier, and if they had done so they would be very close to predicting the processes of leaving the British Army since so much of what it means to leave the Army as a career soldier are stabilised and routinised in Army life. At one level, the full-22 has been "made-up" and "spat-out", a spent product of Army utility. By the time "he" becomes "you" it is already known what is involved, what it means, but in the novel and unique experience of your present, "you" must negotiate how you are going to leave the Army. The lucky ones manage a posting near to where they wish to settle but the rest must wait

to respond so as to get the best deal for themselves, their children, and their wives to position themselves for exit. By the time “you” are this discharging type you enter into a “kind” that though thoroughly known is nevertheless also entirely new.

5.7 Agents of Exit

Leaving the Army is also the domain of a number of “agents” (Glaser and Strauss 1971:41) of exit. Firstly, there are commercial training companies who seek to make money from offering leavers opportunities to re-train. Secondly there are specialist magazines or publications who presumably make their money from advertising to service-leavers, but also include in their pages articles and stories about leaving the armed service. The final agent of exit includes all of those employed by the Ministry of Defence - either directly or by contract - to offer well-established resettlement services to tri-service leavers. All three types of agent are significantly implicated in meanings that surround Army exit, and each of them have varying vested interests in the work that they do. Their influence is notable in the talk of leavers who often measure or track their transition against criteria defined by, in particular, the third agent of exit. These agents are also linked with very practical possibilities, in addition to simply being a place where information from both those who are leaving and those who have left is shaped, discussed, and known.

By far the most important agents are the different components of the collective tri-service “resettlement system” who are paid to tackle exit in stable, patterned, and non-problematic terms. An Army Education Centre information sheet (that

was handed to the author for his exit) is reproduced at Appendix five. This charts in detail the five stages of the “resettlement process” that are understood to begin approximately 2 years before discharge. In summary, stage one involves the Unit Resettlement Officer; stage two is an interview with the Individual Education & Resettlement Officer (IERO); stage three involves a consultation with a member of the Career Transition Partnership (part of a company called “Right Management”) - this involves career counselling assistance with finding jobs. Stage four is briefing attendance, and finally, stage five is exit.

Stages one and two occur largely within the mainstream Army system and exhibit a compatible style of delivery, including, for example, joining instructions urging individuals to “report 15 min early dressed in SMART civilian clothes or Working dress” (these words were included in the authors “joining instructions”). Incorporated into all of these stages is a concern for delivering a “duty of care” and for ensuring that individuals (probably rank-based) have made adequate basic preparations. This is a response to increasing recognition that sometimes forces personnel can be quite vulnerable when they leave the service. For one Resettlement Centre at least, these briefings are compulsory for those under the rank of Warrant Officer. This “duty of care” side to the “resettlement system” is important not only in satisfying potential external criticism if soldiers visibly falter (e.g. criticism in press) but in meeting genuine need. Although none of the leavers interviewed seemed destined for catastrophe (e.g. by becoming homeless or penniless) this does happen, and

when leavers “fail” there is a potential knock-on effect for all soldiers, such is the extent of community and hearsay.

The buzz of communal exit talk was palpable in some interviews and stories repeated and recurred. On one Army camp in particular, stories about the soldier-who-failed-to-leave were ripe. Rumour had it that an unmarried soldier had recently reached his final day of Army service without making any preparations for his future whatsoever. This inactivity included a failure to form an intention to leave his room in the barracks where he stayed apparently in the hope that he could continue unnoticed. This repeated and communal story seemed to invoke a good deal of empathy, perhaps even identification with this person’s seeming pull towards safety and security within Army gates. In the most extreme cases, agents of the resettlement system need to ensure that these sorts of “failure” are minimised. At stages one and two, agents tend to be ex-Army officers, usually from the ranks, and may or may not have had non-Army employment. Their work is with a steady stream of all sorts of leavers to whom they deliver well practiced and reasonably routine briefings / interviews that include practical matters relating to disentanglement from Army life as well as common-sense approaches to finding work. Stage three is provided by the Career Transition Partnership (between Ministry of Defence and Right Management).

In contrast to the reception of practical information that is associated with prior stages, leavers are invited in stages three and four to take more control of their own exit, albeit guided by “expert” assistance. At the three-day career

transition workshop (CTW) an optimistic tone and positive discourse emphasises the benefits of a distinctly “military way” that will be inevitably desired by civilian employers if only individuals can learn to adequately communicate this or to supplement it with new targeted civilian skills and training. This is the main task of the workshop, which also invites leavers to wonder what they want from life and introduces to them, possibly for the first time, the notion that they can choose how hard, when, and where they want to work - ideas hitherto alien to the tri-service participants - at least overtly and officially. This positive approach, though understandable, is misleading and seems unhelpful for those whose Army careers fit uneasily with civilian employment possibilities. For example, there is little acknowledgement of the incremental nature of many civilian employments that largely prohibit entry at levels other than at the very bottom and so effectively exclude career soldiers. Having said this, however, there is some evidence of a subtle dampening of aspiration, notable in soldiers’ much repeated expectation of a drop in pay - a shared and known aspect of exit given much airing among leavers:

You’re (never) going to earn the money I’m earning now and I understand that - I don’t expect it (Roger).

..... as the days start counting down the realisation actually hits when there’s my kit, there’s my id card, and that’s it I am now Joe public, Mr Civvy (...) - it’s just to see how I fair in civilian life, getting a job, and how (..) I know I am going to take a pay cut (Mike).

No I’ve never worried about it (leaving) mainly because I always think that you look out there - you’ve got brothers, sisters, family and all the rest of it, they’re working, they’ve got friends who are. Obviously, in civvy-street they earn less than us, and they can survive, and if they can survive, I am sure we can (Mark).

Typically, this expectation of a pay-drop connects with apparently shared views that civilians earn less and this often forms part of a wider, misplaced, sense of soldierly superiority. Perhaps, the necessary in-service sense of superiority needs more direct management in the pre-exit stage and this would include more realistic - and perhaps depressing assessments of an ex-soldier's employment fit. This is unlikely to happen not least because the swift informal communication among soldiers means that any negative message allowed into formal resettlement processes would soon find its way to mainstream serving soldiers who it would be feared, would question their continued service. It is possible that this shared expectation of a pay cut is traceable to information from previous leavers, recounted to friends and/or official resettlement feedback mechanisms. It may be an outcome of the very practical task of connecting the skills-base of leavers with available job vacancies that are attached to lower salaries. This mid-career dip seems an embedded expectation rarely challenged or questioned - there is a tangible resignation to these sorts of expected conditions. After all, these sorts of difficulty are the reasons for a dedicated "resettlement system" whose general approach however seems to be to play down the rupture, especially the idea that the mid-career leaver might be significantly disadvantaged. An undeniable practical reality confronting numerous leavers is that pay cuts - when and if they happen - could be as a result of non-transferrable qualifications and unusual work histories that prevent many from entering other employments at levels similar to the ones that they have left.

Right management, is a component of the resettlement system, and is a commercial company that forms part of a Career Transition Partnership. Their web page describes their services in the following way:

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) is the name given to a partnering agreement between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Right Management, who are global career development and outplacement specialists. This simply means the MoD contract us to provide eligible Service leavers with career transition services as part of their resettlement process. This is because the MoD recognises that making the transition from the Armed Forces into civilian life can be daunting. Some Service leavers will have joined the Forces straight from school and will never have applied for employment anywhere else.

The CTP was established in October 1998. We employ around 120 civilian staff, including consultants, trainers and administrators. We have nine Regional Resettlement Centres (RRCs) in the UK, and one in Germany. Our headquarters are in London, and our Resettlement Training Centre (RTC) is situated in Aldershot. All our offices are linked to a central database of Service leavers, employers and jobs.

We are here to help you.

We deliver free resettlement services to all ranks of the British Armed Forces, and make the transition from military to civilian life as smooth and successful as possible. We are here to teach you the skills you need to produce a CV, learn interview techniques, research the employment market and apply for jobs. Remember, these skills can be used throughout your lifetime, not just to gain your first job in civilian life.

CTP staff understands the military way of life and the challenges facing people making the transition to civilian life. We are here to meet the needs of the individual Service leaver, and exist to provide flexible, free of charge support for you. We can provide this support from two years prior to discharge, and up until 2 years after your discharge (RightManagement 2010).

Right Management is a career management consulting firm and getting leavers into jobs is their emphasis. They claim and measure success in these terms. This however precludes detailed mention of the kinds of work found, happiness levels, or indeed whether or not Right Management was implicated in that “success”.

Collectively, the tri-service resettlement system is a substantial and unparalleled provision that includes not only practical help and training, but also lengthy periods of paid time-off to find work. It is a key agent in the generation of meaning associated with exit and is inevitably implicated in the routinisation of this process. Moreover, information, advice, and informal chats among participants are brought back to units to inform further general discussions and banter on the topic of exit which contribute to the continuous and ready stock of local knowledge related to the experience and anticipation of leaving the Army. This is especially clear in constant exit talk about the Career Transition Workshop. This is a significant and well-known milestone of Army discharge that appears to signal to a soldier that they “really” are leaving the Army:

I've always known I was going to leave when I get to the end of my 22 but it didn't really sink in until you start your resettlement and so it was (...) 2 years before my end date - transition workshops - and (...) they started explaining all those things and you're looking at yourself - you've got no qualifications on the civilian side of things (...). I've only got one really that's got a civvy certificate with it and that's when you start thinking oh hang on (...) you've got to go and do something (Ted).

I think the career transition workshop was helpful in your self-marketing and (...) putting your CV together (Des).

I started at the two year point (...) - went to go and see the IERO (stage two interview) - got in fairly quickly to the CTW and had not a clue what I wanted to do. (...) Not interested in going down the medical chain (...)and continuing that. Done that for 22 years, so I wanted a change. I needed a tactic about what I was going to be doing but I hadn't a clue about anything. (...) I had numerous things going through my mind from doing any of the trade skills(...), setting up bouncy castles, going HGV driving cos I've got my licences (...). (I) could not make my mind up and it was a big swirl, even on the CTW yes had a fantastic two CV's (that) I came out with, which was something I didn't have before, (...) but I still didn't know what I wanted to do (Roger).

All told, those interviewed expressed significant appreciation of all levels of the resettlement system and although one or two questioned the wisdom of employing retired officers (earlier stages) to provide advice about something many had not really yet done for themselves (i.e. leave the Army), the majority found a good deal of benefit in the help provided, regardless of rank or reasons for exit.

The two remaining agents of exit - in the form of commercial publications and training organisations - are actually quite connected to each other. In the first of these, multiple publications - mostly magazines - such as “Quest”, “Pathfinder”, and “Civvy Street” dedicate their pages to service leavers to provide a space for the second agent of exit - training organisations - to advertise to service leavers their menu of re-training courses. The kinds of employment and training made visible, in these pages, are of a mostly predictable kind and include, computer maintenance, plumbing, all-manner of hands-on work such as floor sanding, tiling, painting, plastering, electrician, security and driving.⁴⁷ Although many leavers draw their own conclusions about the pages of these sorts of magazine, they remain a significant source of information incorporating commercial opportunities and personal stories of exit, transition, and transformation designed to motivate, inspire, and possibly exploit service leavers. At a time of uncertainty and confusion these, largely commercial sources, are potentially quite influential:

⁴⁷ At the time of writing many providers manipulated their training and accommodation costs to capitalise on known military resettlement grants, even producing invoices so that generous resettlement accommodation and subsistence allowances could be diverted to pay for the training - this has changed now with new funding regulations and an insistence that training takes place close to a home location wherever possible.

All the time while I'm working I've got paperwork in front of me, Quest magazines, and I'm looking through different things and looking for jobs (Arthur).

.... you think right, you get a little pack with service leavers, Quest magazines and things, (...) so I've got 2 years left and they are giving me Quest magazines (..) why? It's all just ideas and you think well I knew that anyway I know where I'm going to look, I know what I am going to look for (Rob).

... apparently there's 20,000 jobs for electricians in the UK (....). I go on job sites (but) I can't find that many so (..) sometimes I wonder if some of the stuff they repeat in the Pathfinder and the Quest is just (...) paper usage because (...) the people that have been there and done that [previous leavers talking about their experiences] are the same people that were in when they did transport 14 months ago (....). When you start reading them you start to recognise people (....), so sometimes I wonder (Des).

These sorts of publications seem to offer imaginable futures and although they are often viewed with suspicion, their influence is difficult to ignore. It is well known, even within the Army, that a small group of employments consistently attract ex-military personnel. The most commonly discussed were the police, Light Goods Vehicle driving (largely because this is the one qualification just about all non-commissioned leavers possess), and the Prison Service. But, the available stock of knowledge about what might be done after exit is often viewed by individuals with suspicion and scepticism. One leaver recounted how he believed that his previous colleagues had, over the years, responded in patterned ways to their need to find work:

I've seen different changes, obviously people were leaving to do HGV driving in the eighties or the nineties it was a big thing to do and then later on through the nineties it were fibre optics, everybody were leaving for fibre optics and now they all seem to be leaving for like to be an electrician and be a plumber and all things like that (Mark).

However, he does not accept for himself this communal wisdom about the sorts of jobs that commonly follow Army careers. He seems to believe that, in

becoming a pest controller, he is going against the grain. There is a significant minority who, in their pre-exit talk, reject what they see as well worn employment paths to arrive at ideas they believe are at odds with other peoples ventures, almost as if at odds with what they feel they are supposed to do, thus manufacturing a sense of relief or “freedom”. This sense of escape is often framed in reaction to feelings of detachment from their Army career and so the way in which a person responds to pre-exit demands seems implicated in a whole career, not just the closing years. For Samantha, a persisting sense that she is not a “real soldier”, along with a belief that she has other unused capabilities, seem to culminate at exit in a strong desire to get right away from the Army, almost as a relief:

*..the job bores me to death and I just can't physically see myself doing it for another 3 years (...). I feel like I am at that stage of my life where I need to progress and I need to do something different (...). I feel like I have outgrown the Army now and I need a new challenge in my life because I am 40 in 3 months and (...) I just feel that I need to (..) close this chapter of my life and do something completely different.....
(Samantha).*

5.8 Army Exit: Event or Perspective?

A focus on institutional frameworks has made exit - at least partially - a rather inevitable, systematic, and progressive form of becoming. Young men and women enter organisational processes that partially “makes them up” (Hacking 1986), and 22 years later, aged around 40, they exit. The meaning that surrounds Army exit is in many ways a career-long absorption partially developed within distinct institutional frameworks. This aspect of Army exit has been developed during this chapter in regard to a specific group of career soldiers - the full-22. Though never entirely fixed, institutional frameworks

shape the contexts for individual decisions and - to some extent - shape what can be known. Over the course of a career, smaller reactive decisions - such as whether or not to take your family with you on a posting, or to do this or that promotion course - snowball into a rather bigger choice to complete a full Army career.⁴⁸ Perhaps then, exit is not so much about the final year of service but the career that preceded it. Organisational interactions and incremental choices over time come to shape conditions of exit and suggest that the “discharging soldier” is a form of liminal type built into whole Army lives.

Conditions of service and exit impose practical challenges and consume energy, effort, and focus. Individual responses to this are often in the form of both “artful” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:697) and shared narratives or stories that suggest the experiences of leaving the Army are at once personally nuanced and socially shared. According to Ricoeur, time passes from the future to the present and into the past. To construct a story of the whole against continually moving time would appear to require a (series of) perspective (s) or a static period(s) from which passing time can be ordered into a story. Although there are institutional frames and narratives surrounding final year processes of exit, for most leavers the anticipation of what will come next takes over as a perceptual horizon or end of the story.⁴⁹ This apparent habit of narration, constructed amidst institutional frameworks, de-emphasises Army exit, and turns it from an event that is the end into a perspective or vantage point from

⁴⁸ This is rather like Hacking’s description of the cruel mother who did not set out to be such, but instead came to be so as a consequence of a series of small choices within a distinct and influential context (Hacking 2004:287).

⁴⁹ Leavers have talked about the end of a career always being known and will continue to do this, but they are moving beyond this to find their conceptual horizons in the unknown.

which lines of narrative are constructed, deconstructed, and re-constructed in ways that appear thoroughly embedded in at least some shared local understandings.

Exit becomes a point from which moving time is apprehended and eventually it is the middle of the story around which a known life before is knitted to an unknown life ahead. When faced with a future without prior template might not local understandings become overemphasised, burdened, overworked, or vulnerable to error as a consequence of their creation within distinctive, often static, institutional frameworks? This need to focus on the future by way of stories seems to connect with Ricoeur's view that "we are essentially practical beings, (...) necessarily oriented to our lives in terms of what we are to become. This orientation gives self-consciousness a fundamentally temporal and primarily, future-orientated, character" (Atkins 2004:347).

Army exit seems rather like a firework that promises a magnificent and dazzling air display but instead when it is lit it spits, flickers, and fizzles out pitifully on the ground.⁵⁰ Anticipation creates expectation and meaning but, because as Ricoeur suggests, personal horizons are future orientated there can be no useful future in Army exit as a horizon in the final year or so of service, because it carries no practical utility or passage into the future. Perhaps, the spits and flickers associated with the ending of a career fizzle gradually and slowly over the final year of service when leavers are forced - by practical

⁵⁰ Nicola King (2008) discusses the impossibility of endings as a consequence of perpetual narrative (re)construction.

necessity - to look beyond its scope if they are to order pre and post-Army lives into a desirable narrative whole, or story.⁵¹

Of course there will always be a specific day when a leaver can espouse the words: I have left the Army today, but by the time the last day arrives, it may be a rather empty moment having already - and on a daily basis - expended all of its uses as a means to understand and cope with impending change. Indeed, there is widespread disagreement about when is the end; some say it is when the pay stops and others claim it is the last day of work - there can be three months difference here. Exceptions ought to be noted, however, since the coming of the last day (of work) retains significant value to those for whom daily Army life had become miserable and difficult; and in such cases, the last day ends their discomfort. Endings are often marked by parties and mess functions. There is the final exit from the camp and the handing in of the identity card. All are symbolic and significant. But the impression from most leavers is that these are rather empty experiences in which it is hard to grasp that it is “you” to whom it is happening. In terms of understanding self and exit, these on-the-day events contribute little to the understanding of exit and are marginal social rituals. The final “dining-out” of the Sergeants Mess is supposed to be a dramatic and formal farewell to loyal and dedicated soldiers, and regiments make different forms of presentation. For Dennis, his regiment presents a Duke on horseback as the symbol of the regiment. Dennis recounts his absence from this supposedly grand and symbolic ending in much more mundane language:

⁵¹ There are important exceptions to this such as for example William who cannot look forward much at all.

I didn't want to travel 600 miles there and back (..) just to have a dining-out and get my duke on horseback (..) it would cost me £70 in fuel and then another £60 dining-out and they were busy as hell so they couldn't even guarantee it was still going to be on (Dennis).

5.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have used the full-22 as a reference group to describe some of the institutional frameworks that are associated with Army service and exit. Although these are specific to this group of leavers, similar employment frameworks apply also to other leavers and seem thoroughly implicated in whole careers and to the eventual transformation of Army exit from an event to a narrative perspective. The next two chapters are concerned with the different ways in which leavers negotiate identity in relation to these sorts of institutional frameworks and processes.

6

Identities-For-Fighting

Who and what have I become?

6.1 Introduction

Practical matters such as housing, employment, being a non-absent family member, or becoming a mother dominate the exit focussed preparations of leavers. These sorts of straight forward and practical challenges often provide the main focus for leavers who are intent on making arrangements for the sorts of lives they wish to lead after the Army. Such practical efforts - or prominent ventures - become invested in the final year with significant matters of identity and are important in terms of the continuance of self across the civil-military divide.

Soldiers tackling prominent ventures find new experiences that have to be narrated and this is generally done in the context of a life course that is itself a human construction (Bruner 1987).^{52,53} Order is pursued through autobiography (Becker 1994) and is never a simple report of what happened; instead, our stories of life act as “a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience(..)” (Bruner 1987:12). Furthermore, narrative and action involves a “double determination” (Ricoeur 1992:158) where not only does narrative imitate life (e.g. the “doing” of prominent ventures are narrated in retrospect) but so too does life imitate narrative where the plan, conception, or idea of the prominent venture can determine and direct action (Bruner 1987;

⁵² Eventually, Ricoeur relates this to the “good life” (1992:179).

⁵³ Becker also relates the “collectively shared image” of life to a series of organising metaphors such as for example the “journey of life” (Becker 1994:387).

Ricoeur 1992). Consequently, narratives “are both about life and part of it”⁵⁴ (Rosenwald 1992:271), and this gives them a “formative potential”, and the “power to transform lives” (Rosenwald 1992:271).

In this way identities are imagined, implicated, played-out, and performed in a process of becoming that can be both alarming and invigorating. Prominent ventures seem to incorporate - or even mask - a wider twofold process of identity construction (and reconstruction) that will form the emphasis of this and the next chapter. This is the apparent broader need to answer the question “who or what will I be after leaving the Army?” which also involves a second and related process in the form of renewed attentiveness to questions of: “who or what have I become? This latter question is taken up in this chapter by way of some detailed description and analysis. This is provided in the form of a typology that has been used to construct the different ways that soldiers relate to the idea and practice of being a soldier prior to leaving the Army. This connection between practical change and identity is similar to Beckers’ (1997:101) assertion that people experiencing disruption will question who they are when “predictable routines” are disturbed - though for most soldiers, this particular disruption is a “normal” and expected event in Army life.

Even when Army exit is undesirable or unplanned, leavers have to find practical ways forward and cannot dwell on disappointment or loss.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ In arguing for an hermeneutic processual approach to life-stories Peacock and Holland (1993) distinguish between two major approaches. There are those that emphasise life (“life-focussed”) and there are those that emphasise the story (“story-focussed”). In adopting a processual approach Peacock and Holland also emphasise the role of the “other” as a confrontational aspect of any life story.

⁵⁵ However, extreme problems at exit can severely hinder a persons’ ability to look forward. This was the case for William whose situation is described at the end of this chapter.

Prominent ventures may take time to establish and can involve making the best of a bad situation. They may change, develop, or come to nothing and are approached on an effort continuum, ranging from the most pro-active leaver who carefully crafts a civilian future, to reluctant or sick leavers taken by surprise.⁵⁶ Regardless of their location on this continuum, all individuals are eventually forced to act in ways that are new and novel to them if they are to “leave” the Army. Prominent ventures, as practical tasks, bridge the gap from the known “soldier-self” to a developing future self. They eventually become the next main event in “the narrative unit of a life” (MacIntyre cited in Ricoeur 1992:157) and can at times override everything. Part of this involves thinking of oneself from the perspective of the civilian-other - a stance that helps leavers to (re-)construct meanings about what it is that they feel has marked them out as soldiers and how these characteristics may - or may not - be taken forward. In a moment, I will discuss the concept of prominent ventures further and relate this to different conceptions of a soldierly self; but first, in the next section, I will describe how notions of the “civilian other” are important for identity processes occurring in anticipation of exit.

6.2 “Joe-civvy”⁵⁷ the Civilian-Other

Most leavers have easily described themselves as soldiers and when they do so, they tend to draw on an imagined or explicit sense of difference from civilians.

This is shown below:

⁵⁶ This can also be related to a difference in emphasis between “push” and “pull” factors.

⁵⁷ A common Army phrase but also a term used specifically by Glen.

.....shaped of course we are, yes - we dress in a certain way (.....) we speak in a certain way (...) I think there is certain social and domestic (line) that we (..) work to (Bryan).

Yeah (..) as a soldier... as a civilian (my wife)... I've already asked the wife, I've said right every time I swear, pick me up (.....) Working on weekends, I went to one of the guys on the bays (Post Office vehicle loading areas) and I saw that he was operating his little fork lift and I said can you tell me how this ramp works and he goes: I don't know mate, I operate this. I said, but you go up and down it every day, have you never pressed the button or anything? He goes, not my job and that was his thing, because that wasn't his job to press that button, he didn't know how to do it. I was shocked (.....). So things like that I couldn't get used to - if I was working there and somebody said can you give me a hand with (this), I'd be like, yeah, 2 minutes (....) whereas civvies - it's not my job (Ian).

I think because I have been institutionalised and somebody has looked after me all my life I think I'm a bit scared to come out (Ian).

Perhaps, impending “civilian” lives bring greater relevance for a “civilian-other”, “the one whose appearance may seem to threaten me” (Shildrick 2002:87) and “the stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself” (Levinas 1969:39). If this is the case, however, it is not always difference that is noted. Sometimes, such soldier-civilian comparisons can enliven instead characteristics of sameness often correlated with views that they were never “real” soldiers anyway. Taken together, talk of sameness and difference suggests a variable relationship between all soldiers and forms of the generalized civilian-other that perhaps gains new relevance as exit is anticipated. This relationship with “civilians” is most observable during basic training, a process focussed on instilling a collective soldierly identity, often enhanced by condemning so-called civilian characteristics.⁵⁸ But, at exit, the civilian-other is brought into sharp relief when just about all leavers must find

⁵⁸ Hockey (1986:37) noted a corporal talking to recruits: “(y)ou’re not civvies any longer, everyone has to help each other in the Army. The best way is to work in pairs.”

full-time paid work, a prominent venture that forces them to think about how they may be received by future (civilian) employers.

The civilian-other crops up both in spontaneous talk and in response to direct questions about difference during interview.⁵⁹ This regular reference to a civilian-other suggests generalised ideas about what it means to be a soldier and civilian, and appears to underpin substantial aspects of the “selves” made relevant during interview as Army exit draws closer. Although one or two found crude “civilian-soldier” distinctions problematic, all leavers could discuss themselves in relation to their particular “take” on an imagined civilian-other. These different “takes” relate to exit contexts and are probably informed by a whole host of intermingled experiences ranging from job-search interactions, spouses experiences, and pre-Army employment to mundane activities such as shopping or leisure. It seems likely that these sorts of “real” experience merge with imagination and anticipation to create a (civilian) perspective on the leaving self. Often this is a blunt and largely unhelpful polarisation, compatible with notions of “soldierly superiority” usually comprising narratives that connect with both past and future labour market scenarios.

As a younger leaver aged around 30 Andy provides an example of this sort of polarised thinking.⁶⁰ He presents himself as an effective and ambitious person rejecting a promising Army career for family stability. He exudes confidence and has a range of stories about “civvies” as inferior. He describes a past civilian work place as a “grey drab thing (where) people just sat there (and)

⁵⁹ For example: do you consider yourself different from civilians, and if so, how?

⁶⁰ Although Andy emphasises characteristics of superiority, he also claims never to have soldiered, and does not consider himself a “real” soldier.

typed away”, and he continually describes himself in terms that disparage the civilian-other and so lift him to a place of privilege. Mark, however, is less forthright in his sense of difference. He is older, aged around 40, and is quietly confident with his current situation. Nevertheless, he projects himself into his desired job as a council fumigation officer when he tells this rather amusing story, apparently drawing on the civilian-other:

You’ve just got to slow yourself down, take that time out with people and just sit down to talk to people (.) - not just knock on a door, go in, debug it, and leave - go in, sit down and what’s the problem? How you been doing? Oh yeah, I’ll have a cup of tea, thank you, right we’ll have a look at this problem then (..). A more leisurely pace of life - in the Army if you (are) going to disinfect a room, you would go in, do it and leave that’s the difference (Mark).

Though often crude and stereotyped, the civilian-other permeates the identity of final-year-soldiers in all sorts of ways and is most accessible surrounding the use of words such as “civilian”, “civvy”, or “civvies”, but its presence can also be gleaned from close attention to discussions surrounding prominent ventures that inevitably extend into anticipated futures.

Don is a non-graduate public school officer entrant who in his final year occupies a senior major’s role. He feels he has earned the right not to compete with young graduates and for financial and status reasons needs to find employment equal to his current position:

Well, to be brutally honest (..) I can’t afford to take a pay cut, I’ve got a family of 3 children(....) I’m 37 years old - I will be when I leave - and I’m not going in (to a civilian company) as a 28 year old captain on heat (Don).

