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‘Remembering with Advantages’: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War, 1950-2010

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Second World War, numerous British veterans of that conflict have made the decision to publish a memoir of their military experiences on the front-line. This thesis investigates the contribution of these sources to the historical record of warfare between 1939 and 1945. Contending that these documents reveal something unique and important about the ways in which former combatants participated in and interpreted battle, the thesis focuses on two core research questions. First, it explores what these narratives reveal about the experience and representation of combat, examining the interplay of the authors with the natural environments in which they operated, the machines with which they fought, the enemy they tried to kill, and the comrades with whom they served. Second, it inquires into the intention and function of these texts, assessing why and how they were created. In order to address these questions, this thesis draws on a wide pool of veteran memoirs, written by former front-line personnel from the RAF, Royal Navy and Army, and published since 1950. It also draws, where appropriate, on unpublished sources such as those to be found in the Archive of British Publishing and Printing at the University of Reading. Through these lines of inquiry, the thesis identifies the ways in which veterans lived, remembered, understood, and communicated their experiences of combat during the Second World War, and argues for the merit of the military memoir as a historical source.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Graeme,

I have read your manuscript with the greatest of interest. You have recorded your experiences in a way that is perhaps not possible in more formal histories, and, while not departing from the authenticity of events, by your personal reactions you have added an outstanding account of the human factors which are ultimately so important.[1]

In 1963, *My Sea Lady*, Graeme Ogden's memoir of wartime naval service, entered a fast-flowing tide of personal narratives published by British military personnel who fought in the Second World War. Throughout the seven decades since the end of that conflict, increasing numbers of these documents appeared in print and became cemented into what Graham Dawson has identified as a popular 'pleasure-culture of war' in Britain.[2] In 2015, many titles may still be readily procured from public libraries, airport lounges, high-street bookshops, and giant online booksellers, signifying that national interest in the 'People's War' as a subject of popular entertainment has yet to wane. Hitherto, the published military memoir's prominent cultural status as 'pleasure-reading' has arguably contributed to a scholarly neglect of these books. Yet as Rear-Admiral Rupert Sherbrooke's foreword to *My Sea Lady* articulates, they in fact pose a clear value to historians of war. As the senior naval officer recognised, by providing an account of the serviceman's 'personal reactions' to battle, the war memoirs of Second World War combatants proffer a singular and important insight into the multitude of 'human factors' which comprised the individual's experiences of frontline service between 1939 and 1945.[3]

This thesis examines the unique contribution of post-war published military memoirs to the historical record, contending that these are extremely valuable

[1] Rear-Admiral Rupert Sherbrooke, VC, foreword to *My Sea Lady: The Story of H.M.S. Lady Madeleine From February 1941 to February 1943*, by Graeme Ogden (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 9.
[2] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.
[3] As a former commander of Royal Naval destroyers during the Second World War, Sherbrooke was well-placed to comment upon the credibility of the memoirist's narrative of wartime duties as a convoy escort.

documents for the historian of the Second World War. In order to justify this claim, this study has been built around two core research questions. The first of these asks what the personal narratives of servicemen are able to reveal about the experience, interpretation and representation of combat between 1939 and 1945. The second probes the intention and function of these texts, exploring why and how they were created. These two questions buttress a detailed interrogation of the various modes in which British combatants of the Second World War recorded their experiences. Ultimately this study seeks to demonstrate that military memoirs operate as repositories of vital information about the ways in which former servicemen remembered, understood, and mediated their war. When prophesying the soldiers' creation of memories of Agincourt, Shakespeare's Henry V sagely observed, 'Old men forget: yet all shall be forgot,/ But he'll remember with advantages/ What feats he did that day.'[4] Shakespeare alluded here to the veterans' recollections of fighting, and the meanings that they later ascribed to battle. The same process of remembering with 'advantages', of finding order and significance in combat, drove the creation of the Second World War veterans' stories, regardless of whether they were written five, ten or sixty years after the events narrated. The war memoir therefore 'records the remembered war that persists in the mind through a lifetime.'[5] Correspondingly, this study seeks to shift academic focus upon war memoirs further into the terrain of veteran studies. A thorough scrutiny of the accounts of ex-frontline British servicemen, published since 1950, provides the source material for this investigation of the content, intention and function of Second World War memoir. Although there are potentially thousands of unpublished memoirs lying in attics across Britain, or in the vaults of the Imperial War Museum, this study argues that the published narratives are worthy of special attention. Whilst these documents are inherently works of private memory, by virtue of the act of publication the military memoir represents the veteran's decision to broadcast his story and engage in some way with wider cultural, scholarly or public representations of 'his' conflict. As the generation of Second World War veterans dies

[4] William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, (ed.) W.J. Craig (London: Magpie Books, 1993), p. 491.
[5] Samuel Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (eds.) Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 211.

out, it is more vital than ever to appreciate and preserve their records of experience, and to understand how they were designed to operate within the public domain.