Don tackles exit with focus and confidence. His quest for suitable employment is his prominent venture and he is clearly mustering all of his effort into this project; even admitting to “sloping shoulders” a bit in his ongoing job. He has attended a few “resettlement courses” and talks of the need to translate his Army experience into civilian language.⁶¹ He believes that his only shortcoming is a Curriculum Vitae (CV) that lacks commercial awareness. On one occasion, when he describes these sorts of issues, he appears to slip into an imaginary dialogue with a civilian employer through whom he constructs his (desired) future self:

I am a quick learner and I will make this happen. I am a get things done man (..) and if you are prepared to gamble on me rather than on a bloke who has been doing it but is tired and (...) cruising along, then that's fine (..). I know that if you employ me, look him in the eye type of thing, then you will not regret it. I will add value to whatever you give me (Don).

In this quote, the encroachment of the civilian-other is associated with a real and possibly painful need to consider himself from this novel perspective. Don is used to being a leader and decision maker who relies not on his rank but his charm and interpersonal skill, and he tries to project this into the future: “I am going to be the one who is doing the client interface (...), they need someone to reassure and effectively schmooze them” (Don). As an infantry officer the entirety of his sixteen years of work experience lies in a distinct world uneasily translated into the civilian labour market and his recognition of this is beginning to reflect back on to himself in tune to the question: “who and what have I

⁶¹ This is one of the main messages of the three day Career Transition Workshops (see chapters two and five) attended by exiting soldiers and Don’s account suggests that this is no different for officers.

become?”, since beyond the confines of the Army capsule he finds different answers.

He finds comfort in a principle of commitment to people generally and translates his dedication to his soldiers to a self-projection that involves becoming a civilian “boss” who will care. He notes his limited commercial experience and during a 90 minute interview attempts to shoe-horn his idem identity to fit the civilian-other. Towards the end of the interview he concedes that: “it is terrifying - it’s a leap of faith - a leap into the complete unknown.....and the way you mitigate that sense of being terrified (laughs) is by (...) identifying what skills you bring, what experience you have that (...) will equally apply....” (Don). He recognises from hearing his own talk during interview a desire to “give-back” something to the civilian community and to do this he says he needs a high status role. Don appears to find aspects of exit tough and seems to ignore, in interview, a question asking how it feels to be starting again when civilian-counterparts might be mid-career. Nevertheless, he remains focussed, determined, and confident that he will succeed since so much of who he has become - and wants to remain - seems to depend upon successful resolution of this prominent venture.

As individuals assessed themselves against the civilian labour market some expressed a sensation that they were slightly “outside of society” (Tim). At times, the immediacy of the civilian-other invoked uneasy reviews of the relevance of their past experience: “you can’t (...) say you are a section commander to someone in civvy street because he wouldn’t have a clue..”

(Arthur). Nevertheless, encounters with the civilian-other are not restricted to employment contexts and are just as relevant to other settings. For example, Bryan is a colonel who seemed to approach impending exit in a calm and unproblematic manner. He said he was financially secure and would quite like to reduce his work commitments after leaving the Army, although he would happily take a high pressured job if it was the right one that he could believe in. But he expressed strong irritation when a civilian guest he meets at a social event cannot grasp the Army rank structure: "...and they said oh I bet you are something really important like a Sergeant (...) and I explained that they actually didn't know what the difference was between a Sergeant and a Major or Colonel" (Bryan).

This apparent indifference to Army rank is unimaginable within the Army, especially to Bryan who is annoyed that such a basic error can be made; something that he feels he would not do in reverse: "I would understand the difference between a foreman and a director" (Bryan). But these small interactional experiences of (some of) the civilian other bring to prominence a different self that is increasingly relevant as military exit approaches.⁶² The "self-as-character" relies not on inner organic substance but on the entire scene within which it is presented, and for Goffman, the "crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited" (1971:245). Colonels are unused to being discredited and leavers cannot fully anticipate being beyond the known and supported labels of soldier, officer, or Colonel; and Bryan cannot be credited as

⁶²Care is needed here not to present soldiers as if they are totally isolated from a civilian community during their careers, because this is not the case. For example, Bryan also talks of having a lot of civilian friends.

a Colonel if he is to be mistaken for a Sergeant. These early experiences of (some of) the civilian-other are warnings that the entire scene that supports the Army self is to be removed, but few can recognise the entirety of its message at this early stage since the social origin of self has long been forgotten.

Anticipating a life beyond the Army is for many the first step towards change, and this involves interaction with both real and imagined civilian-others. Imaginative projections connect with ongoing pre-exit events and the “I” must respond to and instigate practical action or prominent ventures towards desired futures. The extent to which identity change is triggered by the combined effects of this varies, and leavers at this stage mostly generate concordance out of increasing discordance. As discussed in chapter three, there are at least two interrelated dynamics going on here. On the one hand, there is an immediate interactive process occurring between the “I” and the “me” that in the short term, at least, might be prevented from effecting changes to self or identity. But any trail of novel experiences will need to be revisited in retrospect as the “I” apprehends itself as an object of the recent past. The combined consequences for identity of a succession of changes cannot be known until afterwards; and eventually, a person’s general sense of self will be implicated, especially when earlier views of oneself become untenable. For Ricoeur this requires narrative action and involves a freeing of a sense of selfhood (ipse) from consistency (idem) and stability. It is also possible that as alternative futures impact on the present - by thinking of oneself from new perspectives - a person might also begin to retreat from some external claims on the body, and this possibility is discussed in chapter eight.

6.3 Arriving at Prominent Ventures

Continuing as before is not an option for leavers, and impending exit prompts new courses of action.⁶³ Mills (1940:906) connects a person's need to choose from alternative ways of acting to the "differential consequences that they anticipate", and he finds connection between action and consequence in stabilised "vocabularies of motives". Prominent ventures are known and motivated in narrative form and are "life projects" (Ricoeur 1992:158) that relate to a person's wider "global project of (...) existence" (Ricoeur 1992:157). For these soldiers prominent ventures are themed accounts of practical intention and endeavour that may become "vast practical units" (Ricoeur 1992:157) that make up life. As soldiers progress their prominent ventures there is a "back and forth" (Ricoeur 1992:157) movement between event and meaning that is a (two-way) process of "exchange between the whole and the part" (Ricoeur 1992:158) where narrative both follows and - within reason - directs life. For example, Joanne's early decision (her developing venture) to get a job as a highly paid civilian security guard in Iraq was altered on the basis that taking such a job would hinder her personal relationships and more dominant plans to have children. This represented a stage in Joanne's formulation of a prominent venture to become a "Mum" (Joanne). She arrived at this changed direction as a consequence of her experiences during a very recent tour in Iraq that brought her to question her continued willingness to risk her life. The relationship between narrative identity and prominent ventures,

⁶³ Jarvinen (2001:268) describes Goffman's "line" (1972) as a pattern of acts by which persons present a specific view of themselves and other participants in social interaction" and this is notable in interviews as individuals present themselves in connection to a line that is largely determined by their desired prominent venture.

however, does not work in a linear progression despite its common appearance as such in autobiography.⁶⁴ Different present contexts can bring about a life history that connects with particular “strings of memories” (Ewing 1990:261), rather like:

“a boomerang; it is thrown from the present into the past and returns with a force bearing it into the future, but the direction and force is determined by the present and by the form of the life history (the boomerang) itself (Jarvinen 2000:385).

As prominent ventures are enacted they bring bit-by-bit, and stage-by-stage, unforeseen experiences that may threaten or confirm the desired venture and self. This chimes with Brissett and Edgley’s (1990:202) claim that “the meaning of every event lies in its consequences, human beings can never be sure of what they are doing until they have done it”. As prominent ventures are progressed, human development “unfolds its unforeseen possibilities sequentially” (Rosenwald 1992:271) and notions about “who and what I have become?” are incrementally or radically altered in “explicit or implicit moments of recognition that the sense of self and its story has already taken a decisive turn” (Eakin 1999).⁶⁵ And so, “telling and living” (Rosenwald 1992:273) are bound together most noticeably here clustered about prominent ventures that emerge in different ways and at different times, often catching a person out when the venture outdoes narrative or leads nowhere. “(M)en live in immediate acts of experience and their attentions are directed outside of themselves until acts are in some way frustrated. It is then that awareness of self and motive occur” (Mills 1940:905).

⁶⁴ Mills’ (1940) “programs” are also similar to prominent ventures.

⁶⁵ “(Because) we never catch ourselves in the act of becoming ourselves” (Eakin 1999).

This is how many soldiers who just want to get a job, or settle down with their family, appear to come to deal with identity. As they put their prominent ventures into effect they begin to experience themselves in different or unexpected ways. And because people generally don't expect to know themselves as a process, individuals perhaps construct in their stories points of stability, despite their place in an endless hermeneutic circular connecting living and telling. Des's story, below, draws out some of these points and typifies the kind of "stop and go" and "back and forth" relationship between acting and narrating.

6.3.1 "Setting out My Stall"

At the end of a 22 year career, Des presented in interview as succinct, factual, and reluctant to embellish his experiences with lengthy interpretation. He is married with children and together he and his wife have owned a house for some time from which Des has been separated by his Army service. Now that he is close to leaving, his posting is nearer home and he can - like many soldiers - make it home each night after a long drive. Des's fairly curt ways made him a challenging interviewee. He projected a sense of control over his exit from the Army and, in practical terms, this projection is perhaps bolstered by his possession of transferrable technical skills and associated feedback from potential employers. Des described the constituent activities of his prominent venture with the phrase "setting out my stall". He was aiming for the "right" job, and now, a few months before exit, his stall was "set out". It had become an objectified entity and a stable narrative in his leaving process. His sense of self was being channelled into his expertise as an instrument technician - skills

he had learned with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineer's. He had collected associated civilian qualifications, and had attended job interviews to test the water.

Uncertainty was, for Des, mitigated by a projection of technical continuity. When asked if his wife had noticed if he had changed, Des responded in a typically action-orientated style: "I don't know really, she'll probably say I was focussed on leaving and that (...) I've set my stall out and I'm ready to go..." (Des). At this stage, Des had no firm offer of employment and his future was still very unclear, but still, his "set-out-stall" appeared to provide a "resting point" in the hermeneutic dialectic between living and narrating. Des had clustered together his many exit-related-efforts into a coherent storied whole; a "concordant discordance" with which he could feel secure and hold (temporally) at bay unfolding uncertainty.

Des's "stall" is the result of much effort. Its coherence and clarity betrays a more fragmented creation and stray narrations hint of some residual uncertainty. For example, when Des compares himself with other leavers he worries that he is not doing enough; perhaps he could do more courses - but which and why? Though set out, it is unlikely that Des's stall is the end of the matter but it is a stage further than the frantic and concerned efforts of Ed who, says deciding what to do is like "trying on different trousers" to test out many alternative lines of action (this metaphor is discussed further in chapter eight in relation to embodiment). It seems unlikely that Des tried too many different lines of action, but still, he claims to have anticipated and worked on his exit for

four years, and this sort of involved behind the scenes activity betrays his stable and “set-out” presentation (Goffman 1971), witnessable in his run-up to military exit. Des had been preparing his “stall” for all of this time and often his plans were contingent and changeable, offering only small spurts of direction or episodes in the unfolding story. Questions of identity arise in the trace-back of the various possibilities that are explored in these prior stages, each edging a person into different versions of self. These prior efforts, such as doing a course, visiting a work place, or writing a CV, are “new living actions” (Rosenwald 1992:274) that can reveal to the leaver the “adequacy of a narrative” that “is revealed by the new cycle of stories and consequences it generates” (Rosenwald 1992:272). In this way the incremental consequences of these sorts of component “new living actions” contribute to a continuous hermeneutic process where “we stop to take stock of our past development before we move on” (Rosenwald 1992:273).

This supports the two broader concerns of this and the next chapter in that the frequent need to take stock is connected with ponderings about “who and what have I become?” and are partially the consequences of a succession of “new living actions” that places a person in a position of possible transformation such that they undergo a formative process through experience; or, as Rosenwald claims, “the capacity to learn from experience” (1992:281). This relationship between experience and narrative involves a “stop and go” process. It is a succession of varied new living actions that (can) spur new learning. Many of these new living actions relate, as a series of efforts, to a prominent venture and form a central - even vital - project of exit. As prominent ventures are

progressed or hindered and as experience unfolds across time, both clarity and confusion ensues since “consequences” can be seen not only to follow stories but also to precede them (Rosenwald 1992:273).

Des discussed what he could. He had found a continuance of self as a successful specialist. The narratives he told were about getting this or that job and having certain skills that he could see were valued in particular market sectors. Regardless of obvious rupture and confusion Des’s prominent venture was hard won and, for now, it predicted a future in which he could find a desirable future self. The prominent venture and its component parts both stimulate uneasy change and provide security. Narrating the venture builds a story and plot into which a developing character is formed in a succession of intermittent practical jumps that demand catch-up narrative action. From this we can see that we narrate to cope not just to understand: “when we tell stories about our lives, the point is to make our lives not only more intelligible, but also more bearable” (Nielson 1999:50).

6.3.2 Narrating Character out of Crisis?

Often prominent ventures are charged with emotion and effort and may be used to ward off crisis. Like Des, soldiers tend not to talk of being lost, disrupted, or struggling, nor do they wonder what have I become in a soul-searching sort of way.⁶⁶ Why would they? These are not characteristics encouraged in the Army and so most do not have the means or interest in talking or thinking about themselves in such a way though, quite clearly, one or two are in distinct difficulty, possibly crisis. Self-reflexivity is a feature of being human, and

⁶⁶ There are some admissions of feeling lost and confused.

soldiers negotiating exit know that change is needed. But habit and idem characteristics persist. Most soldiers expect themselves to overcome challenge and this is the dominant attitude with which they tackle exit as they respond in habitual ways to its demands. Most believe that, although their circumstances are altering, they will remain essentially the same. Ted, for example, claimed that “I don’t really think I am going to have to change myself or the way I do things because I’m quite laid back anyway” (Ted). Other - perhaps more perceptive leavers - already note change, but generally narrate this as unremarkable or unthreatening. Rachel, for example, tells of her colleagues’ surprise at her decision to leave the Army: “you were going to be like a general (laughs) - they all said that I was going to be in forever and I always thought I (would be)” (Rachel). Though, still a tough minded officer, Rachel recognised some dilution in her own military character, especially a newfound tolerance of her soldiers when they put other needs before their Army roles⁶⁷: “I can see that I’ve changed, well, I’ve become more aware of things I think. I just was quite narrow-minded before that green⁶⁸ was the only way” (Rachel). Here Rachel re-interprets her prior “green” attitude as extreme and becomes more sensitive to the wider lives of the soldiers she manages, possibly because her own life was beginning to expand beyond the Army gates. Rachel understands this as a property of a younger self, rather than as an exit related change. She has also come to recognise that some of her fellow officers have extreme views and she disassociates herself from this sort of “green” mentality.

⁶⁷ Specifically, Rachel found that she could now understand why soldiers might put family needs before career imperatives when deciding on postings.

⁶⁸ This is a word that is being used by soldiers to refer to characteristics (usually of a person) that are thoroughly military.

Rachel's patterns of identification, and self-ascription, appear to be shifting in tune with her altering place in present social relations and her increased contact with "outside" dynamics and priorities. Her future place at medical school rests on achieving a grade 'A' in AS Level Chemistry. She has an Engineering degree and it is strange to hear a seasoned officer talk so earnestly about a qualification more typically associated with teenagers. But this is a bridge to her future. Her desired life story rests on its resolution. If Rachel has any anxiety then this is where it is directed. This is what she wants to talk about and her continued identity, as the character in the plot of the story, depends upon it. In some ways her story is already told. She is a successful career officer who leaves to become a medical doctor. Indeed, as she remarked in interview: ".....I can't imagine myself being anything other than someone who is leaving this year to go and be a student and do medicine" (Rachel) . Her prominent venture bridges the identity gap and she is the most sure and confident of all leavers. Her concerns are of flunking her 'AS' level and she can talk extensively about her efforts in this regard, but she does not discuss herself outside of her prominent venture; possibly a skill of focus that makes her a good commissioned officer able to get things done. Rachel is in many ways extreme and unusual, nevertheless, the processes associated with prominent ventures being set out in this section seem intact.

Most leavers admitted or displayed levels of free-floating anxiety associated with their predicaments. In response to the question, "how often do you think about leaving the Army?" most described a perpetual intrusion on their minds. Even Des hints at enormous efforts associated with narrating ones future: "I

check job sites everyday....In some form or other I would say (I think about it) nearly daily” (Des). Spike was a little more measured, claiming that “the more down-time you’ve got the more thinking time you’ve got” (Spike), but Katy typifies responses by retorting quickly and emphatically with the single word: “everyday”. This captures, more than anything else, a sense of personal intrusion that leavers feel, but sometimes struggle to communicate. Mostly, this one word intrusion juxtaposed job related issues with time spent thinking about exit. But what do leavers think about and what versions of an Army self are being described?

6.4 Who and What have I Become?

In chapter three we learned that Ricoeur’s conception of identity consists of both *idem* as sameness and *ipse* as selfhood and that the work of maintaining a self across any social rupture is done by a narrative that bridges both of these aspects of identity. We also learned from Mead and Ricoeur the centrality of the event experienced first and recounted in retrospect, though we have noted in this chapter that to an extent an individually told (but socially supported) narrative can direct and shape life. Our need always to interpret ourselves in relation to the “other” inheres us with a vulnerability routinely obscured by *idem*, and when social relations suit habitual aspects of self, a sense of “who” we are can be found in the “what” of our characteristics. This kind of personal avowal and ascription of valued properties, compatible with our current surroundings, may be something that individuals don’t notice, perhaps until disrupted by circumstances, such as: matters of the body (e.g illness, injury, pregnancy discussed in chapter eight); general pressing discomfort (discussed

further in chapter nine); or altered anticipated horizons and related efforts. For Ricoeur, we achieve our belief in coherence, substance, and continuity from “character” which gives us a sense of “who” we are in two important ways: first, we identify with the character in the stories we tell about our lives; and second, we identify, interact, and locate ourselves with regard to a “set of lasting disposition by which a person is recognised” (Ricoeur 1992:121). These are “acquired dispositions” - formed by habit over time - that despite continual innovation often seem sedimented or static. Leavers appear to project their known sense of character, including important moral dimensions, into the future. But sometimes, for these soldiers, this seems to require a good deal of effort and reworking as they anticipate a new future not easily compatible with their past. This was especially noticeable in the discussion of Don in section 6.2 because Don - who is unable to find a compatible status in a civilian future - constructs during interview a new sense of moral continuity by appealing to personal characteristic of leadership, giving, and service that provide him some concordance from - quite disturbing - discordance.

Perhaps the inherent fragility of identities-of-becoming - and its associated anxiety or crisis - is mostly mitigated in the final year of service by practical and narrative endeavour that is focussed on future projections of a known and desirable self. This may be unsustainable, but still, it is testament to the strength of idem at the pre-exit stage of military exit.

Lengthy careers are suggestive of at least some sense of Army belonging that soldiers have taken into themselves as their own. But, a readiness and capacity

to embrace Army life has varied across individuals and time. Exactly how Army life has been grasped, resisted, or tolerated across whole careers can never be known nor can a clear cumulative and retrospective statement be reached. Instead, we must be satisfied with end-of-career narratives that have been shaped by subsequent events and reach into the past in ways that are compatible with the present mood and focus. When a leaver reaches an exit point they may or may not have progressed through the ranks. They may have been at the centre of activities or been carried reluctantly along by others. Early success might have turned to disaster or early resistance grown into compliance. Each has their own story. But each story is told from similar narrative resources and leavers can recognise “types” in each other (see a discussion of “types” and “kinds” in chapter three), against which they place and position themselves, sometimes changing over time. In doing this they draw on common narratives developed, supported, and nurtured in the Army environment that makes these properties of identity “sayable” and meaningful. As exit is anticipated and futures foretold, leavers appear to pay renewed attention to the sorts of person they have become and this can be described in relation to the types of soldiers they think themselves to be on the verge of leaving the Army. In the next few pages, I will portray a range of “soldier-selves” made relevant by career soldiers in their final year of service. I have described these as identities-for-fighting and explore the kinds of personal properties that leavers apply to themselves prior to leaving the Army as related to their understanding of being a soldier.

Soldiers describe themselves and each other in contrasting terms. For example, Roger described himself as having a “civilian head” on now that he works in the welfare office compared with his prior “green” self as a “medic”⁶⁹. Joanne claims that clerks aren’t proper soldiers and Spike joined the Parachute Regiment to be a “real soldier”, but has since dropped this emphasis on action and prestige. If a continuum could be drawn from real⁷⁰ to less-real soldier then this would ease the descriptive task of this section, but easy and stable descriptors are hindered by contradictions both across time and space as well as across interviews. Instead, it will be helpful to introduce at this stage a fairly loose typology as a way of grouping leavers into broad categories in order to explain further some temporal and contradictory aspects of leavers’ identities as lives are recounted; phases discussed; and future rupture foretold. The typology has been developed from each leaver’s complete interview. This means that types have been awarded to individuals based on their dominant narratives taken from an analysis of their interviews as a complete life-story or kind of autobiography. The lines drawn between types have been constructed without undue difficulty, but still, there are one or two individuals who might well have a foot in two camps. Overall, five types have been constructed in order to describe the differing relationships between individuals and their own pre-exit sense of “being a soldier”. The five types that will be discussed below are: “transmogrified”, “squaddie-scam”, “no-difference”, “disavowed” and “blighted”.

⁶⁹ This notion that the most extreme aspects of soldiering are behind many pre-exit soldiers is taken up in chapter eight (section 8.4) in relation to the body.

⁷⁰ As perceived by soldiers themselves.

6.4.1 “Transmogrified”

This is a term that collects together over half of the respondents who refer to themselves as possessing qualities that relate to their service and that are considered by them always to be “good”, but more commonly to be “superior”. This includes a sense that change has been for the better, and is permanent. A firm feature of those in this type are self-described properties of being “a cut above” (usually civilians) or of possessing some form of “soldierly superiority”. The soldiers in this group communicate a sense that they will “wade-in”, “sort-it-out”, and “get-it-done” and they are proud to declare these as persisting features or key (idem) characteristics ascribed to themselves as the action orientated soldier often described in contrast to civilians:

That’s what soldiers do, they jump in sort the problem out, whereas civilians are like find a problem, analyse it, discuss it, and then do it whereas we’d of normally like cleared the mess up (Mark).

..we are quite used to sort of immediate feedback and so forth and getting on and doing things (...) and taking charge of yourself (Bryan).

Where I wouldn’t say they (..) might look down on civvies but I think generally they consider themselves to be a cut above and better than your average Joe civvy and they always will do even when they are civilians themselves, they always will and I think I will be the same” (Glen).

Of course, the features associated with being “a-cut-above” are necessary aspects not only for coping with trauma, battle, and the unknown but in terms of working together as a team they are characteristics that encourage a reliance and confidence in colleagues when decisions have to be made quickly. Again, this relates to Moskos’ I/O thesis (1976 - see chapter one for details) and the

idea of endless commitment that is determined by the centrality of getting the job done and a focus on the soldier as a person whose character has to be developed so that they will make the right sorts of decisions in the most testing and unpredictable circumstances. The task is paramount and an instinctive, habitual orientation towards “getting-it-done” is inscribed in the character of career soldiers:

the Army or the military are results orientated (..), you've got to get that done no matter what and you're allowed to push the boundaries of risk in order to achieve that - (...) civilian street (...) isn't results orientated its wage orientated you want me to work past that hour or work through my lunch pay me more money (Andy).

For some in the “transmogrified” type, “wade-in”, “sort-it-out”, and “get-it-done” are notable features even across some of the most bizarre contexts when leavers are describing themselves as soldiers. The persistence of these features and their perceived clash with the “civilian-other” are visible in individual encounters with local events in their civilian communities as leavers settle in their own homes in anticipation of exit.

I see people around here - it will be like kids playing on the front doing all sorts - some of the neighbours are sitting actually quite happily in the house and they are writing e-mails to their local constituent. I will walk out the house and I will say grip the kid (Andy).

Actually, outside my house last night, there was an incident which I took firm control of - basically I caught some young lad kicking the wing mirror on my car. (...) there was a whole group of them going up the road because obviously it's traditionally mischief night (Halloween) and I was dressed in slipper socks, pyjama shorts, and t-shirt, dressing gown, and slippers. I had just come out (of)the shower (...) when I turned the light off I saw him kick the car so I flew out the door I overtook the girls, overtook some of the boys, got hold of him and dragged him back to the house and all his mates just left him - they were

shouting but they weren't happy (...). Everybody else had just come to the front gate and looked at them (pause) (Des).

Also connected to this is the theme of “immediacy” that is integral to “a-cut-above” narrative:

“..a soldier will go, get on, get the job done and come back, whereas civvies will maybe take their time doing it” (Ian).

“you have to wait for people like civvies - everything's slow isn't it and I like things being done there and then” (Sean).

Arthur is an infantry sergeant who has mostly enjoyed the speed of Army life and recognises that this has become a habitual orientation: “you are so used to doing everything at fast pace (...) and because you have been so used to it (..) you start to enjoy it when you are deployed..” (Arthur). He finds his job issuing weapons and equipment fast and pressured and recalls deploying to Iraq with only seven days notice: “that was all we were given, seven days notice get your kit and go” (Arthur). Arthur describes himself as a person caught up in a fast and action-orientated environment that he takes as his own, exemplifying compatible attitudes but he is despondent about the calibre of young soldiers and, aged 44, wishes for the slower pace of life that he associates with the civilian-other:

I've got my fishing kit and everything in the shed ready. I've got my son - gonna start going to football on Saturday I am really looking forward to being like a proper family man again (Arthur).

Arthur's sense of being a “cut-above” has been weakened substantially by weariness and anxiety. He is weary of the pressured and fast environment, and a palpable worry about employment pervades the interview as the limited civilian purchase of his infantry skills is recognised.

Of course there are different behavioural expectations across the ranks. For career officers “get-it-done” and “immediacy” is achieved through their soldiers and their sense of self-efficacy rests on this:

..we are a wilco organisation - we can do. And that you can say to a private soldier I need you to do this and (..)8, 9, times out of 10 it will be done, particularly if you know who you are giving it to, if you know your men but I think much more in civvy street you are not going to get that (Don).

I had been in command for two and a half years, I had been on operations with my regiment and so forth and when I went to Northern Ireland I suddenly found that the 550 people that were making me look good (had gone)... (Bryan).

As leaders and managers, officers must appear calm and measured in front of their soldiers, even under intense pressure, but this does not detract from their identification with the characteristics here being outlined only that the character emplaced into the action of getting things done is instead a person who is directing and working through others.

Other notable features among those who strongly identify themselves with soldiering are personal characteristics of “open, free, and blunt”. Although some such features have been noted universally among leavers these are especially associated with the type “transmogrified”. This refers to a - perhaps increasing - awareness that they as soldiers have a ready openness that is unusual and for some this can be extreme. “Open and free” connects with the idea that for some the social buffer, ordinarily found in society between the bodies’ impulses and social expression, appears reduced by close living. This hints that “normal” social tendencies to conceal impulsive thoughts that relate to bodily functions for example, or to topics perhaps taboo in other settings, are

more relaxed as “open identities” are made relevant to Army experiences. This is not to imply a “more natural” presentation, rather that in some parts of the Army community other taboos and socially ignored impulses might instead be created; perhaps those that relate to fear and so threaten operational effectiveness. In many Army environments - especially where working is under pressure and in tight-knit teams - a high level of “openness” thrives. Commonly, this includes a feeling that anything can be talked about:

... there's very much a closeness to military life that you rely on the people around you for that support (Roger).