By recognising and demonstrating the importance of these particular veteran narratives, this project aims to fill a discrete historiographical lacuna. There is presently a surprising lack of any purpose-built, in-depth study of the accounts published by British combatants of the Second World War. Until comparatively recently, as Brian Bond bemoaned in 2008, military memoirs as a genre of war literature received little attention from historians, being generally approached from the perspective of literary criticism instead.[6] Nevertheless there is a small, but influential, extant body of scholarship, consisting of both literary and historical surveys, which has addressed Western military memoirs of the twentieth century. In 1975 Paul Fussell's seminal study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, marked the beginning of new scholarly attitudes towards war literature as it played a pivotal role in shaping understandings of the canon of First World War texts as part of a broader myth-making process. His analysis of the interplay between war, personal narrative and memory uncovered the ways in which British experience on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 was 'remembered, conventionalized and mythologized' in literary form.[7] As John Keegan noted, this approach proved 'revolutionary' to furthering scholarly understandings of war, as it showed that battlefield literature offered a vehicle for expressing collective experience.[8] Although Fussell's work dealt specifically with a limited corpus of 'trench literature' from the First World War, the author's ideas provided a starting point for my own inquiry into the military memoirs of the Second World War. As will be seen, the veteran-memoirists of the latter conflict also engaged in a proprietorial form of myth-making in order to shape scholarly, cultural and official remembrance of 'their' war.

In mapping the scholarship of military memoirs, the work of Samuel Hynes provides the next landmark text in this field. *The Soldiers' Tale* (1998) makes a staunch

[6] Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. xiii.
[7] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. ix.
[8] Susanna Rustin, 'Hello to all that', *The Guardian*, 31 July 2004, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jul/31/featuresreviews.guardianreview10 (accessed 28 October 2014).

effort to survey British and American servicemen's memoirs from the First and Second World Wars, and the Vietnam conflict of the 1960s and 1970s. Expanding upon the limited number of sources interrogated by Fussell, Hynes insisted upon the importance of privileging the narratives of the 'one-book men', authors who told their story and then dropped quietly back into anonymity again.[9] Despite this laudable objective, a serious drawback of Hynes's study is his over-reliance upon the more 'literary' and self-conscious popular texts from the Second World War, which does little to rescue the critical mass of military memoirs still consigned to relative oblivion. Nevertheless, his work proved highly valuable to this investigation, as his is currently the only study which specifically explores the accounts of Second World War servicemen whilst considering some of the formal qualities of the military memoir. *The Soldiers' Tale* also provides a useful reminder that war memoirists are invariably a self-selecting group. Correspondingly, this thesis contends that attention must be paid to the reasons why these authors, whether they were prolific writers or 'one-book men', made a decision to pen, and make public, a narrative of their combat experiences.

More recently, Yuval Noah Harari has become something of an authority on the genre of military memoirs, tracing these narratives as far back as the Middle Ages, and his arguments and insights into the genre necessarily occupy an important place in any methodological approach to these texts.[10] Yet in his history of Renaissance military memoirs, he frequently weighs them against twentieth-century soldiers' narratives in order to exhibit the distinctive design in structure and content of the earlier accounts. Whilst this method leads him to draw a number of valuable conclusions about Renaissance testimonies, it also results in a collection of rather frustrating generalisations about the later personal narratives of combat. For instance, he makes a broad claim that 'Scholars studying twentieth-century war memoirs have reached the almost unanimous conclusion that… soldiers have become disillusioned

[9] Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. xv.
[10] Yuval Noah Harari, *Renaissance Military Memoirs: War, History, and Identity, 1450-1600* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004); 'Martial Illusions: War and Disillusionment in Twentieth-Century and Renaissance Military Memoirs', *Journal of Military History*, 69:1 (January 2005), pp. 43-72; 'Military Memoirs: A Historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the Late Modern Era', *War in History*, 14:3 (July 2007), pp. 289-309; *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); 'Armchairs, Coffee, and Authority: Eye-Witnesses and Flesh-Witnesses Speak about War, 1100-2000', *Journal of Military History*, 74:1 (January 2010), pp. 53-78.

with war, and their own image has partly changed from that of heroes to that of victims.'[11] It is difficult to fit Second World War memoirists into this model of 'disillusionment', as the majority of these authors displayed considerable pride in their wartime achievements. Furthermore, Harari's observation that twentieth-century soldiers' life-writing confirms the dominant Western cultural image of 'war as hell', in which the combatant invariably feels victimised, ignores the fact that the British memoirist of 1939-1945 very rarely identified himself as a victim.[12] Certainly, war is *sometimes* represented as hellish in these narratives, but generally, the 'Good War' discourse, as propounded by Studs Terkel, colours these accounts with a belief that their sacrifices were all worthwhile, a sentiment often notably absent in combat memoirs of the First World War and Vietnam.[13] Clearly, the corpus of Second World War combatant memoirs begs closer scrutiny as a stand-alone sub-genre of military life-writing.

The aforementioned studies of modern military life-writing have gestured towards the research aims of this thesis, but it is evident that the voices of the British veteran-memoirists of the Second World War collectively remain under-researched. It is noticeable that where these books have been used in the extensive terrain of Second World War historiography, they tend to be mined primarily for anecdotal evidence about the experience of war. For example, John Ellis's excellent exploration of 'the sharp end' of this war makes use of the accounts of combatants, as does Martin Francis's equally commendable cultural history of the wartime RAF, yet both studies pay little critical attention to these memoirs as historical sources in their own right.[14] Moreover, the war memoir has become a valuable fund of material for authors at the thriving commercial end of the historical publishing market. For instance, the personal narratives of Second World War veterans have been heavily, and uncritically, drawn upon in works of popular history, such as Patrick Bishop's *Fighter Boys* (2003), which might implicitly suggest that, in some quarters at least, the military memoir remains

[11] Harari, 'Martial Illusions', p. 43.
[12] Harari, *Renaissance Military Memoirs*, p. 21.
[13] Studs Terkel, *'The Good War': An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).
[14] John Ellis, *The Sharp End of War: The Fighting Man in World War II* (London: David & Charles, 1980); Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

identified more as a fount of historical entertainment than an appropriate source for more scholarly works.[15]

Nevertheless, despite the lack of detailed analyses of these personal military texts of the Second World War, there are encouraging signs that memoirs of combatants in general are becoming increasingly recognised as important sources of historical evidence about war. Soldiers' narratives from the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the First World War, the Falklands War, and the Gulf War, have all attracted scholarly attention in the fields of literary criticism, history and human geography during the last decade. The works of Alex Vernon, Neil Ramsey, Catriona Kennedy, K. Neil Jenkings and Rachel Woodward, in particular, have made a significant contribution towards the promotion of military memoirs as an essential means of understanding the complex relationship between war, the soldier, and society.[16] Indeed, in a plea to 'rethink' the practice of military history, Jeremy Black affirmed that 'war memoirs constitute an important part of military history publishing'.[17] This was also recognised by Brian Bond in 2008, when he produced *Survivors of a Kind*, an analysis of British war memoirs spawned by the Western Front during the First World War, in which he approached these narratives from the perspective of a military historian. Crucially, he established that the long-term impact of the conflict upon combatants could be assessed through their personal narratives. He attributed his decision to explore these documents to an 'excellent pioneering' study by Hugh Cecil in 1995, who demonstrated that British fiction of the First World War posed considerable interest and value to the historian.[18] '[I]t seemed reasonable', reflected Bond, 'to assume that war memoirs would be at least of equal importance as historical sources.'[19] As this thesis sets out to prove, this was indeed a valid

[15] Patrick Bishop, *Fighter Boys: Saving Britain 1940* (London: HarperCollins, 2003).
[16] Alex Vernon (ed.), *Arms and the Self: War, the Military and Autobiographical Writing* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2005); Neil Ramsey, *The Military Memoir and Romantic Literary Culture, 1780-1835* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); K. Neil Jenkings and Rachel Woodward, 'Communicating War through the Contemporary British Military Memoir: The Censorships of Genre, State, and Self', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 7:1 (February 2014), pp. 5-17.
[17] Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p .42.
[18] Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, p. xiii; Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1995).
[19] Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, p. xiii.

assumption, and by investigating the British Second World War combatant's experience and reconstruction of battle, it hopes to rehabilitate further the military memoir as an essential tool in the war historian's kit.