.. there's always somebody that you could trust with your - I don't know - your deepest secrets if you wanted to not that I had any (..) but I wouldn't in civvy street they don't do things like that - they don't talk about feelings or anything it is just drinking buddies ... (Ian).

.. when you are sat partying with some of the lads in the Army you can say anything to them, you can throw beer on each other (Arthur).

...my sense of humour is very close to the bone, like Madeleine McCann, I can find humour in that where obviously civilians find that very sick... (Ian).

Pride is also taken in “getting-to-the-point” or being “blunt”. This seems to be intertwined with the properties of “openness and free” and is similar to popular notions of “calling-a-spade-a-spade”, and as such, relies upon a belief in the possibility of incontrovertible fact. Taken together “openness, free, and blunt” is present in many exit-narratives and sometimes the properties that are grouped under these descriptors are heavily clustered in the narratives of particular individuals. Take Glen for example. As he is interviewed in the Army Air Corps crew room⁷¹, he displays a ready mix of open bluntness. Sat on easy chairs in an empty bar-like room he and I talk about his life. The walls of the

⁷¹ This is where helicopter pilots and crew rest.

room are cluttered with photographs and humorous writing bearing testament to “good Army banter” and a warm close-knit community that belies the dangerous work of the Squadron. Glen blends with the feel of the room and has presence and authoritative demeanour. Every now and again, a different crew member walks through the door, throws Glen a few words of acknowledgement, and then moves to the kitchen area to make a cup of tea. Glen is telling his life story and his voice fills the room with personal reflection. The interruptions are of no consequence to Glen whose personal life story is apparently available to all. As different people come and go, Glen shouts over to his colleagues the words “no worries mate” and continues to tell the room his story. Glen knows what he thinks and seems used to sharing it. His comfort in front of any member of his “team” is more telling than his words. For Glen, this is just the way that things are done. Here the “open and free” social relations within which Glen operates seem to be mirrored in his demeanour. But we must now turn to Glen’s words if we are to get a sense of his tendency towards a “blunt” and “no-nonsense” approach to life. These properties - that are connected to his social relations - belongs to his idem and form a firm sense of who and what he thinks he is - what he has become:

..the fact that the attitude that generally civilians have isn't the same as what I am used to operating with (.....). Everyone around me has always been very professional, very dedicated to what they want to do and if there is someone who has got a very lacksidascal attitude (then) generally that's dealt with quite quickly and (..)they get out of that attitude, whereas in civilian life I think that's going to be one of those thingsbecause I don't suffer fools gladly and (...) if I see something going wrong I generally tell them (laughs). It might get me into trouble but (laughs) (..) it's just one of those things I need to try and learn to cope with I suppose (Glen).

6.4.2 Squaddie-scam

At the other extreme from “transmogrified” are those who at exit describe themselves as having never been a “real soldier” and who find reason to separate themselves from some of the more extreme characteristics that they connect with being a real soldier. Those who fit the “squaddie-scam” type are particularly prone to contradiction and may - in a different part of an interview - also describe themselves as thoroughly “green”, but still, their overarching self-perception is built on only marginal or peripheral features of identities-for-fighting. A strange paradox is noted in Lisa who as an education officer has re-entered the Army after a few years to perform a short term but mainstream role and is interviewed as a second-time leaver. Her dual military-civilian experience gives her added insight. The force of her identification with the Army is clear in the following quote notwithstanding her place in the “squaddie-scam” type: “17 years worth of working for one organisation it is quite a lot to step out of it and I guess (that) is why I am back here - I’ve never really completely stepped away from it - never...” (Lisa). And yet, Lisa does not consider herself a real soldier:

No, I don't think I ever was and if somebody said right now (...) you (...) need to put on all your green kit do all the mats (military skills tests and training), (...) I don't know - we are going out of exercise we are doing this that and the other I might sort of go... actually, I don't want to do that anymore(Lisa).

Lisa is an uneasy blend. On the one hand she is unable to let the Army go, and on the other, she does not entirely identify herself as a soldier. This is quite common and perhaps such ambiguity occurs because individuals in this type fail to fully recognise how much who and what they have become is connected

with the relations of the Army as a consequence of consistently feeling less than a real soldier. It seems possible that such individuals may find leaving the Army especially challenging. Interestingly, Lisa's husband, as a serving colonel, finds her to be in firm possession of an identity-for-fighting:

.....he (husband) calls me a military shit, he said I would bleed green which I've never seen myself as that at all. I don't think... certainly not a military shit, but (...) I'm probably military and I always will be overtly or covertly (laughs) (..) which is a strange thing to think about - I think that's probably just the way I am (Lisa).

A number of factors support Lisa's husband's view. After all, Lisa has returned to the Army and confesses to struggling with her previous civilian work place. Her approach to her work shows that she is entirely focussed on doing right by the injured and struggling service personnel that it is her new job and Lisa would never have left the Army if she could have combined service with being with her son, something she has achieved in her temporary return.

"Squaddie scam" also fits Bill, Joanne, and Samantha. Interestingly all of them have been military clerks for most of their careers and they draw on similar ideas to support their non-Army identity assertions. Although "squaddie scam" involves expressions of "no difference" this latter term has been singled out as a separate type and will be developed later. This is because "squaddie scam" often incorporates views suggesting that being untouched by the Army is the reason for no difference, but also noticing Army influence in others, whereas individuals who are defined here by the "no difference" type have a more general view that all soldiers and civilians are broadly interchangeable. Bill draws on his daily working experience in an administration office with civilian staff to claim that: "having that military mentality and shouting and balling at

(people) doesn't get results." Furthermore, he separates himself from infantry soldiers: "you can see any infantry unit scrotebags and whatnot out in civilian street, you get the same people (..), the same mentality - you don't need to wear a uniform to be like a squaddie I suppose (laughs)". Bill appears to associate "real" soldiering with the derogatory term "scrotebags" who he claims can be found in any walk of life. Thus for Bill, not being a real soldier affords him heightened status. Despite all of this, Bill confuses things further by also attributing himself with at least some Army characteristics such as discipline and knowing how to be smart, clean, tidy, and on time. He believes that all of this will mark him out above civilians in the labour market. Samantha has similar views to Bill but generally finds failure in herself for being unable to perform like the confident and "real" soldiers she has observed across her career. These images of correctly performing soldiers have haunted her own efforts to get by and have shaped her view of herself as not a real-soldier. She starts the following quote by saying that she learned to keep quiet and keep a low profile:

Blend in the crowd (...). I think a lot of people do that, but then the other thing with the military, you only get recognised if you are a real outspoken and confident person especially - not in our jobs so much - but especially, like in other jobs you would fly through the ranks if you could get up and give them a fantastic presentation ...

... and if you are not like that your career doesn't really go anywhere (...) if you think about all the Colour Sergeants at Sandhurst (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst) they are the cream of the cream of their regiments because they were all really confident - brilliant at giving presentations (...) really... they held themselves well and you could have another guy whose really bright but a little bit quieter and unassuming (and) he wouldn't go anywhere in his career (Samantha).

Ambiguity patterns Joanne's "squaddie scam" narratives too. Paradoxically, in her 12 year career she has completed 8 operational tours (each of 6 months duration). More than most. And yet, still she describes herself in these terms: "well these boys that go out and fight and stuff - that's a proper soldier. I don't see clerks as being proper soldiers" (Joanne). Again, supportive of the view that despite such assertions the Army is etched in the identity of all soldiers, she talks in the same interview of her difference from civilians as a consequence of being a soldier: "there's no urgency about them it's just put that there, do that tomorrow whereas we're.....I think it's just drummed into you isn't - get it done, get it done straight away" (Joanne). Interestingly, Bill, Samantha, and Joanne all consciously reject continued Army service and seem to find their future character best supported by their take on a civilian lifestyle and so in defining themselves as not real soldiers they also privilege themselves with at least some characteristics of difference but aspire to sameness in their future (civilian) lives. The final three types that are used to describe different takes on identities-for-fighting at exit are "no-difference", "disavowed", and "blighted".

6.4.3 "No-difference"

The claims of those leavers who consistently argue that Army service has had little effect on their self conceptions are surprisingly well supported in this view by their interview narratives and their career (non-)progression. Ed, Nigel, and Ted are the three main exemplars of this type but Sean is added despite his recognition of very limited difference (along with his contradictory assertions that he is a superior soldier described in chapter seven). The first three leavers did not progress beyond the rank of corporal. Ed's narrative is full of early

resistance and disciplinary problems and both Nigel and Ted could be described as extremely “laid-back” - characteristics generally unhelpful to career progression. Ted admits that comments about this have been made on his confidential report. He left the Army for a brief period 16 years earlier and found it tough to make ends meet. His pleasant unassuming demeanour, and unwillingness to project himself, seem contrary to Army life and yet it appears that he has found a comfortable and workable niche for his 22 year long career. Nigel expects to “slot straight back in” to civilian life and claims: “I don’t think I will have to change” (Nigel). It is difficult to argue with his assessment based upon his interview, although as a single soldier he has lived his life entirely within the camp gates until recent times when he has established an ongoing relationship with a woman and her children. Ed is lucky to have continued in the Army. His early resistance saw him in fights, in Military Corrective Training Centre (Army prison), and so close to being discharged that he claims only to have been retained because a colleague took a big risk on his behalf. Ed’s “no-difference” tale is, however, less easy to accept, and having eliminated his own resistance, he now asserts: “I’ve never been one for (...) throwing a Bergen (Army rucksack) on my back and going off for a hike...(…) I’ve never been a squaddie (laughs) so I’ve always counted myself as not a squaddie you know what I mean.” On the contrary he claims he is a driver and a husband.

The “no-difference” argument presented by these leavers is luring. It would be heartening to accept the “I’m just me” argument if only there could be such a thing. Ed, despite his resistance, perhaps because of it, is typical of Willis’s

(1993) lads in that his early resistance secured his identity in unforeseen ways. Troubled by a family move as a child, Ed had moved to London where his strong Cornish accent made him a magnet for trouble in his new school. His expectation of trouble transferred to the Army where he was drawn into informal and aggressive scenarios. Once in the Army, his large physical size aided a hard-fighting, heavy drinking, and an aggressive demeanour that denied compliance with formal, more positive identities, instead carving a niche in the informal dimensions of the Army (Hockey 1986). He developed a place in the cracks of Army life and as a likeable, but troublesome soldier, sculpted himself from peripheral and marginal narratives that he now recounts at exit with pride and regret. Now, he considers himself a loner, and makes the interesting observation that the Army is a community of loners. He denies any identification with the Army, instead placing emphasis on his formative years as a teenager. And, now, on the verge of exit, he finds his core sense of self in the environment of the home where he takes a secondary role to a career minded wife and bears the brunt of child care.

6.4.4 “Disavowed” and “Blighted”.

“Disavowed” and “Blighted” are peripheral but important types that will be described together in this section. The more soldiers have served in hostile conditions, the more relevant these types become. “Blighted” can be applied to four leavers. The first two - William and John - have come to fundamentally challenge a prior identity-for-fighting while the other two - Alf and Pete - managed to incorporate disruptive events into much less dramatic narratives. “Blighted” is used to describe those for whom difficult or traumatic events have

forced a changed identity narrative that is prior to - and perhaps the catalyst for - leaving the Army. In these cases, the difficult events are physical problems, battle trauma, and mental illness. The other, less dramatic, type of “disavowed” is used to describe those soldiers for whom a previously strong sense of Army-identification has been halted by fairly routine events that come to render the prior self untenable. This describes Roger and Katy who both come to find Army life incompatible with an increasingly family orientated outlook. Katy’s story can be used to illustrate this second type.

Katy had come to find motherhood and her desire to be “like other women” incompatible with her daily experiences of being a soldier. Becoming a more available Mum was her prominent venture, but in many ways this was well advanced in her identity narrative long before exit, perhaps as a consequence of the daily grind of combining an Army career with motherhood: “you’ve got to juggle family life (sighs) yeah child care (...) I mean I get up every morning at half past six (..) - sort of planning a military operation just to come to work every morning” (Katy). For interview, Katy came to meet me at the Guardroom, a place located inside the camp gates that is the locus for security and reactive measures. Katy does not work here but is standing among fellow soldiers who are dressed in green coveralls and are painting the entrance to the building. Katy is wearing DPM ⁷² uniform and issue boots. Her hair, like all Army women with long hair, is tied tightly into a compulsory hair net. Friendly and welcoming, she takes me to the office in which she is based. It is a large mostly empty rectangular space with a desk in each corner. Army bergans and

⁷² Disruptive Pattern Material or camouflage.

webbing⁷³ scatter the floor and nervously Dawn sits down unsure what is to come. After a lot of effort trying to get Katy to feel comfortable with the interview she eventually warms up and begins to talk about her feelings about being a soldier. As a teenager Katy went to the Army careers office because she wanted to work with animals (there is an Army Veterinary Corps) but like many would-be soldiers she was diverted to available vacancies with a promise of subsequent transfer to her first choice. Needless to say, this didn't happen. And after twelve years in the Royal Artillery - with little sight of animals - she says she is a little bitter, but still, she says "I am proud - it's just not for me anymore". Her wish is simple. She wants to be like other women. Katy considers herself a calm person who is generally unperturbed by anything. It's just the way she is she tells me. Katy cannot understand why people have to treat each other so badly in the Army and wishes for a life where common decency can prevail. Clothed in a uniform she hates, unable to choose her hair style and with big boots and dirty fingernails, Katy tells me how much she now hates the Army. She wants to be different and, as she reflects on a prior self, she realises that "yeah you are sort of moulded in a way". Katy's story is touching in the sense that although she is a clearly competent and performing soldier she has become a little lost in an alien world. In wondering how the Army has shaped her Katy is in many ways more perceptive than most and she tells of the Army's reach with reference to the wearing of a tracksuit. It is common practice in communal Army life - more so in early careers - to get into tracksuit when off official duty and Katy recounts this to describe how the

⁷³ Large Army back pack and equipment pouches worn around the waist for ammunition and rations etc.

Army had infiltrated her entire sense of self; an influence she now so desperately wished to banish. In the following lengthy quote Katy describes her changing self-conception and appears to come to reject some of the Army's influences:

When I went home (...) - especially when I was a bit younger - I was always in track suit and Mum used to say to me (Katy) you look really scruffy why do you always wear a bloody tracksuit, but it sort of becomes a way of life (...) not that you don't know anything different but because that's it - sort of evolves into your civvy life as well

(..)but I think now as I am getting a little bit older (..) I do wear other clothes but (....) I'd like to look after myself a bit more.....

... and sometimes, especially at home, because my husband's in the Army sort of talking about the Army sometimes and especially in the last couple of months I've said to my husband I don't want to talk about work at home (..), you are sort of trying to break away from it (...). I just wanna break away from it (sighs).

(...) I honestly feel on my last day in the Army I'll feel like a big weight has been lifted off my shoulders (....). I'm feeling as if (..) when someone or something has got a hold over yer (..) when you just have like a picture in your mind and I'm thinking I had this picture in my mind last week actually of handing my ID card in on my last day and like a vision of taking the chains off (..). I know it's not like that, but that's how I feel.....

For Katy, there is a strong combination of both “push” and “pull” factors and a distinct impression that she cannot go on with Army life; a process of disavowal has taken place. She distances herself from some of her Army experiences and although apparently less driven than for example Des, Katy has already started to disentangle herself from Army influence, mostly as a consequence of the clash between her immediate experiences of motherhood and her Army career; experiences about which she has already developed narratives into which an altered character is emerging.

I shall now turn to the “blighted” type. William and John stand out as leavers who have come to question their identification with the Army. For William, traumatic combat experience has forced him to question a prior “gung ho infantry officer” (William) identity, and for John, mental health problems have interrupted his capacity to soldier. Let us take John’s story first. John says that he stopped working due to depression and that this triggered formal efforts to return him to soldiering. John felt that the techniques used to get him back to work lacked any hint of the care and compassion constantly spewed in Regimental rhetoric promising that this “family unit” looks after its own. John’s disappointment at this is clear and seems to undermine so much of his previous sacrifice and commitment: “...supposedly being a family unit - I feel I’ve been let down by the regiment”. John was probably the perfect young soldier. He loved the tanks on which he worked and fully embraced the Army in his early years, throwing himself into becoming the best. He achieved quick promotion and early responsibility. Compelled to excel, John feels now that he was making himself into something that he was not: “so you are in effect making yourself a different person to try and advance” (John). The effort required to meet the standards John set himself are shown in the words that follow:

You’d work yourself to the bone to make things one hundred percent whereas you could probably get away with it being 80 or 90% or the guy next to you (..) may be 95% because you want to get above his 95% (..) and to do that you probably have to mess the lads around (..), keep em behind for another hour and say you will do this before you go and make yourself like an ogre(..). So, you are in effect making yourself a different person to try and advance (John).

These words also capture a sense of the engulfing nature of a soldier's job and the internalised identification with its aims. John's words show a man who is competing with his peers for promotion with all available ability and effort. Inevitably, his sense of self is invested in this too but as time moved on, and as problems emerged, John's narrative changed: "throughout my military career I think I always kept a lot of myself locked away inside and I've not been me I have been who they want me to be" (John). In retrospect John connects his current rejection of the Army with his past by defining his prior self as unreal, false, or alienated. Although John's rejection of the Army is abrupt, it is a much less dramatic story than that told by William.

William's schism to self was so abrupt and catastrophic that - even in the closing days of his service - his adjustment had only just begun. Even, on his last day of service, he was living in an Army house and was still focused on his past. In a sense he was walking backwards into his future.⁷⁴ He could not move-on and seemed to search a narrative (of the past) that would create from events - not supposed to happen - a plausible (and desirable) story; and a character, with which he could identify. Unfortunately, for William, agreeable narratives were not to hand. Readily accessible meaning seemed only to construct for him themes of shame - and a character of negative and condemned properties. William was working frantically to counter these and this was sapping both time and emotion. With the help of a psychiatrist he was trying to construct a story within which he could find a sense of what he had become that could be incorporated into future projections of self. His gaze was permanently

⁷⁴ A phrase used by Andy Wright, a Social Worker working with the Army.

backwards, it was honed on rogue events that stood as tangible barriers to his future.

William's prominent venture was to do with retaining his competence as an infantry officer; in other words it was simply to clear his name. An ensuing dialogue between William and the Ministry of Defence had erupted. Each was pushing different meanings onto William's inability to perform in his role following heavy combat experience. The centre of this fight was William's confidential report that formally described him as having "failed", and this official account of William's identity removed previously earned recommendations for promotion and smeared his character. In this report, William's "collapse" is described by his Commanding Officer as the failure of an infantry officer, and this troubles William greatly who claimed that his Commanding Officer "not only didn't understand but (...) accused me of almost lack of moral courage and malingering which is a pretty tough thing to deal with.." (William). In contesting this report, William appeals to more modern and therapeutic narratives that legitimise adverse reaction to trauma, even for the most robust soldiers. But as William himself admitted, these are narratives he had previously rejected as a mainstream infantry officer. Here, William appeals to this wider narrative:

had it been the first world war he (his Commanding Officer) would have been the sort of guy who would have shot you for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) rather than try to understand you and treat it (...) and its (...) quite a scary thing when you get your officers who you would expect a broader understanding and they just don't (understand) (William).

The interesting thing about William is that at the point of exit, he has lost any connection with his prior military self and talks as if unable to recognise himself. He builds in interview a sense of being lost in social interactions with which he can no longer relate. This creates an impression of a shell-like person physically present among peers, but no longer capable of intersubjective identification:

.. I could see me joining conversations and I would very quickly think oh god I'm just not worried talking about (...) let's face it soldiers when they get together what do they talk about - soldiering (laughs) - so if you're having dinner or having a drink at someone's house or whatever it just happens doesn't it (...) and so (...) I could see very quickly how I'd basically changed, moved on from that....

..... I think you have to be very careful because obviously it starts to (pause) - it doesn't put you out of odds with the system as such - but (...) the system is a war fighting machine and if you are part of that and you're looking at somebody who is not part of that I'm afraid again it is a cultural thing (..) you view it with suspicion - I would have done

.....it's very interesting to see how that as that moulding fell away from me - you saw it more when dealing with everybody. (William).

William's despair and almost complete disintegration of an identity-for-fighting has left him on the verge of military exit with no faith in a prior idem character and unable to construct a replacement. He does not yet know what he has become because in rejecting readily available narratives he finds himself with few narrative resources to apply to his life. His response is to work on his past for a narrative that can be taken into the future; this is his prominent venture that has become a practical venture because William claims that on some days he can be fully employed sending faxes, writing letters, and generally contesting Ministry of Defence versions of accounts. The following lengthy quote will end both William's story and this chapter. It shows the interviewer

probing William about his inability to look ahead because notwithstanding the formal dispute, William could easily portray to a civilian employer the identity he chooses, but his focus seems more about establishing for himself, who and what he has become:

Interviewer - so right now what is the future for you?

..... this is going to sound quite strange but I can't move on until all this stuff has been put to bed

Interviewer - forgive me if I've got this wrong, but (..)on the face of it whichever way that goes you've had a successful career and you could prove that, so that's not the issue, the issue is your own peace of mind that you have performed well, that people recognise that you've performed well, and that you haven't left because of lack of moral fibre you've left because of a natural reaction to a pretty shitty situation

Exactly that and it is (..) a big problem (..) because as you quite rightly identified (..) it stops closure (..)but as I say because it is still (..) organic, ongoing (..). I would hate to commit to do something, working, (and) then have to put everything on hold to go back. (..)This thing tends to (..) come in waves and when you do it's all hands to the deck because it just becomes an all-consuming thing (..) so it's just no good really (...)

I - so actually in your mind you haven't yet left?

It's interesting - I think I have but what I haven't done is (pause) I suppose you are quite I suppose you could argue quite easily when you put it in those terms (..) because there's still unfinished business to close down and until that is really closed down you never really will leave because you are sucked back into that environment all the time so I suppose in some ways yes actually that's quite true

Interviewer ... so where do you want to be in five years time?

(..) looking forward that far is quite difficult at the moment (..) because that is just one of those things that I am afraid has to do with (pause)... it's hard enough to work out what's happening in a month's time at the moment because of the dynamics of everything changing..

Interviewer - In many ways your main challenge is still in the past

Yes, it is, it is dealing with the past. I mean that is quite right - that dominates my (..) working day really in terms of the input I have to put into it because I am forever having to write things, send things (William).

6.5 Summary

It should come as no surprise to find that soldiers and officers on the verge of exit are mostly focussed on prominent ventures and not identity. Even so, the various steps taken towards a new civilian life are implicated in matters associated with what sort of person they hope to become, and this connects to a renewed attentiveness to questions relating to the sorts of soldiers that they have been. Although an observer might note that leavers are in the early stages of personal change, individuals are themselves quite practically and future orientated. Ricoeur's emphasis on individual future horizons is helpful here, especially his insistence that this is rooted first in lived experience but that by "appraising our actions (..) we appraise ourselves as being their author" (Ricoeur 1992:177). This connects with his sense of character as the idea of ourselves as the person in the story we tell about our lives; a story that is told in view of imaginable, anticipated, and desired outcomes. The problem for the pre-exit soldier is an unknown post-exit void that is given form by a situated version(s) of the "good life" (Ricoeur 1992:179). From this a "life plan" (Ricoeur 1992:177) emerges that may be advanced or thwarted by ongoing events and efforts. The important process that has dominated this chapter is the way that anticipated futures have been addressed by these soldiers - through prominent ventures - that implicate the self in a process of change that involves a retrospective assessment. This is concerned with how the self known today may be taken forward towards the "good life". This has been discussed in terms of a typology of the kinds of soldierly self made relevant in the context of perceived futures. In the next chapter, the temporal emphasis is moved

forwards to the ways in which leavers construct stories as they confront and negotiate the sorts of lives they will lead after leaving the Army.

7

Fighting-For-Identity

Who or what will I become after leaving the Army?

(T)he time stretching before and after the present is a time of stories

(Eakin 1999).

(I)n telling everything is transformed by the structuring presence of the to come

(King 2000:22).

(T)he thing actually at stake in any serious deliberation is.... What sort of person is one to become; what sort of self is in the making

(John Dewey, paraphrased by Strauss 1969:43).

7.1 Introduction

Leavers narrate varied and ongoing accounts of their lives in which selected happenings are pulled together into one or several stories that grant meaning to component episodes. This process of emplotment involves the need to grasp life as a whole in terms of its parts (Ricoeur 1992). Individuals differ in levels of creativity, scope of narrative projection, the capacity to form, pursue, or sustain a desired plot, and in the extent to which change and transition is incorporated into the ongoing process of narrating identity. Notwithstanding all of these differences, this chapter seeks to distinguish between early and late leavers as distinctive groups with some different properties and themes. The ways that each of these two groups of leavers narrate their anticipated identities is explicated in this chapter. This is achieved first by outlining similar cross-

cutting themes and then, second, by analysing individually integrated stories of exit that are used by leavers as a means for understanding their impending discharge from the British Army.

From a reading of Mead and Ricoeur, it is clear that people find meaning and search for understanding mostly in narrative form (Atkins 2004) and it was noted in chapter three that for many writers, including Ricoeur, the 'story' is emphasised as an essential element in offering and interpreting accounts of the meaning of our own and others lives. But it was also recognised that stories are not the possession of individuals but instead belong to a swirl of communication in which persons are better viewed as narrators who select and construct stories for themselves. This communal aspect of storytelling can never completely cover lived experience since life has a pre-narrative quality; it is "an activity and a passion in search of narrative" (Ricoeur and Valdés 1991:29). This chapter privileges the story as it connects to the future but also as it is constrained by communal knowing, expectation, and possibility. The story is, for Ricoeur, the means by which we can construct character - or narrative identity - since he claims that "it is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character (Ricoeur 1992:147). In this chapter, the relative positions of early and late leavers are connected with different sorts of communal exit story. Moreover, this chapter also addresses the innovative, nuanced, and artful ways that individuals "take on the discursive practices and story lines as if they were (their) own and make sense of them in terms of (their) own particular experiences" (Davies and Harre 1990:59).

7.2 Early Leavers

7.2.1 The “turn”

Early leavers - aged around thirty - tend to have made conscious and deliberate decisions to leave the Army - a factor that separates them from those whose exit is a conclusion to a complete career. These soldiers need to incorporate into exit narratives answers to the question: “Why am I leaving the Army?” and often they do this in relation to “pinch” or “crisis” points that are used to make reasonable their choices to terminate their service. Ebaugh (1988:123) uses the concept of “turning points” for this which she defines as “an event that mobilizes and focuses awareness that old lines of action are complete, have failed, have been disrupted, or are no longer personally satisfying and provides individuals with the opportunity to do something different with their lives (Lofland and Stark 1965; Lofland 1966)”.⁷⁵ This is best viewed as a “turn” in the story that - by selecting out happenings as significant - permits and invites other meanings to flow in such a way that they become a significant juncture in the plot. This “turn” in the story may be related to a significant single event, or more vaguely, to routine continuing happenings that no longer fit the story a person wishes to tell. The “turn” for Rachel was single and direct. Her quest to be a bomb disposal officer was foiled by her failure to pass an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) course and when she could find no alternative Army role, she narratively constructed this course failure as a “turn” in her story to manufacture an altering self as the character implied in new and different

⁷⁵ McAdams (1997:65) also claims that Western life stories “incorporate “turning point” moments or epiphanies that leave their mark on subsequent events”.

actions. EOD course failure became the point in her exit story when she recognised (she claims fortuitously) that she had to leave the Army. Here the “turn” hinged on a single event. But, this is not always so and we have already noted (in chapter six) Joanne’s “turn” as a seeping realisation that her life in the Army, as she had known it so far, had become incompatible with her new intention to have children. She sought also to rescue her current personal relationship from the inevitable failure that she now associated with Army life. Whatever form the “turn” in the story takes, for early leavers, it is usually fundamentally embroiled with self-justification about reasons for leaving the Army.

“Turns” that are used to justify exit can work as both push or pull forces and seem connected with two dominant topics: the family and - to a slightly lesser extent - matters of risk. While leavers talked easily about their desire to spend more time at home, they found it less easy to admit to risk as a justification for leaving. Nevertheless, risk was repeatedly connected with early exit but often in a way that hinted that there was more to say than the conditions of telling allowed.

Modern warfare means that difficult and unprecedented experiences exist in the work histories of these soldiers. For example, Nigel’s infantry unit had taken significant losses in Iraq in 2006. He would not discuss this but agreed it had badly shaken him. Here risk is being implicated in decisions to cut short careers (risk is discussed further in chapter eight in relation to embodiment and vulnerability). Some emphasise concern for their continued safety; some have

witnessed too much death and suffering; others have seen poor treatment of their colleagues; but for many there is a sense that their luck may run out. This is a sense that is inextricably linked with personal experience and has ratcheted up levels of probability that it might just happen to them. Two or three of these early leavers have also come to reject political explanations for modern military intervention. For example, Sarah tells how, while among threatening and looming blasts and attacks in Iraq, she struggled to justify why she was risking leaving her children by death when she could not connect her role with a useful reason for the British Army's presence in Iraq. Matters of risk and family are sufficiently common among this younger group of voluntary leavers for special mention ahead of some of their more comprehensive stores of exit. It is fair to say that the majority of early leavers, though generally not complaining, have become concerned that the turbulence of Army life is too disruptive; that they "must give too much"; and that they are "sick of being mucked about". When this is related to the privileging of family life and to concerns about safety a feasible - and unsurprising - version of why the majority of these thirty-year-olds are leaving the Army is achieved. Perhaps the surprise here is how cautious these individuals have been in expressing these sorts of views that are embedded among a warm glow about their time in the Army.

7.2.2 "Live to Live"

The "turn" in the exit stories of Joanne, Glen, and Nigel are risk and family related. Together they tell similar, but to some extent, internally taboo stories imploded around the notion that they want to "live (survive)-to-live (time with

family)". Detailed descriptions of the experiences of these individuals are included in chapters six and eight, but taken together the key sentences below carry a certain narrative convergence that communicates a shared sense of horror at lived experiences that they do not wish to repeat. If ever there was a gap between the available means of telling and lived experience it was here. Perhaps their stories are hindered by dominant Army narratives that are centred on bravery, duty, stoicism and which stifle the faint and simple message that these soldiers appear to want to deliver: we just don't want to take the risk of doing it again⁷⁶.

.. it was Iraq that really put it to me because I thought (..) there's going to be more and more tours and I didn't want all that - it's just getting a bit too dangerous... Because we lost a few of our boys - (name of Unit) and it just hits home (..) (mentions some of the boys names.) (Joanne).

I have been in situations (..) where it's been a bit touch and go in parts and I thought (...) do I really want to go away, my luck is going to run out at some point (..) and (..) leaving a kid without a father and I thought no because that would be really, really selfish of me (..). It's got to be now - this point - and to be honest the way things are going within the armed forces, it's only going to get worse (Glen).

.... we went on Telic 2 (Iraq) and it wasn't so much a bad thing but Telic 9 (later tour of Iraq) and there was explosions going off next to you - two close calls that we had (..) and (err) I just couldn't think about leaving her [partner] type of thing - d'yknow what I mean (Nigel).

Nigel was least comfortable talking about these matters and - beyond clarifying that he was here (in the quote above) referring both to death and service separation - he would not discuss this further. It has already been noted that during an Iraq tour (Telic 9), several members of his unit were killed, and

⁷⁶ This aversion to risk among some leavers is addressed further in chapter eight in relation to the idea that soldiers are beginning to reclaim their bodies from the Army in the final year of service.

others wounded. Overall, these three leavers told readily comprehensive stories clustered around a lengthy temporal perspective that connected together their Army entry with anticipated exit. This constant reference to the past, and especially to very early careers, suggests that understandings of exit involve considerable reworkings of meaning ordered around anticipated futures. Joanne remembered her very early Army experiences as a period when she drank too much alcohol, missed parades, and generally pursued actions of fun and lightness over duty and responsibility. In retrospect she connects this previously inattentive young soldier - which she comes to describe as a 'fun' phase - to the present via the process of being "wisened-up" by early Army discipline, a narrative also employed by Sean who finds his extreme behaviour gradually curtailed. In particular, Sean claims that he was "wisened-up" by his encounter with a superior in whom he recognised himself and comes to concede defeat:

Yeah when I got to (my first) regiment (...) there was a sergeant major - or a staff sergeant - and he was from Manchester, that really rough part of Manchester, can't remember what it's called now - Mosside - and he had me straight away. Obviously he had my report [from training] and (...) he was like if this (the reported trouble) carries on I am going to do you and he would of and I had a few run-ins with him (Sean).

In relation to the anticipation of the future, both Joanne and Sean talk of "wisening-up" as inevitable; recognising that their early actions and behaviour were associated with characters that do not survive Army life. Sean effectively encountered himself in the senior non-commissioned officer from Mosside and came to narrate that encounter as the point when he realised he needed to

change his actions. He finds in the character from Mosside and in the words “I am going to do you” a genuine threat to his continued behaviour.

Alternatively, Glen and Nigel talk of a smooth adjustment to the Army and invoke, in wider future orientated stories, images of an “easy green” transition in which younger selves readily adopt soldierly behaviour. In anticipating exit, however, Glen casts back into his past a negative plot in which he talks of the Army as having “cocooned” him from “real life” and of giving him experiences that “civvies” neither understand nor care about. He, too, is bitter that younger inexperienced soldiers are replacing an exodus of the “old-sweats” such as him and he wonders why experience isn’t granted sufficient worth to warrant efforts to retain it. Glen appears to be constructing a story in which his sacrifice, competence, and experience is wasted and undervalued both within the Army and by the civilian community. His emphasis on difference is prominent also in chapter eight, when he talks of his incredulity at civilian indifference as he switches environment from the battlefield to a fast food outlet; life is just going on as normal. On reflection, it seems that Glen’s future oriented story of exit is dominated by an overwhelming sense that his Army service has cost him and he recounts this as an angry rejection of the Army and a personal quest to live-to-live. Much of the force of Glen’s reaction seems to relate to distinctly embodied features of service, and especially his rapid movement between mundane and extreme locations. Themes of movement and risk are discussed further in chapter eight.

Joanne and Nigel are more accepting. Joanne does however reproach herself for failing to take full advantage of the various opportunities and for missing promotions as a consequence of indifference and minor infringements of discipline, although like many she also complains of the demise of the “fun factor”. These three “live-to-live” soldiers are however unanimous in their assertions that there is too much turbulence; a soldier “must give too much”; there are “too many operational tours”; and that their “luck will eventually run out”. All of this motivates and justifies a narrated intention to put the “family first”. For Joanne this is recounted as a fairly inevitable outcome and routine transition from the fun of youth to the stability of family responsibility, achievable by slowing to a nine-to-five civilian work pattern. She has little interest in what that job will be but does continue to invoke a sense of difference. She cites a time when - during the foot and mouth crisis - she worked with civilian staff and found that their perceived willingness to leave work until the following day rubbed against her “get it done” attitude. Nigel, too, is mostly calm and unruffled by exit, admitting to some apprehension. His aspiration is to get any job close to home so as to manufacture a “normal life” scenario in which he can play family roles denied him by Army life. His motivation and intention seem shaped also by an under-narrated reluctance to return to the battlefield.

Glen is far more animated and is willing to overtly reject risk, operations, and Army upheaval to justify and motivate his ongoing narrative that create for Glen a desirable vision of his future and a character of strength: he has

performed his duty but he has come to recognise that his new family circumstances offer good reason to reject the Army and to remove himself from further risk, harm, and discomfort. He also directs his energy into qualifying himself - and striving hard - for a civilian employment of worth. Glen incorporates his early failure of a helicopter pilot course as a significant “turn” in his story. This collecting together of the “what’s” and “how’s” of different actions, over the years, contributes to a sense of “who” these individuals might have been and may become. Their central and motivating plot is simple but vital - they want to survive to live a “normal” mostly family life. In telling and living this plot they are already changing and becoming. Glen talks of rejecting extra duties in the Sergeant’s mess and getting home more often; Joanne claims already to feel like a civilian, and although Nigel seems to plod on with minimal fuss, his mind is increasingly on his new family circumstances back home, diverted away from the Army barracks and the persisting loneliness of separated service.

Early leavers Andy and Spike both tell stories that are family orientated but in different ways. Spikes emphasis is on his reduced capacity to fully engage in Army life as a consequence of new family relations and Andy abandons a promising career as a consequence of a family decision. Spike’s departure is captured in an “all or nothing” narrative, whereas Andy’s exit is justified in terms of “family careers” where fairly hard-headed financial imperatives render the turbulence of a projected Army career untenable and undesirable for this young family of three. As a helicopter rear door gunner Spike has witnessed

risk and will deploy in his final months of service. However, although he recognises danger and notes an increased sense of vulnerability in himself these matters do not gain ascendancy as they do in the accounts of Joanne, Glen and Nigel. Andy's role has so far not taken him into operational danger and so this does not feature in his story of exit at all. In many ways Spike's account is similar to "live-to-live" because he does talk of turbulence; of the need to give too much; of his experience of death and injury; of too many operational tours and of a feeling that his luck will end. In his future orientated story of exit, he pulls together an early sense of "easy green" where the young man who joined the parachute regiment was forced, by injury, to join the much less extreme Army Air Corps. He connects this to the now professional aviator who by virtue of a new relationship could no longer devote himself entirely to Army life. In telling his account he recognises that he had been entirely absorbed by his service and that his own desire to be elsewhere, coupled with the tangible effects of being elsewhere (travel etc), had eventually prised him from his Army submersion. He talks of his Army surroundings in fond terms and especially notes that he knows a lot of people:

... a lot of friends (in) this unit of 400 people here - of which I probably know 350. (...) and I'm going to go out into maybe a small company with 20 or 30 (..) but I can honestly see it will be a small peer group (.....) where you'll not be able to walk past someone and have a 5 minute chit chat and take 20 minutes to get to where you need to go because you've seen half a dozen people (you know) on the way. The social aspect for myself has changed in recent years (with my) girlfriend then becoming (my) wife (..) I've spent less time on camp at weekends (..) socialising with the guys (and) obviously more time at home

I know what I want to achieve (..). I need to leave the forces now, and it's the right moment to do it, to continue my life because it is no longer my life it is our life myself and my wife (..) we could have co-existed to a

certain point but I don't think we would have the relationship that we do have now so I think at the end of the day the relationship is the deciding factor (Spike).

So far, early leavers' stories describe a 'disconnect' between what the Army promises and what individuals desire for the future. Central themes of risk and family have been noted in these stories. However, other early leavers like Sarah and Katy, tell quite different stories but retain the importance of risk and family. The difference for these two soldiers appears to be the immediacy of their lack of fit, together with an urgent sense that they cannot be the person they want to be whilst remaining in the Army. Much of their story is given in chapters six and eight. Both are struggling with daily life and this would seem to be as a consequence of their caring roles for their very young children. Both are married to soldiers and all parents have had to alternate within their couples, deployments of up to 6 months so as to manage child care. This issue of immediate discomfort during the pre-exit period is discussed further in chapter nine.

7.2.3 Other Plots

Family and risk have been dominant matters relating to the "turn" in early leaver's exit stories. Usually, this is in the form of fairly central exit plots that "drive" forward an agentic self in pursuit of a better life. But, other plots are also noted such as for example in Sean's exit story that communicates a disgruntled sense of injustice and personal resistance.⁷⁷ It tells what, in Army vernacular, could be crudely described as a "fuck you" story in which his departure is framed in terms of an angry reaction to disappointment. Twelve or

⁷⁷ Risk is not a feature for Sean, since his recent roles did not involve operational deployments.

so years on from joining the Army, Sean is leaving because he feels that his recent performance as a high profile instructor at a training establishment has been insufficiently rewarded. He claims that the Army has “pissed him about” and has not delivered its promise of promotion and role.⁷⁸ Paradoxically, Sean’s resistant and angry exit story is constructed from a sense that he is a character of significant military competence and worth. The paradox is created here between Sean’s slow “wisening-up” to the Army that, over 12 years or so, has been transformed into an equally entrenched - but thoroughly military - position. The self-as-character that Sean seems to have in mind when he tells his “fuck you” story has been created within the distinctive conditions of a training regiment, and he effectively argues that he has become too good a soldier for the routine and mundane job that he has been given. Sean was eager to take on the role and esteem of a high profile training job and now, anticipating exit, he cannot let it go. Moreover, its consequences have come to dominate, even motivate, his developing exit story. Sean’s angry and ready “fuck you” story is driven by a sense of disconnect between his perceived soldierly worth and the role and rank he had actually been given:

Yeah obviously I was deemed as one of the top bombardiers in (..) Regiment for getting sent to (training establishment) to train up (...) all the recruits (...) and then I come here and sat right on the shelf and hung around since I’ve been here really. I should have been a Sergeant a while ago that’s why it pissed me off (Sean).

Sean narrates misemployment and reduced status into a reactive plot. His character as a top soldier - failed by the system - comes to reject the Army in a

⁷⁸ The status of this promise is unclear but this is a common assumption that might not be a formally sanctioned certainty.

repetitive story not unlike Goffman's (1968:140) "sad tale". He believes, and tells often, this tale that provides him with a sense of being a superior and competent character, let down only by the Army's incompetence. This elevated self-view is a common and encouraged trait in training establishments where performed and exaggerated soldierly caricatures are regular features. Here, soldierly qualities are meticulously dramatized by training instructors for recruits eager to learn how soldiering is done. Instructors live and perform model soldiering both to themselves and to others, and for Sean, such an invigorating experience proves difficult to shrug off. But these aggrandized Army characteristics are potentially problematic in all sorts of ways, especially when this sense of superior autonomy is channelled into harmful avenues such as those implicated in accusations of bullying and abuse at the Royal Logistics Corps Depot, Deepcut.⁷⁹ Although Sean is not associated with these destructive extremes he does seem unable to advance his previously valued identification into new - mundane - Army social relations.

Training establishments inflate instructors who tend to operate amidst an atmosphere of pressure, superiority, and prestige that is increasingly policed for rule breaking. These orchestrated social relations create the space for extreme Army characters that cannot be sustained beyond the gates. Once the social scaffolding is absent, people like Sean need to adapt. This requires narration and Sean seems to lack the resources to adequately cope with this transition; instead he finds a story of exit. His "fuck you" story is a rather blunt and

⁷⁹ The death of four young recruits at Royal Logistics Corp Depot, Deepcut is associated with the alleged uncovering of a significant bullying culture involving the abuse of power by military training instructors.

macho account of some difficult social changes that are not afforded credibility in available Army narratives since moving between units is normal and expected. There is no shared language to describe these moves as in any way challenging since being a competent soldier includes coping with postings to and from different Units. Sean's story of exit is quite shaky. He seems to come to recognise this in telling it and this signals a vulnerable self that is being bolstered by certain - limited - narrative emphasis. Sean's own questioning of his story came at the close of the interview when, having told so much, he appeared to wonder what he was doing, questioning the anger implicit in a "fuck you" story. He knew the interviewer had recently exited himself and he quizzed this knowledge, apparently searching for new resources for understanding.

The conjoining of the different strands of Sean's life during interview possibly enabled new meaning and understanding such that by giving a more complete account of his exit, Sean began to de-emphasize his dominant story simply by talking about other aspects. His character as a "top soldier" had been built from disastrous beginnings, typifying perhaps what the British Army does so well. Like so many recruits, Sean had failed at school and joined the Army a rather destructive young man. It takes him time to bring this aspect of his remembered self into the interview version of his forward looking story, but when he does, there is a fundamental shift in his narrative, demeanour, and style of telling. When he related different parts to the whole of his constructed life, with just a few words he transformed himself, during the interview, from the

“top-soldier-let-down” to the “fucked-up-kid-saved-by-the-Army” - both are familiar Army narratives that are variably available to him and the interviewer:

....well, I lived in Scotland (...). I moved out of my mum's when I was about 15. I moved into me nanas (and) from there I was drug dealing with me cousin and I had quite a lot of people after me so obviously I never had nowhere to live cos me nana kicked me out so I joined the Army and it has done me a world of good..... (Sean).

There is little appetite for this type of comprehensive story telling in Sean's guard room and the speed and compression of his talk hints at local styles of telling in which only fast, blunt, and funny anecdotes grab attention. Soldiers do tell stories but, for the most part, they need to carry action, force, and status. Thornborrow and Brown (2009:355) show how soldiers use stories to create “aspirational identities” to achieve shared accounts of who and what they ought to be - stories that for the Parachute Regiment, at least, often ended up in documentary programmes, books, and films. For these writers, “learning to author and perform an appropriate set of stories was (..) integral to the process of becoming a paratrooper.” Such “Para” stories - and the individuals to whom they refer - became “role models for new young recruits keen to ensure that they met the expectations of their peers and did not violate crucial norms” (Thornborrow and Brown 2009:368). Sean's guard room was a far cry from the Parachute Regiment, but still the sentiment applies. Soldiers' stories must carry the right identity and shared styles and forms of delivery deny audience to other forms. The “fuck you” story gets a well honed audience and affords its teller a credible character as autonomous, risky, and his own man (and this does seem to be a predominantly male response). It is easily and quickly told and offers

agreeable justification for going, but it appears unhelpful for adjustment. Additionally, the interview may be a novel experience for Sean in that it offers an attentive audience for more than an hour. When Sean eventually mentions his drug-dealing past he perhaps hears it again in the context of that moment, set against his other talk and in terms of anticipated exit:

I never had nowt really because my Mums an alcoholic and that's never going to change. She was married to a clown from Glasgow that used to fill-her-in quite regularly and it got to the point where (..) I were getting older and I was fighting back with him. Me and me cousin (..) both filled-him-in - and he filled-her-in. (...) It went to court. (...). I came home from school (..) and I looked across the road to the bus stop and there was me mum getting off the bus with him (...) - she dropped all her charges against him and that's (..) when I thought well this isn't the place to be

Interviewer - it's like the classic story of the guy who joins the Army to get away from things?

Yeah really yeah

I was really cocky and (..) my grandma and grandad came to watch my pass-out [parade] and my troop commander there said once he gets to his regiment he is going to find it hard and if it was up to me he wouldn't even have passed-out (...). I was the best PT [physical training] and because all the things [presentational plaques etc] had been engraved (..) They had to let me keep the award. But, because I Nd'd [negligent discharge - a serious offence of firing a (blank) round in error - or even worse - deliberately]. (...) It was a final attack, like, and I was playing with the trigger and when it had all finished - I don't even know why I did it - just, something in my head said yeah do it, do it (laughs). I pulled the trigger and Nd'd, and that was it, I should have got backsquadded (put into a different squad for more training and delayed qualification as a soldier) but because it was the final exercise and everything had been sorted out I got kept in the troop and I passed out (laughs) - but yeah I was a nightmare. (Sean).

Sean's story of exit is being developed during the interview, since the interview cannot be excluded from its place as an event in life. Indeed, the need to tell this account of himself has arisen from an uncertain horizon. The enquiring interviewer asks and listens, probes and develops until Sean accounts for himself in a way more complete than he is perhaps used to doing. Different strands of his life are brought together in a single narrative encounter where new meaning and perspective is available. Sean may choose to incorporate or exclude this from his ongoing account of exit, but for the moment, during the interview, he confronts the possibility of different perspectives, and altering versions of his past and future character that various stories make relevant. His questioning at the end of the interview suggests a shift of emphasis and he displays a new uncertainty about whether or not he is doing the right thing in leaving the Army after all. It would be reasonable to suggest that this is a consequence of remembering - in the context of impending exit - the distress of his pre-Army life alongside the pride he described at first becoming a soldier:

.... when I was going home, being in Germany, what (aged) 18, with a brand new car seeing all me mates with nothing - definitely worth it, obviously it was a - what do you call it?

Interviewer - self-esteem?

Self-esteem, yeah - obviously me going home with money and a new car and them all having Jack (Sean).

By now, Sean was a somewhat confused leaver who had previously found temporary coherence in a limited tale of resistance that conveniently grasped together different strands of his past. His dramatically difficult start to Army life had been overshadowed by a preferred Army identity that had paradoxically

become his reason for exit and the basis for the sort of character he was projecting into an anticipated civilian life.

Like Sean, other early leavers, William and Rachel did not construct their stories of exit around matters of the family or risk. Their experiences have been detailed in chapter six and eight, so it remains just to emphasise that their reasons, justifications, and stories of exit are centred on alternative - but compelling - issues. William and Rachel are the only commissioned early leavers and they couldn't be more different. William is thoroughly disconnected from his Army identity and Rachel is, as ever, unique in her almost intact identification with Army ideals. She is ambitious to get the right job as a medical doctor and intends one day to return to the Army in this role. On the contrary, William's previous drive, determination, and ambition has been sapped by the dramatic events of combat that have challenged his prior identification and left him facing imminent exit with a story that he admits is almost entirely retrospective, attempting to work out what went wrong. The contrast between William's complete prior identification with the Army and his exiting emptiness couldn't be greater. He does mention the family, citing separation from his wife as a significant hindrance to recovery from battlefield trauma, but these family matters are diminished by much bigger, more pressing events that have to be understood and so enter into William's attempts to "describe more"; also with the professional intervention of psychologists. Again, Rachel is different. She does not talk of a partner and says that she is

not particularly close to her parents who she describes as ‘mouse-like people’ who have little knowledge of what she does.

7.3 Late Leavers - The Full-22

If exit were not so completely expected for the full-22 (defined in chapter five) might there be more annoyance, loss, and dismay at this enforced redundancy mid-career and mid-life? On the contrary, as it is, a sense of expected resignation dominates the stories of the full-22 who mostly approach exit as an event that needs to be accepted, grasped, and overcome. There is little point for these soldiers in wondering “why must they leave?”, since to do so would be to deny an incrementally absorbed norm and to go against what they have come to expect. When, like early leavers, the full-22 talks about too many operational tours, the demise of the fun factor, personal risk, needing to be with family, and wanting to settle in one location they do so not so much as a deliberate rejection of a way of life but as a timely and expected response to a long anticipated exit. And so, although they talk about being glad to leave, it is hard to say how much such statements are a reaction to a long-awaited “fait-a-complete”. Unlike early leavers, full-22 stories need not justify nor motivate a rogue, brave, or autonomous act of departure since the dramatic - but routine - occurrence of exit is imposed from without. Perhaps, then, the narrative process, for the full-22, is the reverse of the early leaver in that their stories need to construct from the rupture of external imposition a sense of continued autonomy and self-efficacy for projection into the future. This is not the same for early leavers whose sense of autonomy - and self - is found in the actions necessary to reject

continued service for a different life. Perhaps, then, for the full-22 the compulsion of exit is lost or forgotten as a consequence of familiarity. This reminds of the phrase “expectation management” that recently entered the vocabulary of Army managers wishing to prevent emotional fall-out from soldiers expecting promotion earlier than is likely. If such soldiers can be brought to hope for promotion (but not to hope too much, or too early) then disappointment can be avoided. Granted, expected exit is not exactly the same as this, but still, the process resonates in that expressions of loss or regret are denied legitimacy in this well-worn and routine pre-exit phase. It is worth mention too that - as a group - the interviewed full-22 has seen distinctly less operational service than early leavers, despite their longer years. It is easy to forget amidst all the internal and external hype about operational tours, even overstretch, that there still remain a sizeable number of soldiers that complete fairly uneventful and mundane careers.

7.3.1 Unrecognised Reluctance

The creation of a useful exit story can be hard work, often interspersed with loss and confusion. Stoic and positive thinking is the communal name of the game but sometimes the optimistic exit story appears through “gritted teeth”. Expected or not, exit is a dramatic shock for some individuals many of whom seem otherwise unlikely instigators of novel or mould-breaking actions finding instead comfort in a sense of belonging and sameness that in this case has been afforded them by an Army career. In other circumstances, this “ontological security” (Giddens 1991) might have been found in familiar patterns of a quite

different sort. After all, giving up a career, life-style, and home in one-foul-swoop better resembles a person characterised by adventurous risk-taking behaviour that seems not to fit the routine actions of many full-22 leavers. Often those soldiers least likely to leave the Army early of their own accord (a quite decisive action that can be seen as going against the flow of expectation in local social relations) appear quite “lost” despite a rather positive and progressive exit story - a story often comprising words and statements that are rather loose, empty, and incompatible with other information “given-off” (Goffman 1971) during interview.

Arthur, Mike, Roger, and Rob are unconvincing in their progressive exit plot, finding significant diversion in difficult issues. Rob offers a good exemplar of this. He is not a dynamic or thrusting soldier⁸⁰ and his progressive narrative projecting him from service to civilian life is achieved from amidst a fog of complaint, fear, loss, and confusion. Rob - like so many others - tells his unfolding story by going back to the beginning (this is discussed further in regard to the physicality of Army entry in chapter eight). First, he claims: “I am in the same boat as when I left school - what can I do with no qualifications?” and, second, a meeting with a diffident youth at a party prompts him to wonder how he might have been had he not joined the Army since “with the Army you get confidence - (..) the way you talk to lots of people - the way you project yourself” (Rob). Overall, and set against imagined aspirations of people back home in Bolton, he feels the Army has served him

⁸⁰ His role as Guard Commander is typically associated with mediocre achievement.

well: “I’m glad I got out of Bolton - done me wonders (...). I still like the Army (...). It’s been good to me”. Rob accounts for the difference between Army and civilian life by there being a “big gap between your social life and military life” and the task for making this break is to “put the Army side behind because you can’t go into civvy street as that soldier attitude (...) you’ve got to change from this machine as in drummed in and being on time everywhere (...) you’ve got to blend in with the civilian life ..”. He describes the Army as the “big safety net” and seems to be forcing himself to create a story that will work for him. The only reason he talks about these matters is because he is being forced to anticipate a post-Army life that requires him to find a new way to earn a living. As he contemplates his future, he tells the interviewer quite unconvincingly that “you have got to make that break” and “I think after 22 years you have got to say yeah that is it”. His story is based on a construction of civilian life as for “mellow(ing)-out” and for being “more laid-back”. He doesn’t want to work in management and says: “I wouldn’t like to push myself as far as management side of it because that’s like putting unnecessary stress on yourself”. As he tries to fit his character into unknown futures, he talks of bringing some of his Army “work ethic” into a relaxed civilian environment and he aims for a “complete career change”. Age is a factor for him since he claims that “I can’t see myself doing this (...) until 55”⁸¹.

But Rob’s utter loss and confusion isn’t afforded acknowledged expression. Instead, it is carried in side comments and complaints directed at a system he

⁸¹ Although ageing is an underdeveloped theme in the thesis, it is a theme that emerges from time to time in chapter eight which explores leavers’ talk that I have related to embodiment.

cites as inadequate. These side bets are distanced from his exit story protecting his progressive story - that the time is right and he wants a change - from their negative message. Rob's belief in his positive story is not being questioned here, but it is as if Rob (and others like him) has been denied a legitimate expression of loss during the pre-exit phase as a consequence of a soldierly "get it done" orientation and the embedded expectation of exit. This is conducive to continued soldiering but might hinder the anticipatory loss of a life-known. In his world Rob is master. He is a minor figure of discipline and authority on camp. And, in the front stage regions of his guard room, he is quick and decisive. He carries a pace stick⁸² and Junior Non Commissioned Officers continually approach him for advice. But, in the back stage area of the prison cell where he is interviewed, his utter panic and fear about exit dances around the edges of a progressive narrative.

I can't understand how people coming up to their 22 years - like we try and plan our lives like we do - how the Army haven't got a little room - right this blokes out in 2 years time, yeah sorted. Let's get all his paperwork sorted out, send it to him, sign that, back to us (Rob).

Rob does not know what to do next. Everything is new. He is overwhelmed and wishes for someone - the Army - to come along to help him negotiate difficult decisions. Of the three day transition workshop, he says "it isn't enough to prepare someone to get out into civvy-street, coming out of this environment". But still, for Rob, exit is inevitable and here. His exit plot will

⁸² Used by some Warrant Officers and Senior Non-Commissioned Officers. This consists of two pieces of wood, hinged at the top, tapering towards the bottom. The stick opens so as to measure a person's marching pace. More commonly however, the stick is retained in the closed position as a symbol of authority and serves no other purpose. It is very unlikely that Rob was involved in drill movements requiring the stick.

take him home to Bolton to a settled and mundane civilian life where he can relax. This preferred story seems to mitigate his largely unacknowledged distress in maintaining a necessary progressive narrative expected of the exiting, but still serving, full-22.

7.3.2 Being ordinary⁸³

Imagined metaphors of civilian life as ordinary, relaxed, and mundane are commonly set by leavers against the turbulent, exceptional, risky, and effective world of the Army. Ian saw himself - or wanted to see himself - as an “ordinary bloke” who never quite found his place in the Army. He regularly uses humour (Mulkay 1988) to distance himself from the military and he uses it to define for himself a humbled and “sensible” identity against a backdrop that he paints in rather ridiculous and somewhat grandiose terms. Now, at the end of his career, separated from family and with virtually no military role, he is detaching himself from Army life, but he repeatedly betrays his self-declared ordinariness with amusing tales depicting a character that is also outlandish and anchorless shattering his predominant ordinary aspiration. He finds this contrary self through the civilian eyes of his weekend driver colleagues in the Post Office where he is both horrified and delighted to learn that even in a place where the words “fuck off” are scribbled across a no-swearing-sign he can be extreme and offensive, causing upset with his behaviour, humour, and harsh language.

⁸³ Ordinary is being used here to refer to perceived personal characteristics that make a person blend in with their surroundings.

Ian's humour dominates his story and he makes light of situations by comic effect. His central plot concerns an "ordinary bloke" from the Army who gets a similarly ordinary civilian job so that he can be with his family. At first, it is as though Ian is opting for a life that will give him camaraderie, banter, and a place as "one of the lads" but closer analysis suggests that this plot is rather more of a reaction to significant change. Indeed, although he claims that "I have been a manager all my life" he belittles himself against civilian counterparts because military managers lack budget know-how. Notwithstanding Ian's humour, confidence, and effective exit strategy his story is rather like a cautious retreat from a stressful situation. In the following quote he justifies his rejection of a management job:

.....they want me to manage a team (...). Can you motivate your people? Well, yeah, but I don't want to get into that job and then all of a sudden, right, well, we're doing this and this budget and, oh well actually, I haven't done that before and it would be too much - I just can't be bothered with the stress to be honest (Ian).

Ian wants an easy and ordinary transition. This is the story he tells, and unusually too, this is what he gets when he achieves quick employment as a prison officer.⁸⁴ Once he has secured this job he looks back on his exit period as "prolonged, steady and extremely comfortable and smooth". He has, by way of such a story, kept himself focussed on a range of jobs that he knows he can easily do and which will limit the strain of exit.

Through humour, Ian has a skill for capturing oddities and stereotypes in everyday situations. He notes "types" and "kinds" (see a discussion of

⁸⁴ A well-worn route for many leavers who are perhaps also seeking safety and ease of transition.

Hacking's work regarding this in chapter three) to consider his own character within a rather safe and ordinary exit story and he astutely recognises the occasions when he is the hapless and extreme squaddie who is upright, forthright, and offensive. He takes some pride in this and plays with the idea that he is sometimes the institutionalised squaddie who by virtue of service separation cannot answer routine household matters such as who is the gas supplier or recognise friends of the family when they come to call, leaving them perplexed on the door step. Through humour and bluster he becomes the quick-witted but feckless squaddie, a projection that supports his rejection of management jobs and his more dominant quest to be "ordinary" and to fit in. By his second interview, however, Ian has effectively realised his story. Still in the Army, he has ceased work, and is at home with his family. He has been accepted as a prison officer and still drives for the Post Office. With only days until exit, his lively humour is absent and he talks more soberly about differences of lifestyle. He claims his exit has been easy and it is now all but complete. Already different however, he talks about his observations whilst emulating a civilian life:

I can say I have probably made friends with one person and I'm interacting with them (...). You interact with them at work and all that but nobody has actually - ohh do you want to come round for a beer or anything like (...) there is no camaraderie in the civilian jobs at all - their job is completely separate to their home life whereas Army obviously you work together and drink together. (...) I said (to my wife) when are you having your friends around? She said we don't do that, we don't go to each other's houses - ahh, ok (laughs). And I noticed it with the Royal Mail as well, you get on at work but none of them interact with each other outside of work (Ian).

And so, Ian learns that civilian lives are lived in separate places. He is surprised that they are surprised at him and he has captured many transitional experiences with stereotype and humour. Ian's "to-be-ordinary" story seems motivated by a desire to fit in and may be a reaction to the void of exit. While he jokes, he struggles; his increasing ill-ease being vented in funny anecdotes.⁸⁵

7.3.3 Evaporating Status and Other Family Members

Most full-22 are quick to recognise that the status they have earned in the Army will evaporate at exit, though as a consequence of a strict divide between commissioned and non-commissioned officers it is likely that eventually some leavers in this group will experience improved employment status once this increasingly arbitrary divide is absent.⁸⁶ Generally "status evaporation" is expressed in relation to qualifications and though this is relevant to all leavers it is perhaps most pertinent to the "full-22" because it coincides with being at an age when many civilians will have settled on a life-style and working pattern that increasingly includes the acquisition of qualifications. In looking ahead beyond the Army, the "full-22" sometimes struggles to find an easy employment transition and this urges some imaginative narrative in which practical possibilities are vital. As we saw above, Ian found himself lacking against civilian managers - a perception that he narrated into a mundane future, at least in the short-term. Other dynamics are entwined with matters of status,

⁸⁵ This is where this research leaves Ian - and others like him - on the verge of completely experiencing new environments.

⁸⁶ Bryan, Colonel, late Royal Army Medical Corps, also makes this point which is especially relevant to skilled trades such as nursing where the divide - in terms of education and ability - between commissioned and non-commissioned staff is becoming less and less defensible. This argument is probably less persuasive in teeth arm units however.

however, and for leavers like Ed, Ted, and Arthur, for example, matters associated with dominant spouses are significant to their experience and understanding of exit.

Even now soldiering remains a masculine and male dominated occupation as briefly discussed in chapter two, and very traditional arrangements have motivated policies such as “accompanied service” founded on assumptions that female “dependants” “follow” male soldiers around the world, in supportive, subordinate, and secondary roles. Despite formal and informal rejection of these sorts of arrangements, significant residues of male dominance persist in Army life and - although this is not a focus of this thesis - this needs to be acknowledged. The often closed nature of Army life suggests that changes in civilian living patterns transfer slowly - if at all - and it can be difficult to recognise when such lags are occurring. Indeed, it is only in the last 10 years or so that the term W/O or “wife of” has been dropped from common vocabulary, especially in medical centres in overseas stations where spouses (still mostly women) are defined as dependants of the serving soldier. It is suspected that a male breadwinner model that is declining elsewhere (Brannen and Nilson 2002) continues to underpin many Army policies despite adaptations to incorporate equality agendas. So far, this thesis has emphasised identity in terms of a soldier’s relationship with the Army. But a focus on stories of exit has, for a small number of male leavers, brought to the fore the family not simply as the place to which leavers wish to return, but, more centrally as a major source of exit employment. Ed, Ted, and Arthur are male

soldiers who rely on their wives for significant drive and direction. Although spouses are substantially implicated in most exit stories, in the following three cases the non-military partner emerges during interview as a dominant narrator.

That's the nicest part of it actually [leaving the Army], knowing that - it's a real pain in the backside when (..) you've got to move every 3 years (....) It does put a lot of strain because if your wife's working, I mean she's either got to follow you around or change her job (..). Changing her jobs every few years or you then have a strain on your marriage and relationship by (..) being separated (..) albeit because she's working - and then you've got the problem of housing - do you get your own house or do you keep the house there if you're able to. If you're in a married quarter you can't always do that(Roger).

Ed offers the clearest exemplar in that the driving aspects of his story of exit rest on his wife's professional expertise and influence. Moreover, that Ed opted to serve longer only to finance his wife's training as a nurse supports this point. Ed describes himself first and foremost as a husband and there is much to suggest that this involves substantial responsibility and decision-making for his wife on whose nursing qualification the family intends to settle in America:

I'm more worried about my wife's transition...

The wife's a scrub nurse in cardio thoracic surgery so (...) hopefully we will get in on her qualifications.

When we go out (USA) in January for the recce (..) hopefully we're going to have interviews lined up for the wife...."

I'm very closeted, my wife's a little bit more - she's opposite to me. She's a more outgoing person (..)

I'm more of a housewife... (Ed).

Of the full-22 leavers, 12 have been married for lengthy periods, making Army service and exit - to some extent at least - a shared experience. At one extreme, stories and plans of exit are directed and plotted by dominant non-military

spouses, and at the other extreme, such as for example in Des's situations, the spouse, though firmly connected with the Army has nevertheless lived a rather separate geographical and social life, influencing little the narrative formulations of the leaver.

7.3.4 "Safety" and "Re-invention"

Two key approaches dominate full-22 exit stories. First, there is exit as a chance to slow down, settle, and pursue a more mundane lifestyle which is a common "safety-net" paradigm connecting with limited aspirations about what sorts of future are possible beyond the Army (see also chapter five). On the contrary, the second approach finds threads of "self-reinvention" dominating the stories of a much smaller group of leavers who narrate urgency, ambition, and drive into their stories of exit. These leavers talk about achieving something completely different or about progressing possessed skills into civilian lives.⁸⁷ Narrative themes of "self-reinvention" work for the realisation of ambitious endeavours and also support for some a dogged refusal to accept "status evaporation". These two overarching narrative approaches to exit - "safety-net" and "self-reinvention" - seem to be implicated in whole careers, rather than something that is created only during the isolation of the closing months of service. In other words, these approaches are connected in some way to different types of soldier and to different types of continuing family circumstance.

⁸⁷ Since, often in the later stages of exit, employment is the only unresolved major issue.

The full-22 is partly the product of a career system that has run its course and which coincides with individual assertions that it is time to leave. The sheer effort and strain of achieving a life together as a family - both during service and in this pre-exit zone⁸⁸ - might for many full-22's be implicated in "safety-net" themes of exit. A "safety-net" paradigm comes in many different forms but its sentiment is summarised in the following words that are paraphrased from numerous leavers in the full-22 category: I've had a good time; I'm glad I joined, but I am mentally tired now and my family comes first; I just want a job and a stable home life.

Ian's "safety-net" venture to become a prison officer is a classic anecdote of transition. The Prison Service seems like a haven for many ex-service personnel⁸⁹ and it perhaps offers a kind of semi-civilian job as a consequence of its uniformed, confined, and disciplined nature. Perhaps, also, residual Army-identities can find some form of continuity in this environment since it is easy to imagine Ian finding a ready audience for his humour in such a place. Even so, it seems surprising that such a sizeable group of full-22 leavers are so keen to settle for safe and fairly mundane goals. Arthur's narrative suggests that he does not view himself in pro-active terms. Indeed, as already noted Arthur's wife, by way of her dominant character, creates for him a quite subordinate position. True to form, then, Arthur does not grasp exit head-on. He is wearied

⁸⁸ See chapter five for a discussion of the institutional and career factors associated with exit as well as the implications on energy and planning. These are associated with ongoing career-long effort to maintain a desirable and working living and family arrangements.

⁸⁹ This option is well documented in resettlement literature and magazines. There is also the infamous character of Mr Mackay in the situation comedy "Porridge" who is a now dated stereotype of the ex-soldier who becomes a prison officer.

by repeated family turbulence, prolonged separation, failing to achieve promotions that he feels he deserved, and he tells of a sense that Army life has changed. Aged about 40 his motivation to perform at the required pace for a soldier has dissipated and so his thoughts have turned to a quiet life at home.

Arthur presents almost as a “spent” man. His “safety net” approach precludes any sustained preparation for exit and his plans to re-train during evening classes never materialised creating a source of conflict with his more pro-active wife who complains of his inactivity. But still, this infantry sergeant seems lost, unable to set a distinctive course of action and follow it through. It is possible that outside of the structures of Army life, he struggles to make decisions.⁹⁰ Arthur is overwhelmed by exit and resorts to an exit story in which safety and low aspiration dominate. Similar narratives seem as if they are employed by many leavers - however fleeting this may be. Even those set on motives of “self-reinvention” are not exempt from this, so pronounced is impending - sometimes unacknowledged - change. A range of quotes from such leavers are set out below:

I've had to revert back to like doing driving which (..) I would have liked to have got out with a bit more than just a driving qualification but - I don't think it [the Army] does enough for people in their last 6 months, they should set aside, put people into like their own platoon and just give them teaching - like civilian stuff (Arthur).

⁹⁰ Like Rob, Arthur also appeals for the Army to put leavers into “platoons” (Rob says “rooms”) and effectively “spoon feed” them in making a transition. This sort of talk for Rob and Arthur seems to communicate substantial confusion and vulnerability that is not expressed in more direct forms. This seems like a form of paralysis in the face of endless choice. It is suspected that most leavers will experience this sense of complete loss and confusion at some point in their exit journey.

I've got driving, but driving's easy isn't it anyone can drive. I just don't want to be behind a wheel (..) for the next 20 years, 25 years(Rob).

When I get out (..), I will do, I'll do anything (..) - a jobs a job at the end of the day. Once you're out and got a job you can then really focus on what you want to do but (..) yes you've got your gratuity you can tie your mortgage over for a few months, and all that, but I prefer that I can walk in a job, even stacking shelves in Tesco's (Ian).

If I can get a job I'll be happy I've always said that and I won't be bothered if I'm stacking shelves in Tescos and things but if I did end up there I think I would be a bit cheesed off because I think I am a bit better than that (...). I like to think I've got a bit more common [sense] about me than putting beans on the shelves (Rob).

By the time, leavers are in their final year of service, the majority have settled their families, got their children in schools, wives are working⁹¹; and so, by this point the “safety net” paradigm is generally translated into obtaining “just a job” that for some, like Roger, becomes almost a desperate plea.

Of those full-22's who can be said to be driven by a motivation to “re-invent” themselves; Samantha is probably the most distinctive. In a kind of reaction to a sense of underachievement in her Army career she has rejected limited extended service for a new life that inspires and draws her away from the Army. She feels she has more ability than has been relevant to the Army and she has become determined that she will use it. Her sense that she wanted to reinvent herself has grown from a mid-career change of job from military clerk to Army Welfare Worker. This latter job afforded her different working conditions that boosted her confidence and incubated ambitions beyond the Army:

⁹¹ There are no husbands or male partners in this group.

... they (the Army Welfare Service) encourage you to be (confident) (..) - people wanted to know what I was wanting to say at meetings (..). If I was talking about (a case) or if there was anything that they were concerned about - child protection or anything, they used to listen to what I had to say and that was like God they are actually taking my advice (....) (Samantha).

Although “safety-net” and “self-reinvention” paradigms are divided unequally between different full-22 leavers and represent “major premises” (Becker 1998) that shape how exit is approached, most individuals do, nevertheless, spend some time talking from within a “safety-net” mode. It seems likely that exit - in all of its practical implications - is being experienced by all of the full-22 leavers as a significant challenge at least some of the time. For many, significant effort has been necessary to make quite basic arrangements such as arranging for families to be safe, secure, and educated. Mental and physical effort in these areas perhaps depletes available resources for any sense of reinvention. But, even so, during the pre-exit period, for the full-22, there is a noticeable association between Army exit and the demise of ambition, the acceptance of lower wages, and a quest for a quiet life.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has focused on the deployment of emplotment (Ricoeur 1992) as a feature of developing exit stories which are the dominant means for understanding Army exit. Typically, this has involved locating leavers in narrative constructions that flip through the past - often dwelling on Army entry - but always pursuing meaning about what confronts them both in the “specious present” (Mead and Morris 1934) and in the context of forthcoming civilian lives. Commonly available plots associated with leaving the Army - often

supported by formal processes discussed in chapter five - seem to emphasise the pursuit of a better or new stage of life that for the full-22 leaves little room for incorporating issues of loss or reluctance. But still, for the observer at least, there is a sense that the complexities of life - as experienced by the pre-exit soldier - are substantially more than can be apprehended in any of their stories. This seems clear in at least two examples outlined above: in the first example, Robs dominant and progressive story at the end of 22 years service conceals his utter confusion about what is happening to him; and in the second example, Ian's exit story, and appeal for ordinariness, seems to be undermined the closer he gets to leaving the Army when novel interactions appear to render him thoroughly unusual at the same time as he is being ordinary. For the moment, he captures this in humour and banter.

This chapter has also emphasized important differences between early and late leavers in regard to their future orientated stories of exit. This reflects themes that emerged during analysis suggesting that leavers differed in quite distinctive ways along these lines but that these differences were being concealed beneath significant similarities such as wanting to be with family etc. Indeed, the possibility that the vast majority of early leavers were exiting the Army by choice partially to avoid further operational deployments was not noticed until quite late in the research process. It has been productive to discuss leavers in these two groups but an unfortunate penalty has been the exclusion of long serving officers (limit-35) from the analysis. The quite different characteristics of the full-22 and longer serving officers have precluded the latter groups

inclusion into a generic category of “late leavers”. Very long serving officers seem like a quite distinctive group of leavers by virtue of their relatively high status and age. They are deserving of specific analysis. In addition to this, it might be prudent in the future also to remove the commissioned officers from the early leavers group discussed in this chapter. This is in recognition of some distinctive social relations present both before and during commissioned Army service that has not been fully explored in this chapter or thesis. It seems that there are some important variations between non-commissioned and commissioned leavers in terms of post-Army expectations; and especially in regard to those officers who have served in excess of thirty years.

Embodied Vulnerability

8.1 Introduction

Soldiering involves habits and norms that relate to the body. Although these aspects of corporeality seem more likely to be done⁹² than discussed, it has been surprising to find that leavers have talked about issues and situations that may be connected with the body in both mundane and extreme ways. This has included matters that range from saluting and basic physical fitness to actual and imagined threats to life. This sort of corporeal talk among Army leavers reminds us that a career soldier's self is narrated - at least in part - by references to memories and projections that relate to their body.

In this chapter I refer to this sort of unexpected talk - that I have associated with embodiment and vulnerability and which has prompted me to tackle matters of the body from the perspective of leavers. After a brief account of the relevant literature, I introduce the "body as mine" - as the place from which life is felt, noticed, and experienced. After this, I explore the idea that by virtue of embodied career experiences, each soldier has a nuanced past that connects with varying final year circumstances. Moreover, as leavers anticipate and plan for new horizons, often many of the extreme and physical aspects of Army

⁹² In "Breathing like a soldier" (Lande 2007), the practical aspects of cultural learning are shown to develop a soldier's body into a "background of social action". Lande describes the way that soldiers are taught to breath for shooting and running as "culture incarnate" and how this sort of embodied basis for interaction is only moved to the foreground when it becomes problematic.

service have already receded into the past, which suggests that the pre-exit soldier is - in some regard at least - beginning to reclaim their body from the Army. This process of reclaiming the body is especially noticeable in regard to the themes of availability and movement, together with those of vulnerability and risk; these dynamics are discussed in later sections. Although the idea of vulnerability may be worthy of exploration in many places in this thesis, it has nevertheless become prominent in this chapter as a side-effect of exploring narratives that I have been able to connect to the body. This has informed the title of this chapter and retains the connection between the concept of vulnerability and its origins in the body. Even so, the wider applicability of the concept of vulnerability to identities-of-becoming is too important to contain in this chapter and so the concept of vulnerability is given further attention in chapter nine.

A soldier's embodied connection to their environment is distinctive (Woodward 1998) and is implicated in organisational purpose. For Higate (1997; 1998; 2001), this operates at a deep and habitual level. But, for a long time, the body has evaded specific treatment in sociology, a factor also compounded by the predominance of a Cartesian duality. Recent substantive work has redressed this imbalance (Turner 1984; Featherstone, Hepworth et al. 1991; Frank 1991; Butler 1993; Scott and Morgan 1993; Shilling 1993; Turner 1996; Shilling 2008; Turner 2008); and in his seminal work, Turner (1984; 1996; 2008) provides a sociology of the body in which "the immediacy of personal sensuous experience" is retained (Turner 1996:229). In pursuing this, he rejects structuralist views of corporeality as an outcome of power and knowledge, and

claims that a “sociological notion of the body must embrace the idea of phenomenological experience of embodiment and the facticity of our place in the world” (1996:33). For Turner, bodies alter across time and place, and personal understanding of this is mediated by social training, language, and context (Turner 1996). Turner places the body at the centre of his social theory both as a single point of reference, and as a framework in which the Hobbesian tendency to conflict between embodied persons is suspended or held at bay under a kind of “social contract” (Turner 1996:105) where embodied rights are relinquished under a concept known as the body politic.

For Mauss (1979), the body is a “physiological potentiality which is realized socially and collectively through a variety of shared body practices within which the individual is trained, disciplined and socialised” (Turner 1996:25). The body has no neutral demeanour independent of physical and social milieu and so ought to be treated as part of social practices in which corporeal styles - or schemas (Lande 2007) - are made relevant, visible, and normal. The body is a sentient (Crossley 1995; Wacquant 1995; Higate 2000a) and experienced entity as well as an object to others and to self. Crossley (1995:43) makes a related distinction between “what is done to the body” and “what the body does”, calling for sociology to treat both aspects. This is similar also to Wacquant’s (1995) assertion that the boxer is both the attacker and a target for attack; an observation that is applicable to soldiers as fighters. For Wacquant - borrowing from Garfinkel - the body is seen as an “ongoing practical achievement” (1995:65) that is inherently connected to the social relations in which it exists. Wacquant draws upon the concept of “habitus”, first used by

Mauss (1935), to refer to an “acquired ability” achieved as a consequence of a body’s “potentiality” that is realised in social interaction. For example, even the most common bodily movements - such as “coughing and spitting technique” - are realized in this way (Mauss 1935:16). Bourdieu developed the concept of “habitus” further and he defined it as:

(t)he conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence pro-duce the habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation (Bourdieu 1990:53).

Wacquant’s (1995) reference to Bourdieu and his use of “habitus” locates the social relations of the gym in the dispositions and bodies of boxers as “capital” that display deep inscriptions of the tastes and relevancies of those relations. Boxers - and soldiers too - provide an extreme example of the “habitus” as a concept that is used to bridge the gap between the objective and subjective. The body of a boxer compared to, say, the body of the dancer (Wulff 2005) carry very different meanings, both visually and intentionally, and it isn’t difficult to trace the embodied dispositions and “perceptual templates” of dancers and boxers to their different social worlds.⁹³ But, like soldiers, the

⁹³ The “habitus” is a powerful concept that attempts to connect social relations with individual embodied dispositions. It describes complex interweaving between social and individual meaning but the “habitus” has been criticised for simplifying and reifying intersubjective and changeable processes and dynamics, despite these factors being at the centre of the origins of the concept. King (2000) finds a disconnect between two aspects of Bourdieu’s work. Firstly his “practical theory” emphasises interactions between individuals, and privileges a broad and loose social emergence of what is acceptable, rather than strict rule-following for example. In this aspect of Bourdieu’s work, intersubjectivity is key, but for King this vital aspect is lost in Bourdieu’s detailed development of “habitus” as his second strand of work. This is because the term diminishes much of the dynamic and negotiated functions of the social group to the extent of forcing a polarisation between “objected structure” and “determined isolated individuals” (King 2000:417). This is described below:

difficulty arises in describing the relations between the social and embodied self, accounting for difference, nuance, and change. Nevertheless, Wacquant's use of "habitus"⁹⁴ in his work on professional fighters is a shocking example of the malleability of the body within a unique social environment and purpose.

8.2 Body as Mine?

The emphasis of this chapter is on the ways in which identity is realised in and through the body as "mine" (Ricoeur 1992:34): as it is felt, noticed, lived, and located in place and time. This is in contrast to *having* a body in the sense that it is a "thing" (Turner 2008:244) - an externally observable object that can be fixed and frozen in time. This emphasis - on the "body-as-mine" - recurs throughout my interviews and is clearly relevant to the question of how career soldiers understand the process of leaving the Army. The body "as mine" is noticed as belonging to me and as the place from which I speak. The body is the site of the 'I' of the interacting self that is reflected upon and storied into narrative identity, as the basis of the person as the "project which I represent to myself" (Ricoeur cited in Hall 2007:48). By virtue of its necessity to always be somewhere acting, the body achieves unavoidable "receptivity" (Ricoeur cited in Hall 2007:47) and "openness to the world" (Crossley 1997); and through this acting and suffering the "I" is narrated into a coherent self across time. Embodied "receptivity" is related to a "point of view" (Hall 2007:47) created

"In arguing for the habitus, it is not just that Bourdieu reneges upon his commitment to the virtuosity of individual actors, which was one of the central elements of his "practical theory." In addition, he renounces the ontological implications of his "practical theory" implicit in his discussion of gift exchange, which implied that society consisted only of the complex interactions between individuals. Bourdieu returns instead to a dualistic social ontology of objective structure and subordinated individual" (King 2000:425).

⁹⁴ See also Jenkins (2003) for criticism of Bourdieu.

quite practically by the special and temporal location of the body as the place from which the event is perceived.⁹⁵ The self is inseparable from a body to the extent that they are “reversible aspects of a single fabric” (Wacquant 1995:47). This challenge to a separation of mind and body is also clear in the “lived-body” (Fraleigh 1996) or “body-subject” (Crossley 1995)⁹⁶, a view also progressed by Wainwright and Turner (2003; 2006) with regard to ballet dancers. How career soldiers understand the process of leaving the Army and what this means in their final year of service is very much connected to their embodied experiences. Ricoeur (2004) also uses Halbwachs’ notion of “collective memory”. This sort of memory is embodied (Narvaez 2006) and contributes to how different groups come to see from “within”, and come to differentiate a “we” from the “them”, although this sort of collective remembering ought not to be equated with the idea that each member of a collective group carries the same memories since it is being argued in this thesis that changeable constructions are continuously developed in time.⁹⁷ In the next

⁹⁵ This is not to say that an exclusive singular perspective is created since as Mead asserted a person is capable of holding multiple perspectives on one event in passage where a passenger on one of two passing trains “can occupy in passage both systems, and hold the two attitudes in a comprehensible relationship to each other as representing the same occurrence from two different standpoints ...” (Mead and Murphy 1959).

⁹⁶ Crossley uses this term to capture Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of the body in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962).

⁹⁷ As we have seen in chapter three, both Mead and Ricoeur insist on the dominance of the passage and process of the external world. For Ricoeur, coherence is forced on this changing world by the “collective memory” whereby “a person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought” (Halbwach quoted in Ricoeur 2004:121). Remembering is recalling a corporeal self acting within a network of relations through which we see ourselves. We become selves only by taking the role of the generalized other (Mead and Murphy 1959:185), and we know and remember ourselves from the stance of “another” (Ricoeur 1992). In this way, “one does not remember alone” (Ricoeur 2004:121). The seemingly personal, unique and spontaneous way that we remember is an illusion that conceals the collective rootedness of all such memories (Ricoeur 2004:123). Granted, all soldiers are different by their embodied variance in terms of place and group; and, as we will see in the section below, there is no homogenous soldierly experience, especially across lengthy careers.

section, different embodied situations of exiting career soldiers are discussed as an important factor in the ways in which exit can be understood.

8.3 All Soldiers - Different Pasts

The vast range of possible Army experiences is rarely acknowledged. Unlike Wacquant's boxers, a clear singular and direct connection between fighting, the body, and identity cannot so easily be made for all career soldiers. Varied embodied experiences of Army life create conditions for different identities, within reason and within wider Army narratives. Soldiering has its grades and extremes (Higate 2003:30) and there is a good deal of variety in what, on a daily basis, different embodied soldiers actually do. Inevitably, this is implicated in the sorts of identities that are made relevant. Practical and embodied differences between "types" or "classifications" of soldier are important in terms of the ways that they view themselves and each other, and this has been shown in chapter six by way of a typology.⁹⁸ This sort of variation is also implicated in the sorts of experience that are reflected upon when in the final year of service. But, at the beginning of careers, differences are less pronounced because basic and officer training ensures a largely physical - and to some extent a levelling - introduction to the Army that focuses on a willing and able body (Hockey 2003). It is a rite of passage that produces "tough bodies" (Higate 2000a) as a vital component of soldiering, achieved by

⁹⁸ Barrett also links what naval officers physically do to masculinity and the US Navy. He researched US naval officers from three trade groups to find that "(d)efinitions of masculinity are relationally constructed through associations of difference: aviators tend to draw upon themes of autonomy and risk taking; surface warfare officers draw upon themes of perseverance and endurance; and supply officers draw upon themes of technical rationality (Barrett 1996:129).

graded “exposure to physical hardship”, which also encourages a “certain kind of stoicism” and resilience to suffering (Higate 2000a:16). With drill, exercise, and weapons instruction, basic training is used to bring about a “dual orientation: to teach recruits soldierly skills (...) and to inculcate them with canons of military discipline” (Hockey 1986:21). Regardless of gender, future role, trade, or rank, all officers and soldiers endure in training the basic conditions of the infantry soldier.⁹⁹ Additionally, officers are required to prove leadership whilst learning the sorts of hardship that their soldiers will experience.

Predictably, the duration and extremity of early military training is proportionate to future roles, with infantry soldiers expected to physically endure the most. In the first few months of Army life the body is taught to behave and endure.¹⁰⁰ New recruits are not surprised when they must experience cold wet conditions, wear boots, and fire a weapon, since it is common knowledge that this is what soldiers do. But, no matter how much prior knowledge of the Army¹⁰¹ they may have (ranging from virtually none to those for whom it is already a way of life in terms of “endo-recruitment” (Soeters, Winslow et al. 2006:250)), basic training is supposed to be a physical shock designed - at least partially - to bring about in young bodies a corporeal

⁹⁹ Some longer serving female soldiers may have experienced very watered down versions as members of the now disbanded Women’s Royal Army Corps. Women are now trained alongside male counterparts, but often have different physical standards. See (Dandeker and Segal 1996) for an account of gender integration.

¹⁰⁰ Although see (Hockey 1986) for descriptions of informal resistance by soldiers.

¹⁰¹ Ideas of battle and soldiering are often absorbed by would-be recruits from the media long before basic training. Recruitment slogans are also designed to allure potential recruits with the promise of adventure and difference. Some individuals have a greater pre-knowledge of the Army, such as those who live in garrison areas or have military parents, with the latter group providing a steady form of “endo-recruitment” (Soeters, Winslow et al. 2006).

transformation. To succeed¹⁰² this unrealistic¹⁰³ training phase into a career, the body must adopt a variable soldierly “appearance and bearing”¹⁰⁴, and in this way, basic and officer training is an “effervescent ritual” since it becomes “the peak moment in which (the) social construction of meaning can literally harrow meaning into the very skin of the participants ...” (Narvaez 2006:57). This is a re-orientation from an individualistic to collective perspective that places the team and communal effort first, invoking endless endeavour and adherence to key moral codes and values that are “sold” as above and beyond those of a former civilian life.¹⁰⁵ Endless commitment is an ideal that soldiers are taught to apply to their bodies and this will be addressed further in this chapter in regard to the interpretation of sick, injured, and failing bodies in later careers.

Soeter (2006:240) recognises military difference and differentiates between “hot” and “cold” aspects of the military culture, connecting to Moskos’ (1976; 1988) thesis, introduced in chapter two, that separates occupational from institutional characteristics. He makes the point that “within the military considerable cultural differences in fact do occur” (Soeters, Winslow et al. 2006:245) and defines headquarters’ staff and life in barracks, for example, as “cold” locations with little need for action, where the pace is slow and uneventful. He balances this with “hot” front-line military units that are fraught

¹⁰² This word is being used here to refer to progress and doing well within the confines and internal definitions of an Army career.

¹⁰³ In the sense that basic training is not in any way comparable to the daily routines of an Army career.

¹⁰⁴ This is a category on a soldier's annual appraisal form (MOD 2003).

¹⁰⁵ There are explicitly listed values, which are: selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty, respect for others moral codes (Army 2009).

with danger and immediacy in which life may be regularly threatened. For the British Army, inevitably, “teeth arm” soldiers are more likely to experience and train for aggressive fighting situations but when considered from the temporality of an entire career, most soldiers and officers probably experience a degree of both “hot” and “cold” situations. For example, once career officers have proved themselves at the level of regimental duties (more likely to be described as “hot”), they will often be employed in “cold” headquarters jobs, as part of career progression. It is also quite probable that since 1990 and Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, virtually all career soldiers and officers will have been close to conditions of operational risk, and this is certainly the case for most of the individuals interviewed for this thesis, although their specific jobs vary.

Soeters’ distinction between the “can do”, “virile” and “competitive” characteristics of “hot” locations and “cold” bureaucratic ones is far from the clear cut arrangement he suggests. His distinction is helpful in the way it highlights divergent career soldiers’ experiences as at least partially dependent upon location and role, but it is misleading in its omission that - in the British Army at least - it can be the same soldiers who occupy these different places over the course of a career. In addition to that, “colder” specialist and supportive trade groups, such as for example Royal Army Medical Corps and Royal Signals, are often the ones who spend the most time in “hot” environments. This is because owing to their small numbers and specialist skills, they often find themselves on back-to-back operational tours to support more numerous and interchangeable front-line soldiers. Those interviewed, demonstrated that their trades, roles, and locations were implicated in how they

viewed themselves, but also despite often occupying very “cold” roles with limited to no physical demands they made reference to “hot” or more physical and controlling aspects of Army service as if drawing on some form of internal hierarchy against which they positioned themselves; this was variably remembered, aspired to, or simply drawn upon as a reference point:

...in people's stereotype views I am not a soldier, (..) however from day one you are - my trade, terrain analyst, there's only one place you can do that and that's the brigade sergeant so effectively (..) it's a specialised thing and therefore I may wear the uniform of a soldier, act like a soldier, but in the civilian stereotype of a soldier I will never end up doing that - you will do it for a promotion course (....). So you see yourself as a small cog in the bigger machine of the Army but what people consider a soldier no (...). I was asked: what's your biggest regret? (.....) Well it's not a mistake, I consider it a regret, that I've never actually soldiered (Andy).

.. you are encouraged to be more challenging in the AWS (Army Welfare Service (..)) and (..) I quite like that actually because (..) if, like at Bulford, I was a sergeant and (colleagues name) was a (Warrant Officer Class 1), in real Army life you wouldn't have that relationship with somebody (..) Whereas, (..) I could challenge (colleagues name) if I didn't like something - if he said something and I didn't agree, I would say I don't agree with that. (..) You are encouraged to be more mature (.....), whereas (if) a corporal went into the RSM (regimental sergeant major) saying I am not actually comfortable you picking me up on parade this morning (..) (laughs) - (he) get(s) shoved in the nick (Army prison) for a month (..) (Samantha).

... you think about these things all the time especially in the Infantry because you know you are going out there and you're going to be the one that is running towards the bullets (Arthur).

Numerous further examples of this internal differentiation are available, generally affording infantry soldiers, and front-line physical action, a dominant status, though not always affording them respect:

... even though everyone is trained to fight, when you first start you do your basic training and everyone's a basic soldier (but) the infantry - they train, train, and every week they're doing that basic training, every week so that's drilled right in to them. That's why when you go into garrison towns and (..) the majority of trouble is between infantry because they are trained to fight and all they want to do is get rid of the aggression, it's not cos they hate each other. It's just that they want to fight people so that's why you get a lot of problems in garrison (...). They are a different breed (..), some of them are, jeeze, they are proper, like I said before, rigid I recon (...), whereas like with our job, because we are (..) transportation, it's near enough a civvy job anyway, move your tanks from a to b - it's just like ASDA (Mark).

8.4 Unfolding Horizons in the Final Year

By the time career soldiers reach their final year of service, arduous and communal physicality is sometimes a thing of the past - even a very distant past - often due to more senior positions, or the characteristics of certain trade groups. Uniquely soldierly activities such as drill, marching, fieldcraft, and operational service can be redundant in final roles where day-to-day living and employment take on a more civilian feel, implying that at least some of their soldierly self has already moved into the past. This has been mentioned several times in previous chapters such as, for example, in chapter six, section 6.4, where Roger describes himself as having a “civilian head” on now that he works in the welfare office. Moreover, the emergence of an accelerating civilian horizon during this final year brings many novel features that rapidly encroach on the here and now. The overwhelming sentiment of all leavers was that although it had been a great career, it was absolutely time to go and minds were increasingly fixed on what next, sometimes rejecting, without thought, unexpected offers to extend their careers. Those whose roles allowed space to prepare for the future, seemed to relish the settled nature of their current

arrangement, but on the contrary, other individuals - for whom full-on military roles and family separation remained a factor - complained that the Army had changed beyond recognition. This was suggestive of a reduced sense of fit between self and Army role, and this is clear in the following quotes:

... up to about the 16 year point I was still enjoying it and then it just changed (Arthur);

I didn't like the general (..) way that all the restructuring has been happening, (..) basically squadrons were losing their identity - they are losing their ethos (Glen);

there's no fun anymore - there's no fun factor - everyone's too serious (Katy).

Tim is typical of a long career officer. He is also similar to other soldiers - discussed in chapter seven - in his attempt to find a story of exit that casts back into his past. One difference here, however, is his reference to some extreme corporeal events from which he is constructing increasing distance. His last job as Unit Welfare Officer is a post that is traditionally filled by those pending exit and in a career spanning 33 years, this Royal Artillery officer had progressed in rank from Gunner to Major. At interview, a few months before exit, he remembered and recounted himself across the years. On his office wall - besides a photograph depicting his icy wet emergence from a Norwegian snow hole - hung a large painting of a row of terraced houses in his home town, Sheffield. He described his career as a journey from working class lad to Army Major and wondered both at his good fortune and where the years had gone. He did not hide his anxiety for the future as he sat in his office aged 54 surrounded by his half-packed boxes. He is six foot five inches tall, was a

rugby player, and is typical of the sort of soldier that everybody likes and respects.

In some ways, a transient Army life is good practice for military exit and many approach the final move as just another posting. Tim was keen to leave an efficiently organised job to his successor, and he hoped he would be remembered as a decent sort; both are characteristics of a soldier pending routine posting. But at military exit an added ingredient is invariably present; and for this officer, it was a recurring question about his place in “civvy street”. His words below show his attempts to draw together from his varied embodied experiences, a coherent whole; and this involves some hesitation and embarrassment as he contemplates different aspects of himself across his career. Each of the events that he describes are “mythical pasts” (Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983:170); in the sense that they are reinterpretations of the past in the light of the present, and in relation to (radically different) future projections:

.. after all these years what am I worth? Can I do this in civvy street? (.....) You are in a nice little slot, you know where you stand, you know your capabilities - and I freely admit, I am well within my comfort zone, well within my comfort zone. Suddenly, I am going to be extracted at the age of 54 out of that comfort.....

in many ways you are an actor on a stage¹⁰⁶ (...). You are almost, y’know, this is a life but (..) ... when you were (..) - Gulf 1991, you’re going across there and you think (..) this is almost surreal (..) and it was (...)I was battery sergeant major then (..) - stiff upper lip and all of that..

¹⁰⁶ This officer also described this as an outer-body experience. Giddens’ claims this is due to a “too radical discrepancy between accepted routines and the individual’s biographical narrative” (1991), such that a person disassociates from their body and danger is experienced as if it were another person under threat.

I've enjoyed it (..) - being quartermaster was great fun, especially with the AMF (Ace Mobile Force) and going off to Norway and doing things like that - it was great fun loved it, loved it

... nobody ever thinks of themselves as being - you always, as you go through your career you see (..) smelly old quartermaster who is leaving and he's 50 but you don't see yourself ever being 55.

.. one of the managers (of a company he was going to work for) told me this story about this petty officer - sergeant major equivalent (..) that they had taken on and (he) was struggling a bit because he was running around barking commands etc etc. The advantage of (..)going beyond that and being an LE (late entry officer) is that you do mellow and you go back to the old, show-respect-to-gain- respect to be honest with you (Tim).

In the “specious present” of the interview, Tim “select(ed) out a past which allow(ed) for the understanding of new situations” (Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983:163). The dramatically embodied act of leading men to war as a Sergeant Major was remembered as a surreal and novel experience that became temporally ordered and reconciled with the Major now anticipating civilian employment. Coherence urges a “symbiotic relationship between that which is continuous and that which is discontinuous” (Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983:169). Or, in other words a concordant discordance (Ricoeur 1992). Tim constructs concordance and coherence from the “all stiff upper lip” Sergeant Major in the gulf war and the mellow Major, now sat in his office beneath a picture of the Sheffield terraces. He reflects upon his younger view of the typical old soldier he had now become, actively working on a narrative that can draw together these now conflicting embodied experiences. One of his narrative solutions is that of progress and inevitability. The “stiff upper lip”, becomes a phase; an inevitable (soldierly) precursor to the mellow Major. Tim reinforces this by telling the story of a naval person who had left the Navy at the “stiff upper lip”

phase, a factor that Tim thought denied this person the in-service “mellow” period that might have better eased his way into civilian employment where the “all stiff upper lip” demeanour was anticipated as unwelcome.

This retrospective “storying” of events into an inevitable progression or direction seems to demonstrate a process of distancing from some of the more extreme and embodied parts of the military self in the final year, as preparation for an imagined civilian environment. Although, this distancing can occur at any point in a career, a degree of legitimacy, honesty and withdrawal seems unique in pre-exit career soldiers, who find themselves occupying positions of those gone before them (e.g. smelly 55 year old quartermaster) for whom narratives already exist (Somers 1994) and are adjusted once it is realised, with some shock, that they have slipped into very similar shoes (this was discussed in chapter five). Available explanations abound, but this sort of “collective memory” has to be tweaked, adjusted and rejected if it is to be made to fit the embodied perspective of the individual leaver.

This recognition of oneself as increasingly distant from prominent past events, competencies and behaviour is noticeable in the comments of those quoted below. These individuals seem to be separating themselves from some of the more unique and physical Army attributes, though most leavers were very quick to deny any suggestion that they were withdrawing:

... I don't think I even know how to properly do my weapon and stuff like that nowadays - I never use it in my line of work. I sit at my desk all covered in pink stuff (laughs) (Joanne).

I'm not wearing the green kit as much (...) so I'm not having to jump to attention every time somebody comes in because the actual job I'm doing is much more relaxed (...). I don't think the transition is going to be too much of a problem (..). I do have quite a civilian head on now (Roger).

... I don't want to stand in the cold and I don't want to- I was a PTI (physical training instructor) as well - so very fitness orientated. And now, I don't want to have to do any of that. I don't want to have to carry a Bergen (Army rucksack) around in case I hurt myself. (..) I've got a real sort of thing now about needing to look after myself in case - y'know because obviously he's (husband who is a soldier) away all the time, so it's like being a single mother so (..) I can't afford to go out and get a blister so I can't walk y'know because I've got to look after that baby and she's my (...) one priority and so (...) my attitude towards all that has all changed (Sarah).

Commonly, at this stage of exit, intense Army physicality is no longer a daily relevance, but a mere collection of memories. More mundane and absorbed habits do however prevail and some even complain that the relatively limited physical demands of their present roles are holding them back: “I don't want to do (...) PT (Physical training) anymore you know what I mean I just want to get out and get my life sorted, it's a new step” (Rob). Others yearn to repeat it: “there was still the urge to go to Afghanistan but I've (..) fortunately realised that it's somebody else's turn - I don't need that anymore.....”(Tim). Sometimes other attributes are more prominent in the roles that they finally occupy. Bryan, a colonel, late Army Medical Corps¹⁰⁷ made this observation: “I mean physically you are less robust in (your later career) although we like not to think we are (..) we are employed not for our good looks and our speed,

¹⁰⁷ Officers who hold the rank of Colonel and above no longer belong to a regiment or corps because their status requires them to be impartial across the Army. It is however common to connect them with their prior corps by the word “late” so that others can understand their career history.

but for our brains”. He was referring to Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Officers.

In other cases, rank has fallen behind age. Consider this full-career corporal, for whom physical surveillance and testing has become a nuisance, perhaps even an embarrassment:

It's just the same thing over and over again, and in the end I thought do I really want to - as a 42 year old - do I still really want my kit when I go on exercise to be checked by someone who is 20 being a second lieutenant, lieutenant or Captain (who) might be 25, 20 (years old) checking my kit when I've been in the Army say 24 years (Mike).

Ed puts it another way: “.....who wants to be a 45 year old Corporal that's what I say”. Spike was different, but not alone in his mainstream and embodied contribution until the very end. As an exiting corporal he was voluntarily deployed to Afghanistan for three months. This, his last operational tour, invoked a special meaning for him, incorporating both a heightened awareness of self-risk and a strong sense of responsibility to younger members of the team:

.. in the work environment yes you have to be (matter-of-fact). I have some young guys that I am deploying with - two of them are first tour so they need to look at me and see a calm exterior - inside am I worried about it? I'm more worried now than I was 4, 5 years ago - mortality is now (at the) back of your mind, whereas 5 years ago it wasn't (Spike).

Those who were leaving for medical reasons had no final role because they had been posted nominally to a unit known as the “Y List”¹⁰⁸ which operates as a notional holding unit until decisions are made about futures in the Army. Those interviewed in this category had all been awarded medical discharges on

¹⁰⁸ This has now changed under a new policy known as Sickness Absence Management (SAM).

account of a range of problems such as depression, back injury, post traumatic stress disorder and other medical conditions. For these leavers, the Army had already become a distant memory, even though they were technically still serving. Most felt isolated from their original units and experienced a sense of being discarded:

For months on end, the only contact I had with the Army was to receive my pay statement every month (Alf).

I feel absolutely destroyed, the only phone calls I've had off people are the lads from the TA (Territorial Army) who I was working with, I was only with the TA physically working for 14 months and I've had more phone calls off them in the last twelve months than I have off anyone within the unit that I've been with for 20 years (..) which to me is disgusting (John).

New sickness absence management (SAM) procedures have improved matters recently and the inclusion into this new policy of regular visits from members from a soldier's unit was especially welcomed by these leavers who noticed improved contact with the Army. Overall, exiting the Army on medical grounds is a complicating factor that adds to the status passage other identity issues relating to the experience of a failing body (Charmaz 1991; Charmaz 1994).

Practical and employment situations of Army leavers, in their final year, provides the vantage point or perspective from which narratives of exit are constructed, and the angle from which embodied "collective memories" are approached. These are memories that are rooted in what different soldiers actually did during their careers, as well as incorporating memories associated with the absorption of meaning surrounding all those who have left before. In

terms of corporeality, two key processes have been gleaned from career leavers' common talk of the body. First, there is talk relating to the construction of the "soldier-past"; and second there is the process of "reclaiming the body", a term that incorporates availability and movement as well as risk and vulnerability. This latter process is discussed in the next section.

8.5 Reclaiming the Body

Notwithstanding the already noted variations, soldiers recognise in each other similarity, solidarity, connection and belonging that transcend rank, age, and role. Like the habitus, common meaning persists in a stock of soldierly habits and dispositions, many of which are sacrosanct and reflexively embodied. For example, ask a soldier to stand to attention and they will know what to do. "Corporeal memory" (Ricoeur 2004:40) means that they will know in their entire being, even before the words are fully uttered. As they think the words - or give the command - the body is simultaneously poised to move. A twitch in the leg signals habit and instinct, much like Mead's boxers in chapter three. Thought and movement merge in habit, and the "body-subject" (Crossley 1995) remembers. For Mauss (1973), "techniques of the body" carry habit, meaning, and significance in small rituals that become solidified over time. For, Narvaez (2006) the memory can be inscribed in bodily practices not as an "individualistic creation" but in a loose way as a reification of a community: a living, moving testament to social relations. Interestingly, Narvaez suggests that while memory recollects the history of the "I", the body, "does" the history of the "I" and animates the body in ways indicative of its past. Poise,

movement, and appearance display the subtleties of social habit which can be so often at odds with time and place. This soldier is telling how his wife's friend described him to her after seeing him at the local school in a civilian area where this soldier plans to settle:

I mentioned her (the friend) before, (she) goes and picks her daughter up (and she) said you always stand there with an air about you and I'm like what do you mean - it's because they are - my area is full of mongs who slouch over and I just stand upright and (..) I don't lean on the fence or sit on the wall. I'm stood there waiting for my daughter to come out. You're not there to slouch around or scratch your backside (Ian).

With the pugilist extreme, Wacquant connects body modification and schema to “the uses one usually puts it to, so as to internalize a set of dispositions that are inseparably mental and physical” (Wacquant 2004:95). This is an instinctive but innovative relationship inherently connected to the purpose of boxing. It is inscribed in habit; a mental-physical symbiosis that “reaches a degree that even willpower, morale, determination, concentration, and the control of one's emotions change into so many reflexes inscribed within the organism” (Wacquant 2004:95). Career soldiers, like boxers, are available and vulnerable with unique purpose, reason, and form. Different Army settings or “regions” (Goffman 1971:109) can trigger a repertoire of dormant but habitual, trained and innovative behaviour (Wacquant 2004:59) that is mingled, adapted and tweaked to the needs of the here and now. On the firing range for example, an unspoken attitude of serious and functional competence descends as testament to shared and consistent training. Again, the capacity to behave competently in these and other regions is not something that can be acquired quickly by a

visitor, but is remembered in the habit of the “body-subject” (Crossley 1995). Army bodies are offered, claimed, shaped and trained to be at hand for service anywhere, anytime, and sometimes at great risk. Across careers and regions, experiences depend on how the body has performed and the sorts of situation encountered.

The “claimed” status of the soldier’s body is best explained in relation to incidents of illness and injury which are used here to emphasise the inherent connection between a soldier’s entire corporeal existence and organisational purpose. When the “body-subject” fails this relationship - that has become so imperceptible - is brought into focus. Military exit ultimately involves a withdrawal or re-claiming of the body that is a conscious intention for many leavers who decide to pursue greater control over what they do and where they go (this also relates to decisions to leave the Army early to avoid life threatening situations, discussed in chapter seven). Effective management of failing and sick bodies is a feature of Army life and as part of the constant effort to keep soldiers soldiering; doctors and dentists are incorporated into the Army community where they are paid to elevate communal and operational health over the individual. For the most part, they wear uniform, carry rank, and have the remit to occasionally override “patient” confidentiality which tends to happen within a special relationship between the Commanding Officer and his medical officer. Together these two officers must balance individual need with operational effectiveness. Faltering bodies are labelled as either fit or unfit for duty, and reporting sick is taboo: “come on (..) you’re an officer y’know officers don’t go sick (...) they don’t have these problems (..)” (William).

Indeed, many career soldiers will remember “sick parade” during basic training as a kind of traumatic and stigmatized doorway into the kinder world of the medical centre. Sick and skiving bodies comprise this early morning parade, and stood to attention, they are shamefully gathered together clutching packed hospital-admissions bags seeking medical opinion.

This sort of experience, early in the career, encourages collective meaning such that the soldierly interpretation of the bodies’ signs and symptoms, instils a necessary stoicism in the mature soldier: “I was constantly in pain I was trying to hide the fact that I thought I was being classed as a wimp..” (Alf). Throughout careers, the suspicion of malingering is ever present and charges of feigned illness or injury are commonly implied and felt within routine interactions, urging individuals to define and narrate themselves in palatable terms avoiding this the most damning of accusations:

if someone sees you sick and it doesn't immediately appear obvious that you are sick (.....) you get the impression that a lot of them think you are shirking, even if they don't say it to your face (Pete).

being called a liar (..) to me it's a massive kick in the teeth and I've seen soldiers throughout my years that have been pulling the wool (..) and they are quite blatantly pulling the wool and I wouldn't do it. (John).

.. I knew I wasn't lazy, lame yeah maybe because I had pulled my ankles but I tried - I went to the (unclear) clinic at least six times and they couldn't do anything about it (Mike).

I would defy anybody to in first instances to go sick because they've got a problem because (..) you go: my God I can't do that, because it will wreck my career. And there are lots of other knock-on's that you foresee (..) just the fact that what are your peers going to think about you - if you go, well actually, you know, (..) I'm going to put two pencils up my nose, and a pair of underpants on my head, ala “Black Adder” (..). But it's true, you do, and that is what stops you from sort of

making that very important call, and that's wrong. And again, that's a cultural problem we have right across the forces actually that we need to address. So I didn't actually put my hand up really until my wife really forced me to (William).

Sickness and injury carry a certain stigma that is finely balanced with the need also to recognise “genuine” difficulty. A common currency of stoicism and resilience to injury and illness is noticeable and this is supported by banter that ensures that bodies are fit for purpose, unhindered by overly-sensitive acceptance of failure. Consider this definition of a sickness certificate, taken from an Army website, and the implicit identity afforded its possessor:

*A biff ¹⁰⁹chit is a piece of paper signed by the Doc (doctor) or MO (medical officer) usually given to a biff. The piece of paper is usually then taken and waved around in front of the soldier's SSM, CSM, or BSM (different types of sergeant major) in the frantic hope it will get them out of PT (physical training). This is a somewhat forlorn hope at best. Such pathetic attempts are met with “Get out of my office you malingering ****!” Or similar. Professional biffs will have their chitties laminated or covered in fablon to keep the dribble and wee off (Encyclopedia 2008).*

This sort of banter is more common among younger soldiers but when bodies are unavailable for organisational purpose, it is hard to avoid deeply ingrained and negative narratives that surround the sick and injured, and those concerned must construct from available narratives a story within which they can locate themselves.¹¹⁰ This can be a painful and difficult process, sometimes involving the rejection of negative identities that are being activated by the responses of

¹⁰⁹ Though still used, the term “biff” is extremely old and distasteful and is reproduced here to emphasise the stigma towards genuine and feigned failing bodies.

¹¹⁰ It is suspected that a different attitude is shown to those who are returning injured from operational tours.

others, commonly involving the sort of attitude that they themselves would have had prior to difficulty:

(a psychiatrist) signed me off-sick with severe depression (..) - my unit didn't believe (her) (....). They said to her that they think I am pulling the wool (John).

Oh not only didn't understand, but have accused me of almost lack of moral courage and malingering which is a pretty tough thing to deal with (...). If I was meeting me (..) 14 months before I'd of gone who's this bloke then (..) - that's all very dodgy. I know I would have done because that's a product of my (..) training and (..) the cultural input that I've been experiencing up until now (William).

A purposive narrative accompanies the body and it permeates all soldiers in one way or another. It is a central story against which soldiers must interpret their bodies in the sense that they are a means to an end - they are available for purpose. Such common meaning transforms neglected teeth and broken limbs from dental and medical categories into signs of weakness or genuine barriers to operational performance:

I was given a medical to see if I was fit to deploy and I was fit to deploy but not on the front line (..) but my OC (officer commanding) of the workshop I was with knew I wasn't 100% fit I even had somebody carry my bags for me - and actually during the war itself (..)I only went into Iraq a couple of times (Alf).

Individual soldiers have little choice but to interpret their bodies' performances in these ways, with the genuinely sick and injured attracting a double bind of a failing body and a sense of stigma and blame. In this way physical inactivity becomes a failed training opportunity; food becomes fuel; and, time-off becomes rest-and-recuperation, a mere interlude between purposive embodied performances. This embodied career orientation towards a continuous,

sometimes ill-defined and uncertain purpose acts as an undercurrent in Army careers.

Failing bodies have been used here to emphasise the inherently embodied character of soldiering. As exit approaches, matters of the body rise to prominence. This seems to be connected to the necessity of imagining oneself in a range of new futures, in which past habits become disrupted. Ed had firm plans to move to America for a better life and this stable aspiration provided him with continuity and security, but when practical complexities forced him to re-think his plans, the sheer employment choice that opened up began to overwhelm him as he worked at projecting himself into a variety of possibilities. As we saw in chapter six (section 6.3.1), he expressed this process of imagining by way of an embodied metaphor: “.....it’s like trying on trousers just trying to find the right pair of trousers”. Over the course of a career - and in a less obvious way than Wacquant’s pugilist extreme - a soldier’s body has been “an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project that should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity” (Shilling 1993:5). This process began in basic training and has existed largely as an “absent-presence” (Shilling 1993:8) in which the body performs a soldierly capital comprising unthinking adherence to mundane and extreme habits of belonging such as dress, hair, shaving, stance, a sense of urgency and authoritative demeanour etc. The person begins a partial withdrawal from these compulsory external claims on the body, at the same time as alternative futures enter into the present by way of the necessity to think seriously of oneself from the perspective of a different “generalized other”.

This connects with chapter six and the discussion of the “civilian other” as an encroaching perspective on the self.

New perspectives on self seem especially potent in regard to employment, as the most pressing practical issue at military exit and the only matter that the resettlement system addresses. This is especially pertinent in regard to the novelty of determining for oneself matters of movement, availability, risk, and appearance. The emergence of real choice in these areas is an obvious dimension of exit since in beginning to reclaim their bodies, exiting soldiers are for the first time able to determine completely where they will live and can legitimately withdraw their bodies from vulnerability and risk, something unthinkable for mainstream career personnel. To be clear, issues of risk do not simply arise as a soldier enters Iraq or Afghanistan because soldiers know they are continually available for deployment or action. This is not to say that this is a negative force, rather it is a way of life that is generally remembered with fondness. But by the time of exit, a sense that it was now time to leave has already been noted and issues of risk and availability seem thoroughly embroiled in both decisions to leave and in accepting that exit was upon them (see chapter seven). It is only in the last year of service that this requirement to be permanently available begins to recede - though not to vanish - and as residual service contracts choice increases. This is because despite being mainstream soldiers, the feasibility of deploying or being posted in the final year is low and individuals recognise this. In some regards, close-to-exit soldiers find a level of control over their lives that they are unlikely to have experienced before.

8.5.1 Availability and Movement

Soldiers must be available and ready. This includes a commitment to serve anywhere, including regular postings within and beyond United Kingdom, commonly involving whole family moves, prompting a complete style of life, especially in overseas locations such as Germany or Cyprus. There are predominantly two ways that postings (now called assignments) are managed. Firstly, individuals can join a regiment and - except for the occasional posting away - remain in the same regiment that moves en-mass; some regiments are more geographically stable than others. Secondly, those who join a corps - such as the Royal Logistic Corps - are “trickle” posted to pre-existing units (including the regiments), often in supportive roles such as chefs or clerks. Such soldiers will move from one unit to the next every two to three years when they must each time establish themselves anew in work and social relations.

Turbulence is a factor for all soldiers and their families who are encouraged to remain together under policies of “accompanied service”. Over and above this, all soldiers may be sent on operational tours either as part of a regiment; as part of the Unit to which they are posted; or, as an individual sent to a vacancy in an operational theatre. Interviewees have, in their biographies, a complicated mix of these sorts of experiences. Mark had served in an infantry regiment and in the Royal Logistics Corps. In the following quote, he discusses the differences:

I've done all that side of running around and all the rest of it with a permanent unit which I think you feel more bonded to than a corps and I joined up with people and I left people. If I had of done twenty-two-years I'd of done twenty-two years with the same people where in a corps you don't - in a corps, you are more isolated, you are an

individual - you go to a unit by yourself, you move on by yourself so you don't have that unit move, unit bond as such. It's a different bond although you do bond, I don't think it is ever as tight-knit as the infanteers or the regiments and that, but (..) I've enjoyed my time. I've done a lot of things I wouldn't have done if I'd been a civilian. (..)I've made a lot of friends. I've lost a lot of friends as well through one thing and another (Mark).

Altogether, this routinised programme of postings - coupled with operational tours and courses etc - create a lifestyle in which career personnel must accept the need to be available and ready for the needs of the service. Availability across time and space characterises the life of a soldier and attempts are made within the Army to manage this readiness so that individual needs - such as, for example, the education of children - are accommodated as much as possible. Even so, inscribed in the ethos of a career soldier must be a fundamental willingness to go when and where told. This is both the joy and pain of soldiering, and related matters are often inherently connected to decisions to join, stay, and leave:

.. they were telling me - you are going to be posted round about January, February time, so I think that was the main, kinda - because obviously - I was... we were here and we were trying to look at our options - do I sign-on for the 3years? Where will I be posted to? (..) It was lots of things going around in the pot and you were trying to pluck answers out of nowhere and (..) they weren't coming back. Oh, they're not doing the postings yet. (..) It was getting quite a stressful time since I was trying to get my family life together so I could say right I'm posted to so and so (tape changed)

...it was quite a hard time between us (..) as well (...). It was really stressful. I was going into my boss to find out what's happening and there were no answers coming back. I was then relaying that onto (wife's name) - she was getting down about it as well so it was quite a stressful time. But (..) that's probably the downfall (...) - you are reliant

on them (..), and they come round and they say oh right you're going there...(Bill).

... the mess about factor - where you are doing this once, and then you are doing that, and they send you down south to do this and then you've got to come back up and (Nigel).

A normal life something I've not really experienced for the last decade really. (..)To all intents and purposes, for the last 12, 13 years I've been living out of a suitcase ... (Glen).

Well you don't join the Army to stay at home do you? So, I've had my fun. I've had my time. (..) They say you reach your 12 year point and then you've got to decide whether to go on and do the full 22 or what. So, I'm not going to do the full 22 (Joanne).

In one form or another, this continuous availability, sometimes associated with risk, has been a central feature of the lives of career soldiers. This is what soldiers do, and this for most is a factor in their overwhelmingly fond memories of a remembered career. Bill's sentiments are common:

I've enjoyed my time (...), went to Acapulco as an 18 year old; Belize on a 6 month tour. Looking back and doing things like that (..) I probably would never of got anywhere near Mexico. (...) Looking back, I did a rugby tour to America, 2 years in Hong Kong - holidays to Thailand, the Philippines when we were there and when you look back at things like that and (..) people back home or your friends (...), they're all kinda jealous and envious at you having the opportunity (..) I can't fault the opportunities I've had (Bill).

William's availability, however, was his undoing. His experiences ultimately challenged his identity as an infantry officer and he struggled to tell the story of events that he connects with the mental health difficulties responsible for his medical discharge from the Army. His key story, shown below, came at the end of a long interview. In its original form, it is a rather garbled account full of pauses, silences, and confusion. There are a number of conceivable reasons

for this confusion so unusual for an otherwise articulate infantry officer. Firstly, it may be due to the obvious trauma involved in his initial combat experiences; secondly, perhaps it is a consequence of a complicated trail of events that are actually quite difficult to condense into a regular conversational style of communication; but thirdly, I think the original quote might also be difficult to understand because William explains himself in local “short-hand”, expecting me to use my Army experience to fill in the gaps from my knowledge of the events he discusses.

I have adjusted William’s story in a way that I think retains his intended meaning. I use his words below to show how the consequences of being available can be cumulatively destructive. For William, this is extreme and obvious but perhaps for other leavers the cumulative effect of availability and the experiences that this brings can be less visible, subsumed instead into a narrated sense that “enough-is-enough” and explained in chapter seven as responsible for a “safety-net” paradigm among the full-22. Inevitably, for William, matters of availability are entwined with operational risk and William tells his complete story against the backdrop of the infantry officer he used to be - the one who expected himself to cope. There are few remaining traces of this coping soldierly self and William has been shocked by his “collapse” to the extent that his entire interview narrative seems like an attempt to search a new sense of self. William’s duty to be available saw him working all over the world in a very short space of time, taking him in and out of war zones and away from his home and family; all are factors that ultimately damaged his resilience and hindered his capacity to cope.

(In Iraq) we got our arses handed to us on a plate (..) and took a lot of casualties (...). My personal involvement was quite extensive (..) (and we were located where) the first suicide bombings took place. I lost (..) soldiers from my company - three guys killed (..), one of the guys injured. (..) I was actually personally involved in a suicide bombing where luckily we were in our warriors; (..) a car (..) tried to drive into my warrior, but missed, and (exploded) between the two vehicles. Unfortunately, I had two (.....) guys (.....) (who) both got their legs blown-off (..) in the explosion (..). So that was quite a big traumatic event (..), and then, subsequently, (..) I was involved with another vehicle born suicide bombing, and then another two incidents (..)

It was quite a lot - it was full-on (..) combat, being mortared, (..) rocketed every day.

.....we (..) then shipped home and then (...) things started to go quite badly wrong. (.....). (Before I went to Iraq, my wife and I) were still living (..) (in the north), but I was (working) in (the south) having to commute (home). (..) I was then sent out to (another regiment) because they needed a Company commander (..) but (when I was posted there) they (were) in (Germany) so (my wife and I) couldn't move to (Germany) because there wasn't enough time (since they were soon to move to UK).

(..)By the time I came back (from Iraq) we were just getting to the process of moving (..) (house) and my wife was quite poorly at the time so we couldn't move then; and then I went to do a staff job in (America) for a while. And so, (..) in terms of (my) adjustment (..)everybody I had had that communal experience (Iraq) with was down in (the south) so I didn't really have anybody to talk to about it (..) and I think (..) its very obvious when I came back (home) that we were all wound tight (..), I was very, very irritable, I had a very short fuse (..). So we had our leave and various things and went back to work and it just went pheeew - the bridge collapsed on me (some names have been removed for confidentiality reasons) (William).

8.5.2 Vulnerability and Risk

Generally, vulnerability or risk is the last thing that a career soldier will talk about since, as we have seen, attitudes of resilience tend to dominate; and it has been in the vein of this sort of confident optimism that military exit has been

discussed; even to the point of arrogance. Nevertheless, this dominant “wilco”¹¹¹ demeanour that is perhaps a defining mark of the British career soldier is punctuated in interview by occasional - and significant - acknowledgement of anxiety, worry, and uncertainty. Scattered also among their accounts of exit are anecdotes of the shock and pride at some of the “informal” physicality in their first months of Army life. This apparent need to revisit the beginning was discussed in chapter seven, and noted also by Jolly (1996). It is perhaps a consequence of personal efforts to grasp the whole of careers or life to achieve narrative understanding. The extreme physicality of Army entry has been an emergent theme in this sort of return-to-the-beginning discussion. This kind of personal narrative may be related to the body in terms of its capacity to drink alcohol, achieve verbal volume,¹¹² appear tough, brawl, and withstand physical “horseplay” and correction. These anecdotes are introduced here to provide a flavour of the environment entered by these soldiers, and to relate these embodied experiences to the soldierly tendency to cushion and dampen vulnerability and risk:

...just what I thought soldiers should be I suppose, hard drinking, hard fighting -but I'm not that type of person really (Ed);

I ended up getting slapped off different people (Sarah);

I had quite a few slappings but (...)he sorted me out really (Sean);

He would just take you round the back and punch you sort of thing (Ed);

¹¹¹ A well known Army term that means “will co-operate” and refers more generally to the sort of attitude that gets things done, focuses on solutions and does not complain. It is a term that connects with Moskos’ view that endless and ill-defined commitment marks the soldier from other occupations.

¹¹² Something that is surprisingly difficult for the reserved or quiet soldier and a hurdle sufficiently troublesome to be recounted by a number of leavers.

You need to shout and ball at these people but the training needs to be robust and actually a kick up the arse doesn't do anybody any damage (Tim).

Together with formal training, all of this and more urges an attitudinal buffer against vulnerability such that within Army social relations a comforting sense of forbearing is fostered and developed. As can be seen by the early anecdotes above, this sort of self-view goes hand-in-glove with the reasonably tough, controlling, and physical environment that is set apart from wider society. With some exception, noted in chapter six, leavers claimed that they were “different” and sometimes this was expressed forcibly, perhaps arrogantly:

..you think you stand out, you think you are different (...). Even leaving the Army, I think you still have that personal pride; you still have that belief that you are a cut above people. Your experiences take you to a different level (Andy).

At other times they just appeared to accept a vague sense of contradistinction from others (see typology in chapter six). Overall, however, a tangible sense of self-efficacy dominated each and every interview.

The formal and informal intersubjective origins of this kind of soldierly stoicism¹¹³ is forgotten as careers progress and these necessary “war-fighting” attitudes are taken into oneself. This is especially so when careers are stable and “ipse” and “idem” (Ricoeur 1992:121) identities can be said to be overlapping. Drawing again on Ricoeur, the characteristics of the community have been “internalised” into the “character” (Ricoeur 1992:119) of the individual soldier and the sustaining features of Army relations become

¹¹³ It is also likely that such features exist to some extent in those who are attracted to the Army in the first place.

obscured, even forgotten. This soldier seems to be struggling to make a similar point because as he looks back over his years from the shaky vantage point of his final few months of service, he remembers a time, mid-career, when his confidence was greater:

.. the level of doubt is - you might have had it when you first join up. When you're a private, lance corporal you're still learning - corporal, sergeant (..) you've got most of it and you're, yes, still learning bits but you're the doubts pretty much reduced I think because your confidence in you've had the corporate knowledge throughout the 10, 15, 20 years (Roger).

Socially encouraged “character traits” of confidence and resilience become habits and are supported, even demanded, in the Army environment. Although leavers mostly continue to tackle exit in this manner, Turner (2008) notes that social institutions shelter persons from the inevitable vulnerability of being human and in the same way intersubjective relations of the Army provide stable roles and statuses in which individuals can identify and ascribe to themselves admired characteristics. But there is a strange paradox present when talking about soldiers and vulnerability. The Army is at once a space of immense security and huge risk. Stable Army roles provide succeeding career soldiers¹¹⁴ with ontological security but at the same time they place them in extreme danger. This is why embodied talk noticed in interview is broad and complicated; it refers to at least two very separate dynamics associated with the concept of vulnerability. To be vulnerable is to be human. It is a consequence of our openness to the world and of the necessity to always be acting. Vulnerability as a concept originates from the metaphor of a “wound” but has

¹¹⁴ This might not be so for other soldiers who leave earlier and might have been less comfortable in the Army environment.

developed into a broader term that also includes the human capacity to “be exposed to psychological or moral damage” (Turner 2008:244). It is connected to our ability to draw upon pleasure and pain and to reflect emotionally on our “existential state” (Wainwright and Williams 2005:29). As an embodied sentience, vulnerability makes us human and is a motivating force. Moreover, “vulnerability is..... the very condition of becoming” (Shildrick 2002:33). Injury, illness, and ageing signal our frailty until death, but for the most part this ontological condition of being human is mediated and experienced via social narrative, otherwise as Giddens (1991) notes the chaos on the other side of the “protective cocoon” would be too much to bear. It is in periods of rapid change that vulnerability is most visible when “disrupted lives” (Becker 1997) effect a rupture between our social status or role(s) and our embodied ontology (Turner 2008:252). This might be in terms of age, physical capacity, or in a more general recognition that change is needed if we are to realise the “good life” (1992:179).

Leavers often narrate their exit in terms “push” or “pull” factors, including the lure of a new life. Matters of vulnerability and risk are implicated in both of these factors and this has been discussed in chapter six in terms of reasons for leaving. A major push factor discussed has been a reluctance to return bodies to situations of extreme military risk. Those who have been close to military risk often describe it cautiously as a traumatic and enduring experience. In some cases push factors have been sufficiently strong to effectively remove choice and - though beyond the scope of this thesis - it is noted that death and serious injury are a continuing outcome of Army service - knowledge not lost

on exiting career soldiers. There is much mystique surrounding war, battle, and danger, and the difficulty veterans have in discussing this is well known. A kind of bond develops between battle-veterans and Glen seems to express a belonging to this distinctive group in this statement: “...you get a load of squaddies together (.....) they’ve been on operations, they’ve seen a certain amount of things - they almost have an elitist thing...” (Glen). Even so soldiers sometimes appear to find it hard to communicate their experiences to others who they believe will not understand and perhaps there are too few acceptable narratives available to soldiers to describe their experiences.

Overall, in the last two sections of this chapter, themes of vulnerability/risk and movement/availability have been constructed from the unanticipated talk of leavers that I have related to the body. In many ways, this sort of talk relates to central features of soldiering - readiness and risk - that are so integral to being a soldier; themes that might accompany many of the narratives in prior chapters. Moreover, matters of corporeality are present also in the talk of leavers in more mundane ways: this is in the form of a perhaps renewed recognition of the minutiae of Army corporeality which is discussed in the next section.

8.6 Appearance and Bearing

Bodies can signal compliance or dissent, both in form and in movement. Hockey (1986) describes how soldiers set up saluting traps to deliberately inconvenience passing officers with an eager succession of salutes that forced the officers into tedious and repetitious return gestures. Tradition has it that a soldier salutes the Queen and not the officer and this precludes the officer easy

escape from salutes that are suspected as insincere. A soldier might also time the delivery of a salute with sufficient delay to transfer the subservient gesture from soldier to officer, manufacturing a situation where the officer learns with embarrassment that he has just saluted a soldier.

The phrase “Appearance and Bearing” is a category on soldiers Confidential Reports, a form that equates to an annual appraisal. This category is one of a series of other qualities such as “Physical stamina” and “Ability to get things done”. This reflects a boundary free commitment that is measured not by job descriptions or categorical achievement but by subjective opinion of the whole person. The formal assessment of “Appearance and Bearing” is a highly subjective opinion, reached by a reporting officer and made upon an impression of what a soldier might look like, how they hold themselves, and connected to performance and movement. Reporting procedures differ for officers but are also focussed on subjective criteria. For those who fit comfortably into desired presentations, Army life is easier, but when an embodied presence signals a contrary form, a permanent sense of “drag” or hindrance is felt that taints interactions. Mike’s overweight body is a continuing problem. His frustration with this is shown below as he mitigates this “drag” by emphasising a physical capacity to carry weight quickly over long distances:

...people’s perceptions of you - (the way)they look at you. (..) I got once told because I wasn’t the most skinny chaps in the world my BSM (Battery Sergeant Major) at the time who is now a captain - he says you do not have the stature of a senior NCO (Non Commissioned Officer). I beg your pardon, (..) because I was (..) not as skinny, I couldn’t(But) I could tab (march quickly for long distances with weight). I couldn’t run, but I could tab, I could carry weight, but in the Army if

you can't run a mile and a half in that time (..) you are unfit, you're lazy. But they don't look at if you can carry weight for 8 miles in 2 hours and then carry on doing your job. They don't look at that, they look at that bench mark (..) - the BFA (Basic Fitness Assessment).

..... it got to a point where (..) on battery parade (..) where the (..)BSM used to say: all those sick, lame, and lazy fall out - sir, excuse me sir, are you talking to me? No, no, no, not you. In the end, I was getting sort of fed up with it until their attitude changed. We are not all sick, we are not all lame, (and) we are not all lazy. There's a reason why I am downgraded (medically) and if you happen to ask (..), bother to find out about your men, you might find out why I've been injured or why I've got a medical condition (Mike).

Ease of physical compliance is more common, however, and is probably an asset not appreciated:

... the Army was always an option because I think I was sort of a leadership was reasonably natural to me, I was captain at various levels of sport so the leadership thing presumably had been recognised by the school - teachers (..) - and the sort of physicality that I had. I used to play a lot of rugby (..) and that sort of lent itself to the military and therefore that's basically why I joined (Don).

Mundane matters of corporeality are everywhere in the Army. Bill is a newly promoted and exiting Warrant Officer Class II whose new status means he is addressed as "sir" by junior soldiers who now must physically acknowledge him in passing. This doesn't fit well with him since he generally struggles with the authority expected of a soldier of his rank. He can no longer walk around camp without ceremony:

..you are walking around camp and you get young signallers (equivalent to the rank of private) all bracing up (pushing chest out and putting arms down by side) oh morning sir and things like that, it gets a bit..... you can understand the reasons why it is..... it all comes back down to discipline and such like, but you think to yourself - I'm just the same as you (Bill).

These sorts of mundane physical norms appear to be brought into some degree of focus for departing soldiers, especially those connected with changes in appearance. Some seemed more sensitive to the corporeal constraints a military career continued to impose upon them:

... I am looking forward to just being a normal person (.....), just walking down the street with, I don't know, with nice nails ... (Katy);

I've got this burning desire to change the way I look, the way I dress, everything as well, and I don't know what that's about either (..). I want my hair long, I want to be a bit scruffy, maybe have a few piercings (laughs) (Samantha).

In the following interview transcription, this corporal is talking about how he is looking forward to leaving the Army and in discussing this mentions minor physical aspects that he has obviously considered:

..... you are going to wake up in the morning and (whispers) look in the mirror shaving - I won't have to do this soon, I'll probably still shave yes but I won't wake up and do it first thing in the morning. (...)

And you look down at your feet - oh look a little bit of dirt on my boots (laughs) so what, so what - know what I mean, when I come to work got to get it off oh yeah scrub it off. Yeah, It's just as I say, there's nothing major that annoys you it's all.....

... if you want to go to work not shaven, go to work not shaven as long as you go to work, be on time get the job done that's the main thing (Ted).

8.7 Summary

Over the course of lengthy careers all of these soldiers have absorbed and engaged forms of military corporeality that are inscribed in their bodies and

persons in noticed and unnoticed ways.¹¹⁵ This can be related to different and similar embodied experiences. For example basic and officer training provides a certain period of embodied “levelling” where all soldiers and officers undergo the same sort of physical training and challenge but varied roles, postings, and succeeding or failing bodies means that the early “levelling” of training makes way for a much broader spectrum of embodied career experiences. Embodied belonging, though more done than discussed, has been surprisingly present in the talk of most of these leavers in one form or another. This has been themed in this chapter in terms of movement and availability along with risk and vulnerability under a broader process in which leavers are beginning to reclaim their bodies from at least some of the more demanding and extreme aspects of Army life. In drawing out these themes from the data, the concept of vulnerability has been a surprising outcome suggestive that alongside identity processes of becoming are also quite obvious processes of unbecoming where prior and relevant identifications lose a footing and relevance in social relations. This chapter suggests that if identity is to be treated as a process involving the local manufacture of continuity then into this approach must be incorporated a central notion of embodied vulnerability. Career soldiers anticipating exit only rarely narrated during interview a sense of vulnerability but a focus on corporeality in this chapter is suggestive that this is a much more central dynamic than has thus far been generated from the data. This seems like a feature of treating identity as a becoming and a process and will be taken up in the next and concluding chapter.

¹¹⁵ The extent to which this alters across time once careers are over seems like an interesting research question.

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

Collectively, hundreds of years of Army life have been experienced by the soldiers interviewed in the course of this research. This includes 53 operational tours, countless postings and exercises, and work at most levels and in all manner of roles, trades, and locations. The detailed texture of this sort of experience is varied and complex. Not only that, it incorporates events and activities of the most extreme kind. These are the kind of events not forgotten, and which sometimes ruin or end lives. Few can know what it is like to lead men to war in the Gulf, or how it feels to command an armoured personnel carrier that is attacked by a suicide bomber in Afghanistan. Nor do many know what it is like to make decisions that result in the death of your soldiers, or what it is like to repeatedly collect casualties from the battlefield in a helicopter continually at risk of attack from below. These are extreme circumstances, and further examples are available from these soldiers caught-up in modern warfare. There is the mother who endures bombings in Iraq while wondering what is she doing there? Is it really worth leaving her children for? There is the infantry soldier who lost six of his mates in some gritty fighting; and the clerk who no longer has to administer “these boys”. These are the sorts of experiences that are typically associated with why the services - and here the Army - need to be different (Dandeker 2002). They are deliberately and overtly connected with

developing personal characteristics and subjectivities that can cope and excel in such environments and give rise to a distinctive community somewhat separated from wider society.

Alongside such extremities are often very mundane experiences, even whole careers that raise questions both in the literature (Biderman 1964) and among leavers themselves (see chapter six) about just how distinctive it is to be a British soldier or officer. Even so, all career leavers who are exiting the British Army will need to find ways to develop or emphasise appropriate skills and characteristics associated with what they will do next. This research has been concerned with a small part of this important transitional process in a focus on the final twelve months of service. The aim has been to explore what is going on for these soldiers during this period as they begin to decide what they will do next. In regard to Army careers, meaning, understanding, and identity have formed the special focus of this work that sought to investigate the tricky interactions between person and Army service in relation to time. It has been consistently argued that identity is a process and a becoming that is continually made relevant because “the self-abstracted person” (Maines 1993:23), as connected to a narrated biography, is the means by which we have learned to make sense of ourselves and others. Reference to Ricoeur has shown that people exist in a state of continuous change that incorporates a narrative ordering of discordant events into a coherent whole that is a story or range of stories that form the basis of a moral self with which (with whom) a person can identify. These sorts of routine processes of identity are especially noticeable when external Army relations are already changing in anticipation of complete

separation. For individuals, the significant event of Army exit needs to be understood and incorporated into the projection of self into the mostly unknown future. As the end draws nearer, military exit seems not so much a significant event but rather a temporal point that comes to act as a perspective, or quite static vantage point, from which narratives are adopted and formed so as to mesh a known life before with a lesser known life after. To understand is to explain more (Ricoeur 1984:x) and this, it is argued, takes a narrative form that though generally focussed on practical events is implicated in identity dilemmas as leavers are forced to consider who and what they have been and will become. Although narrating identity has been my predominant concern, it has been important also to include embodied, reflexive, and habitual dimensions of lengthy Army service that though often concealed from narrative notice have the potential to surface owing to the liminality of Army exit.

One of my hopes for this research has been that I could use the concept of identity to explore the intriguing relationship between social relations and people. In this regard, there has been success and shortcoming. Unfortunately, narratives of exit do little justice to career experiences and the challenges of capturing the experiential richness of Army life are compounded by my methodological reliance on narrative constructions during interview. Nevertheless, the combination of the work of Mead and Ricoeur provided a useful theoretical approach to the topic of Army exit.

9.2 General Orientations towards Army Exit

Long term soldiering involves a persisting and sentient belonging that is still fairly intact during the final year of service when a soldierly “us” is frequently contrasted with a civilian “them”. Indeed, identity projections long into the future sometimes retain this sense of difference as if an indelible feature of self such is the tenacity of some form of identification with the properties associated with soldiering. Even the most “damaged” or detached leavers seem not to reject the organisation perhaps because to do so is also to spurn themselves or at least the characteristics that they have come to value.¹¹⁶ Impending Army exit “energizes” (Charles Lemert, cited in Elliot 2008:22) matters of identity for all leavers, albeit often in very indirect ways. Army exit is also associated with degrees of general anxiety and excitement seemingly connected with the need to contemplate what to do next, together with some social discomfort.

A small number of final-year soldiers stand out as at odds with “normal” Army expectations and seem already to be tackling substantial change. This is because they have been injured, are overweight, depressed, struggling with motherhood or just failing to find a desirable continuing sense of self in their roles as soldiers or officers. All leavers are potential contenders for this “at-odds” group for whom daily Army life has either ceased¹¹⁷ or persistently fails to support the person they want to be. A kind of continuous social drag brings

¹¹⁶ For example, although John’s regiment responded poorly to his depression he transferred his allegiance to a previous regiment, noting that instead they are his “true friends”. This protected his belief in the Army qualities he admired (such as “looking after their own” and loyalty) and allowed John - despite accusations of “pulling-the-wool” - to concur with others that, overall, his career had been a good one that was worthwhile and mostly enjoyable.

¹¹⁷ For example those who are unfit to work and are on what used to be called the “Y List” which is an administrative category used to describe their absence from work.

immediate irritation. Here, change cannot be deferred, ignored or denied, and prompts abrupt and challenging narration. This connects with Mills' (1940:906) view that people are most aware of the self when practical endeavours are frustrated. Less frustration and immediate discomfort, however, is associated with the majority late leavers ("full-22", "full-16", and "limit-34") who are still largely content and functioning as soldiers. Their narrative efforts are a mostly anticipatory and forward-looking feature of varying degrees of vigour. Often, early civilian life is a distant and youthful memory and this shows in some naive portrayals of the sorts of jobs they will enter; their perceived difference, and the mark that they expect to make. Some however are completely overwhelmed by choices and work hard to try to define their vast and unknown civilian future. Different again is another group whose general orientation to exit (noted in chapter seven) is inherited in their chosen and dissident act to leave the Army early, rejecting available ongoing careers. Here, immediate discomfort is mild owing to a continued fit with Army relations and a sense of control found in the idea that they drive their own exit. Paradoxically, sometimes these leavers also feel that the Army has changed them for good and for the better, instilling a sense of soldierly superiority and a capacity to get things done that they deliberately take and sell to civilian employers¹¹⁸. Altogether, three general orientations to exit are prevalent in the soldiers that I have interviewed: 'pressing discomfort', 'routine anticipation', and 'self-directed'.

¹¹⁸ For example, Andy's swift and seamless move into a management position seems a probably quite common experience. This an argument also forcibly made by McDermott (2007) based on significant empirical data.

9.3 Distance and Awareness

Overall, the declared task of the pre-exit period is to decide what next to do and to make plans. This involves some degree of “letting-go” and the creation of a kind of “soldier-past” where oneself is recognised as distant from past events or personal characteristics (see chapter eight). The falling away of Rachel’s strict attitude towards her soldiers (chapter six) and Tim’s disbelief that he was ever a “stiff-upper-lip-sergeant major” (chapter eight) are examples of this process that seems to involve more extreme or embodied aspects of soldiering. This sort of distancing connects with thinking of oneself in different future scenarios of employment, motherhood, and family and seems a much less dramatic process than Jolly’s “disengagement” (1996:158) which involves disentanglement from social relations that is not yet occurring for most of these leavers who generally “soldier-on” until the end - less the extremities.

Overall, leaving the Army is a practical quest for a desired lifestyle that involves a hermeneutic process that tugs and alters identity in a jerky relationship between living and narrating as novelty challenges habit. It is fair to say that these soldiers can never be the same again. Awareness of this is varied and depends, it seems, on the (often rapidly) changing circumstances of the “species present” (Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983:161) and on general orientations to exit mentioned above. For example, William is intensely aware of his (disintegrating) Army identity as a result of some immediately uncomfortable experiences of “I” including feeling thoroughly at odds with his peers (see chapter six, seven, and eight). But on the contrary, Ian’s cautious

and “ordinary” aspirations hold off “otherness” to postpone significant threat to a known self until he has stopped work (see chapter seven).

Regular use of words such as “moulded”, “shaped”, and “institutionalised” suggest that many leavers are aware that marks of their special community are within and upon them. This internalised “set of dispositions that are inseparably mental and physical” (Wacquant 2004:95) is discussed in chapter eight and forms a kind of inscribed and habitual element to soldiering.¹¹⁹ In a similar vein Polkinghorne (1988:150) notes that “for the major part of daily life a person’s self concept is raised, edited, and implemented preconsciously, at the prelinguistic level of emotion and “felt” disposition”.¹²⁰ Higate (2000a; 2001) too emphasises unthinking processes among some homeless ex-military that seems to involve a gradual erosion of the gap between stimulus and response (see chapter three) where the “I” acts in a “ready stock” of familiar ways. Higate uses the term “unconscious groundings” and relates this to masculinity.¹²¹ This connects also to habit and character (Ricoeur 1992:118-125), discussed in chapter three, that conceals from self and others preceding innovation.

Habitual and reflexive forms of self however can be undone. Identity displays may be credited or discredited (Goffman 1971:245) and unexpected interactions

¹¹⁹ This is illustrated by the act of standing to attention described in chapter eight and also in the author’s description of how he heard and experienced the words of Don in chapter four.

¹²⁰ Emotion, instinct, and habit are aspects of Army identity worthy of further attention beyond this thesis. Holmes (2010) also connects emotion to reflexivity in interesting ways.

¹²¹ The gendered nature of identity has not really featured in this thesis even though it is a quite significant aspect of identity. This is because it has received substantial recent coverage, e.g. (Barrett 1996; Woodward 1998; Woodward 2000; Higate 2000a; Higate 2001; Higate 2003; Hockey 2003; Regan-de-Bere 2003; Higate and Firestone 2004; Woodward and Winter 2004; Woodward and Winter 2006; Woodward and Winter 2007) .

can surface these habitual features. This is why the three general orientations to exit, above, are important in the degrees to which local “otherness” is experienced in the pre-exit period. Selfhood - ipse - understood here as will, agency and orientation finds a stability expressed in idem that in the last year of service is for most only just beginning to slip from an overlapping. For the leaver, however, although they talk about life beyond the Army they do so mostly by projecting forward the person they are today into imagined new environments. This is a self objectified in “ideational processes” (Mead and Murphy 1959:76) and may, for some, be problematic. If identity is a process; a being and a becoming and “never a final or settled matter” (Jenkins 1996:4) then the projected “soldierly” self described in detail in prior chapters is potentially fraught with trouble and may, in some cases, be associated with a sense of shock and alienation that some leavers experience in civilian life. As a practical and policy related side-bet I believe this issue of awareness could be addressed by increased civilian work placements, an argument also made by Tim who urged me to tell everyone I meet that they ought to do this. For balance, however it ought not to be forgotten that countless leavers appear to do well (Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005; McDermott 2007) and probably succeed in taking forward a soldierly self into reasonably compatible employments. On the whole, leavers view themselves as distinct and powerful agents bounded from relations and yet the argument of this thesis suggests otherwise.

9.4 The Trouble with Narrated Coherence

As partially known horizons draw closer, and as parts of known routine living recede into the past and are altered by processes of “mutual disengagement”

(Ebaugh 1988:181), the limits of imagining ones future self in past-based projections cannot be ignored (notwithstanding some changes owing to prominent ventures). The rupture of exit to self is potentially significant but seems de-emphasized by routine procedures, personal expectation, and progressive stories where discordant events are brought into concordance (Ricoeur 1992). Individuals appeal to their own sense of self-efficacy and continuity to tackle the challenge of exit. In many cases they have been waiting for this moment for years. But, it is from within still supportive social relations that these approaches are formed and exit is framed - both formally (see chapter five) and informally. Bounded and “capable” (McCarthy 2007:106) selves generally approach exit as an opportunity, a much awaited release from pressures wearing thin or as a means to a perceived freedom from the constraints of service often as flippant as hair style, clothing, or piercings or as significant as wanting to be with family, have a baby, or to circumvent military risk.

This positive and practical orientation seems vital for negotiating Army exit because despite some well worn employment routes there are few soldier-shaped social spaces into which to go. Additionally, if, as I suggest, identity is a becoming there is much narrative work yet to be done when new social relations are eventually encountered. Until then, however, a small number of leavers work to re-invent themselves, a larger proportion focus on the safety of housing, employment, and satisfying family aspirations, and a very small number must tackle past trauma. Probably they think that the past is stable leaving them to concentrate on their various future ventures. But, for the pre-

exit soldier on the verge of a new life, the validity of the past seems just as unstable and vulnerable as the future (this relates to Maines, Sugrue et al. 1983). An intersubjective view of identity suggests that the past also is partially beyond the individual not only in terms of “reseeing” (Strauss 1969:67) but also because in future interactions different meanings can be given to a soldierly past that create new and so far unencountered subject positions that have to be negotiated - this is compounded by the variety of different Army trades, roles, and careers and it too is compounded by the altering levels of identification with soldiering, ranging from “squaddie-scum” to “transmogrified”. It seems possible that those who align with “squaddie-scum” beliefs or consider themselves untouched by Army service are possibly most vulnerable to change when the scaffolding that supports their perceived impartiality is removed. Those who openly discuss themselves as changed by service are at least aware.

Again, the benefits of a pre-exit civilian work placement would help leavers defamiliarise themselves with some of the unique properties of Army dynamics that have slipped from notice into habitual and sedimented aspects of character. By way of a civilian placement Tim could talk in the pre-exit phase in more realistic terms about matters of difference. Contrary to many who describe civilian life as a place for slowing down, Tim notes that temporary colleagues in his placement employment appeared harsher than his Army ones in what from a military perspective is poor man-management.¹²² He notes too altered dynamics where money replaces people as paramount. Even so, Tim is proud

¹²² A well used Army term that is clearly gendered.

to survive this new world and cites encouraging words from the staff as a measure of his success. In typical Army style he points to his mouth and says “you’ve only one of these but two of these (ears)” and again urges me to tell other leavers to listen and learn more than they speak. I am on the verge of overstepping my data at this point and ought to declare that I have drawn on my own post-exit experience to make some of these recent points. A well known anecdotal statement in Army circles is of the (mostly) senior non-commissioned officer who cannot adjust to being just another face in the crowd. No longer the Regimental or Company Sergeant Major these people are deemed lost - the sad extreme; but often, like many stereotypes there is perhaps more in this than most admit. My own thought is that this is related not so much to power and status but to the evaporation of an acknowledged and known past. One of the greatest shocks of leaving the Army is no longer being known and when a person is not known, others have to draw on available information to fill in the gaps. Limited general experience of Army lives can result in some negative and inaccurate responses to a prior soldier status and it can be disconcerting for example to find oneself witness to conversations condemning soldiers. Recent interest (Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2003; Iverson, Nikolaou et al. 2005; Dandeker, Wessely et al. 2006) in the fate of veterans along with government initiatives (Browne and Ainsworth 2008) that seek to raise the status of ex-soldiers seem a step in the right direction, but still more is needed to minimize the chasm of Army (military) exit.

The trouble with a narrated and coherent identity is its inherent vulnerability concealed behind perceived and narrated continuity. Vulnerability has been found not just as an imbedded feature of a narrated identity but also as a kind of occupational hazard created by the unusual and exceptional need to witness and face death and suffering. Unsurprisingly this has found expression in narratives of survival (for one's family) or in decisions to leave. Even so, I would be hard pressed to find a more concrete belief in a stable self than among career soldiers whose individual dependency and commitment to a cause above their own (Ricoeur 1992:268) is taught and developed amid an organisational need for accountability and decisive action. Meaning and moral worth are granted or denied in social relations and I now wonder if the reconciliation of pre and post-exit identity is a mostly unattainable endeavour in this anticipatory phase. Perhaps a good deal of substantial preparatory narrative effort is wasted energy?

9.5 Reflections and Concluding Remarks

In these closing paragraphs of my thesis, I would like to reflect a little on the complete research process. I began this research in 2007 with questions formed soon after my own discharge. These questions are described in chapter four and emphasise processes of agency and individual (but intersubjective) meaning making. My approach is almost certainly implicated in my own experiences¹²³ although I do not agree - nor identify with - many of the individual assertions that are made by the leavers throughout. Overall, my focus on the pre-exit

¹²³ I have already discussed my influence, in chapter four, in terms of the co-construction of narrative.

phase has been a useful but limiting methodological decision that was made in the earliest planning stages. It has helpfully restricted the scope of this research into a manageable form and has achieved a good deal of data from career soldiers who are still thoroughly embroiled in an Army environment - just the sort of access that can be difficult to achieve. This has generated many narratives that I suspect would have not been possible with other approaches - such as retrospective interviewing of ex-soldiers for example. But there are some small problems with confining the work to this period. Although, of course, the resultant work has merit in itself, it is more limited in the contribution it can make to the important wider social issue of how soldiers adjust to civilian life. In this regard, I can only surmise or project likely or possible transition outcomes that are no less risky than the soldiers' own life projections. The unavoidable question that arises as this work comes to an end is what happens next for these leavers? Clearly, this can't be answered and this is a lack that is integral to the research design and represents a limiting feature that needs to be acknowledged. Probably this is most apparent in regard to the practical utility of this work as it stands although I have committed to write for the Ministry of Defence a short management-style report that will be practical in its focus. Moreover, in further work, it would be possible to follow-up most of these leavers to discover what indeed does happen next and to compare much discussed anticipation with realisation.

When I coded the data, I wanted to describe properties associated with being a soldier and to explore what occurs during transition. I began this first stage of analysis in a theme-based way, trying to enliven the research questions with

grounded data. Now the work is over, and I look back, I can see that I re-ordered these code-based concepts and themes in a case-based manner. This style of analysis and writing contributes to the integrity of the individual person compatible with my own experience (chapter four) and with my theoretical framework (chapter three). Even in the face of the most challenging threats, coherent selves are manifest in unequivocal assertions by those involved. My approach to this research, viewed in hindsight, creates the conditions for the processes I seek - for example, my interviewing (and my questions) invited biographical style answers where between the researcher and leaver various presentations of self are made relevant, possibly closing down other versions judged by the leaver as not relevant to the setting. While I am confident that this is a process of understanding common to persons tackling life and change generally I have already noted in chapter four that perhaps I now know something that they (leavers) don't. This is on two counts. First, I have three years post-Army experience and, second, I have studied and researched the topic. From this new and privileged position I feel somewhat drawn to an emphasis that I didn't recognise when I began this work. As I think of what may face these leavers, I cannot help but increase my emphasis on the discursive formations of the places into which they will go. As these soldiers step into a civilian life, I believe that they will probably change as much as their destination requires of them and it is here that I find a post-structural emphasis on "discursive practices" so much more relevant than I did at the beginning of this work since, quite disturbingly, all of these leavers are about to step into new grids of meaning and though not empty vessels the post-exit task will be

to discover how much of a prior and desired self can be made relevant and made to work.

It is difficult to trace precisely how, and in what ways, my own experiences have shaped this research, although I have tried to tackle this in chapter four. In these closing pages I have drawn more on my own post-exit experience but, on the whole, I believe that this is useful especially at the end, when it is logical to think about what will become of these soldiers. There is an already defined dynamic regarding the unusual and relatively extreme circumstances of my own post Army experience since few leavers seem likely to enter activities as isolated as those of the PhD researcher and so it is important to take this into consideration when interpreting my comments about what may happen post-exit for these soldiers. My own view is that the extremity of my circumstances (e.g. the absence of significant new employment relations and career routines and responsibilities noted in chapter four) provides insight into some of the processes that I suspect others will face. So my own experiences of occupying some wholly unfamiliar “subject positions” thoroughly at odds with anything I could have anticipated in the pre-exit period seems applicable also to these leavers. It is in this regard, in particular, that I acknowledge “discursive practices” where no room exists for the sorts of identity projections that many of these soldiers discuss. I cannot conjure this idea from out of nowhere and I argue that if it has come from my own unique position then this is a position worth some notice, albeit a kind of reflexive hunch.

I would like to say a few words about my theoretical framework that has steered a middle road between self-as-substance and self-as-illusion. This combination of Mead and Ricoeur has underscored important processes of identity formation that are otherwise difficult to notice. Retaining a sense of the centrality of “self” reflects both local understandings and the emphasis of the symbolic interactionist. The different accounts of exiting soldiers described in this thesis, have involved narrative effort towards the continuance of self. The “concreteness” of the self arises not from inner substance but from “local accountability structures” such that the context provides “frameworks within which actors and actions are defined or define themselves in circumstantially relevant terms with reference to situated values” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994:699). This theoretical approach does acknowledge poststructural forces of “(d)ecenteredness, polysemy and difference” (Gubrium and Holstein 1994), discussed in chapter three, but finds in individuals a capacity and habit to order experience around a central character of life.

This theoretical framework has guided my approach to the topic and data. It has helped to challenge my own thoughts about self and society and it has shaped my ideas about the different ways that leavers might approach, understand, and narrate exit and themselves. Mead’s insistence on the centrality of time, the species present, and the continuous interaction between the “I” and the “me” have underpinned this work to highlight the interplay between action, narration, and understanding from which the interview setting cannot be excluded. More widely, this applies well to the way that individuals tackle change, often from beneath a veneer of apparent continuity and

sameness. This constant, mostly unnoticed, construction of meaning that draws into the present moment the past and future is a routine process that is “energized” (Charles Lemert cited in Elliot 2008:22) at times of change, crisis, and novelty when individuals must decide what to do and find themselves with new experiences. Ricoeur’s (1992) concepts of the “good life” and the process of “emplotment” whereby discordant events can be brought into concordance is possibly the single most important process that is displayed by these soldiers intent on maintaining a desirable identity in the face of challenging events - both occurring and anticipated - and always in the context of a story about life.

This theoretical framework has helped me to break down the substantial self that individuals wish to present in interview and it has also helped to explain how the narratives co-constructed during interview might relate to the experience of ceasing to be career soldiers. The middle path between illusional and substantial selves created by this approach is achieved mostly by Ricoeur’s dual definition of identity as both ipse and idem and the idea of selfhood as invested in idem has been eminently relevant, albeit a complicated and sometimes slippery notion to apply. This issue of application is connected with the continuous challenge of identity as both subject and object and I am sure I have not exhausted the potential of the chosen theoretical framework that promises much more than has been achieved in this thesis.

Appendix 1: List of Army Ranks

(Abbreviations and appointments are shown in brackets)

Non-commissioned Ranks

Junior

Private, Gunner, Sapper (Pte,Gnr,Spr)

Lance Corporal (LCpl)

Corporal, Bombardier (Cpl, Bdr) - lowest rank in sample

Senior

Sergeant (Sgt)

Staff Sergeant (SSgt)

Warrant Officer Class II (WO2) (e.g. company sergeant major)

Warrant Officer Class I (WO1) (e.g. regimental sergeant major)

Commissioned Ranks

Second Lieutenant (2Lt)

Lieutenant (Lt)

Captain (Capt)

Major (Maj)

Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col)

Colonel (Col) - this is the highest rank interviewed

Appendix 2: Career Soldiers Interviewed October 2007 to July 2008

| Name | Rank | Cap Badge | Trade/Job | Gender | Type of Unit | Service Length (years) |
|-------------|--------------------------------|--|---|---------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Alf | Staff Sergeant | Royal Electrical / Mechanical Engineers | Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant | M | Y List (medical category) | 21 |
| Pete | Corporal | Royal Military Police | Police | M | Military Police | 21 |
| William | Major | Infantry | Infantry Officer | M | Infantry Training | 12 |
| Andy* | Sergeant | Royal Engineers | Geographic Specialist | M | Headquarters | 12 |
| Arthur* | Sergeant | Infantry | Infantry soldier | M | Infantry Battalion | 22 |
| Mark* | Staff Sergeant | Royal Logistic Corps/ Infantry | Supply Controller | M | Medical | 22 |
| Roger* | Warrant Officer Class II | Royal Army Medical Corps | Combat Medical Technician | M | Medical | 22 |
| Ian* | Warrant Officer Class II | Royal Logistic Corps | Driver | M | Signals | 22 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------|-------------------|--|--------------------------|---|---|----|
| Joanne | Corporal | Adjutant General's Corps | Military Clerk | F | Headquarters | 12 |
| Tim | Major | Royal Artillery | Welfare Officer | M | Artillery | 34 |
| John* | Staff Sergeant | Kings Royal Hussars | Tank Commander | M | Y List (medical category) | 21 |
| Mike | Bombardier | Royal Artillery | Gunner | M | Royal Artillery | 22 |
| Lisa* | Major | Adjutants Generals Corps | Education Officer | F | Headquarters | 18 |
| Sarah | Bombardier | Royal Artillery | Gunner | F | Artillery | 12 |
| Ted | Corporal | Royal Logistic Corps | Driver | M | Logistics | 22 |
| Glen | Sergeant | Army Air Corps | Helicopter Gunner | M | Air Corps | 12 |
| Des | Staff Sergeant | Royal Electrical / Mechanical Engineers | Instrument Technician | M | Electrical / Mechanical Engineers | 22 |
| Rob | Sergeant | Royal Logistic Corps | Driver | M | Logistics | 22 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---|-----------------------|----|
| Spike | Corporal | Army Air Corps | Helicopter Gunner | M | Air Corps | 12 |
| Nigel | Lance Corporal | Infantry | Infantry Soldier | M | Infantry Battalion | 12 |
| Don | Major | Infantry | Infantry Officer | M | Headquarters | 18 |
| Katy | Corporal | Royal Artillery | Sound Ranger | F | Artillery | 12 |
| Sam-antha* | Staff Sergeant | Adjutant General's Corps | Welfare Worker | F | Specialist Welfare | 22 |
| Bryan | Colonel | Royal Army Medical Corps | Admin Officer | M | Hospital | 34 |
| Ed* | Corporal | Royal Logistic Corps | Driver Tank Transporter | M | Logistics | 22 |
| Bill | Warrant Officer Class II | Adjutant General's Corps | Military Clerk/ Accountant | M | Regional Headquarters | 22 |
| Sean | Bombardier | Royal Artillery | Gunner | M | Artillery | 12 |
| Rachel* | Captain | Royal Logistic Corps | Administrative Officer | F | Logistics | 10 |

Key: * = those who were interviewed twice.

Appendix 3: Background Information Sheet

Research on Officers and Soldiers During the Resettlement Period

Contact Details and Administration:

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Name: | |
| Telephone: Home: Work: Mobile: | |
| E-mail address: | |
| Home address: | |
| Current Unit: | |
| Work/Unit address: | |
| Preferred interview location | |
| I understand the purpose of the research as described to me (described below) and that my participation will be confidential. | Signature required here: |

Service Details

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Date of joining: | |
| Age on joining: | |
| Date of expected last day: | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Do you expect to be posted or deployed before discharge? If so give details: | |
| Official reason for leaving: | |
| List Regiments and/or Corps that you have served in: (e.g RLC, AGC..) (Often there will be only one) | |
| Employment specialism | |
| If you have completed operational tours, list the place, dates and the job you did: | |
| Is there a possibility that you will be offered continued service? | |
| Do you qualify for an immediate pension? | |

Family and Close Relationships

| | |
|--|--|
| How would you best describe your family, relationship situation? E.g long term partner, single, married etc | |
| Do you have children – If so please list sex and age(s) only | |
| It would be helpful to talk to family members and/or those close to you about what they have noticed in you in your last 2 years of service. Is there someone who might be willing to do this? | |

Description of Research

For career officers and soldiers, the last year of service is a period in which the resettlement system invites you to consider your future employment. It can both be an exciting and anxious period and there are decisions to be made and lots to think about. This research aims to build a description of how soldiers experience this 'resettlement' period and the personal journeys that they undergo.

The research also aims to consider the "process" of discharge in terms of "identity" or how soldiers view themselves. This is intended to consider how soldiers deal with discharge under different circumstances and it is expected that there will be both positive and negative aspects to this.

Thank you

Your agreement to do this research is very much appreciated especially so during a period of change. **You can be sure that anything discussed is entirely confidential** and your name will never be revealed; you will be referred to as, for example, a 'RLC SSgt with 22 years service'.

Appendix 4: Initial Interview Guide

(original note format)

INTRODUCTION:

- build rapport - interview about 1 to 1.5 hrs
- background Information sheet - explain purpose / confidentiality
- not necessarily looking for problems / difficulties just changes that are occurring as you come to leave the Army. Has to be said, however, that it is fairly common to have some difficulty with some aspects of leaving since it can be a big transition.
- explain own situation very briefly and “give permission” to say things beyond the “party line”.
- it’s ok to talk about personal/family matters, but not expected.

FIRST THOUGHTS:

When did you first have thoughts about either wanting to leave or realising that you had to leave? How did you come to that decision / realisation? Are there any issues you struggled (are struggling) with?

- turning points
- tipping the balance
- push and pull
- Army v family
- enough is enough
- doubt and anxiety
- just a job or more?

FINDING ALTERNATIVES:

What sort of things have you thought about in deciding what else you might do?

Are you still working on this?

- side bets?
- how do you decide what to do?

- doubt and anxiety

THE RESETTLEMENT SYSTEM:

How are you finding the resettlement process so far?

- choices
- timeframes
- contradiction

SOLDIERING ON:

How is life for you right now while managing being a soldier and dealing with leaving? How often might you think about leaving?

- what do you tell people who ask about what you are going to do or why you are leaving? What response do you get from other soldiers, from civilians?
- have you had any thoughts that are new to you or different?
- does continuing to be part of the team / Unit / Regiment feel any different. Do you feel different to those around you?
- is there any change in how you see your bosses / leaders? How you relate to them?
- withdrawal, the team?
- fade away
- rattling inside yourself
- free floating

LOOKING BACK:

Now that you are leaving, do you look back over your career?

Are you glad you joined? Have you got what you joined for?

Do you feel you have been well compensated for all that you have contributed – has it been worth it, not just in money terms?

- what have I done? Why did I do it?

- qualifications
- for Queen and Country?
- moral code, loyalty
- I joined because...
- did you miss out on anything ?
- always felt a square peg in round hole?
- Operational tours – overstretch?
- burnout?
- denial
- any bitter feelings?

WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO BE:

When you look into a new future what do you see / feel?

- how do you imagine yourself in your new life?
- looking forward, glancing back?
- anxiety, excitement, resentment, compensated?
- I'll have to change?
- pay the mortgage? Fight and achieve?
- what is it to be a civvy – what are they like? Do you see yourself as different to civilians? If so, how?
- who defines who? soldier / civvy?

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

If I was to ask your partner (or close family/friend) what might she/he have noticed about you over this period, what might they say?

- might other family members have a view?
- what do they (does she/he) feel about you leaving - has she /they / he always felt this way?

PRE-SERVICE LIFE:

What was life like before you joined the Army?

Appendix 5: The Resettlement Process

(Information has been reproduced here from a leaflet created by a local Army Education Centre)

STAGE 1: Interview with Unit Resettlement Officer (URO). Within the unit lines the URO should be prepared to give the following advice:

- Career prospects in the Army
- Retention
- Civilian housing
- Pension matters
- Long service Advance of Pay Scheme
- Final Tour of Duty Package

STAGE 2: Interview with Individual Education & Resettlement Officer (IERO). Given in unit lines or in local Education Centre depending on local arrangements / circumstances. Advice will be given on:

- Financial support for resettlement activity
- Academic preparation for a second career
- Personal development
- Financial support for Further Education
- Children's Education
- Health matters

Discussion will also take place on topics on which to seek further guidance. These can include:

- Pensions and Preserved Pensions
- Commutation of Pension
- War Disability Pensions

These services provided by the Career Transition Partnership:

Career Counselling

Attendance on briefing and seminars

The format of Resettlement Training

Job Finding

STAGE 3: Interview with Career Transition Partnership (CTP). Given at Regional Resettlement Centre. The Career Transition Partnership are tasked with:

Career Counselling

Giving advice on Briefings and Seminars

Giving advice on Resettlement Training

Giving advice on Job Finding

Career Transition Workshop

Self Employment / Small Business Awareness

Small Business Start-up

Half day seminars on CV writing, interview techniques, networking and making direct approaches to employers.

Housing

Financial and Pension Advice.

Resettlement Training may be selected from:

Resettlement Centres

Civilian sponsored

Civilian training attachments

Individual Resettlement preparation time

A mix of the previous four methods

STAGE 4: Attend Briefings and Seminars

STAGE 5: Start Civilian employment

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