Parameters of this Study

In order to achieve the aims of this research project, it was necessary to impose strict parameters upon the investigation. Ascertaining what 'counts' as a war memoir in order to distinguish a genre with discrete rules is a notoriously troublesome task, and in an essay tellingly titled 'No Genre's Land' Vernon highlights continuing ambiguities in the war memoir's identity.[20] Much effort has been expended, particularly in the realm of auto/biographical studies, in trying to define where memoirs fit into the spectrum of life-writing.[21] Within this field of critical discourse on auto/biography, there has been a good deal of discussion of an apparent need to discriminate between autobiography and memoir. However, excessive attention to the complex wrangles over precisely where the latter should be located on the continuum of ego-documents is arguably unhelpful in attempting to understand the narratives themselves. As Harari acerbically, but accurately, notes, 'From the perspective of military history, much of this debate is superfluous.'[22] Instead, he proposes his own useful framework for identifying criteria by which these military memoirs may be known:

(1) are synthetic narrative texts
(2) are written retrospectively
(3) are written to a considerable extent on the basis of personal memory
(4) deal with a considerable time-span
(5) have their authors appear as protagonists, and
(6) devote considerable attention to martial affairs in which their authors participated as combatants.[23]

[20] Vernon, 'No Genre's Land: The Problem of Genre in War Memoirs and Military Autobiographies', in *Arms and the Self*, pp. 1-40.
[21] For example, see Laura Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001); Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1960).
[22] Harari, 'Military Memoirs', p. 290.
[23] Ibid., p. 290.

To this might be added Hynes's primary criterion that a book constitutes a war memoir when it speaks with 'a voice that is stubbornly distinct, telling us what it was like, for *this* man, in *this* war.'[24] Abiding by these principles, this study does not therefore include texts from the extensive and nebulous hinterland of military life-writing, which includes co-authored narratives, personal testimony camouflaged as fiction, anthologies of testimony snipped from oral or published accounts, such as the *Forgotten Voices* series, or chapters on the war in larger autobiographical works. The criteria outlined above also informed the selection of individual war memoirs for integration into this research project as they helped to eliminate narratives which were written as a cursory outline of the memoirist's war, providing a simplistic factual record of experience without really describing the author's perceptions of battle or responses to combat. For example, Gordon Colquhoun's memoir of service with Bomber Command, *How Many for Breakfast?* (1997), gives very little information as to what the author thought or felt about his experiences.[25] Instead, he provides a 'whistle-stop tour' of his operational record in 1944, proffering almost no indication of where he flew or what the outcome of a raid was, few details of what he could see, hear or feel during an attack, or what emotions he experienced during and after an operation. Narratives such as this are thus excluded from in-depth interrogation in this study as they contain little of the meticulous introspection and reflection which characterise the most valuable post-war memoirs.

Important distinctions must also be drawn between wartime-published memoirs and their post-war counterparts. The RAF personal narratives published between 1939 and 1945 have been aptly labelled by Martin Francis as 'instant' memoirs, hurriedly written by men who were still on active service, and this description pertains equally to wartime accounts penned by personnel from the other services.[26] Although they are of course valuable in their own right, even without the constraints of official propaganda and censorship, these books differed considerably to those published in peacetime because they lacked the crucial reflective dimension which this thesis seeks to interrogate. Nevertheless, it is difficult to comment upon the

[24] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. xv.
[25] Gordon Colquhoun, *How Many for Breakfast?* (Seaton: Motoprint, 1997).
[26] Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 156.

post-war narratives without recognising their wartime antecedents. As Elizabeth Bruss observes, autobiography responds to what precedes and surrounds it at the time of writing.[27] Post-war and wartime published memoirs form a distinct genre of military life-writing, and so some awareness of the latter is essential to a study of the former. For this reason, Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* (1942), Nicholas Monsarrat's *Three Corvettes* (1945), Keith Douglas's *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), and Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead* (1946) will be drawn upon where necessary to explain or illustrate discussion of the post-war memoirs. The precise influence of these accounts upon their successors is rather more difficult to discern, although several of the post-war memoirists were clearly well-acquainted with the earlier narratives. For example, Stuart Hills's *By Tank into Normandy* (2002) announced that the author had thoroughly enjoyed reading Douglas's book as it contained 'some marvellous pen portraits' of mutual acquaintances and fellow officers.[28] Indeed, Hills claimed that 'if there is a better piece of prose writing about that war than *Alamein to Zem Zem*, then I have yet to read it.'[29] Similarly, former fighter pilot, Geoffrey Page, had met Richard Hillary whilst they were both hospitalised and recovering from severe burns at East Grinstead during the war. In an amicable exchange of insults, Page confirmed that he had read *The Last Enemy*, although he described its author as a 'supercilious bastard'.[30] Such open acknowledgement of familiarity with the work of the earlier memoirists is, however, rare in the post-war memoirs. Nevertheless, as this study demonstrates, the narratives of Hillary, Monsarrat, Douglas and Gibson frequently provide useful tools with which to unpick the post-war memoirs of aircrew, sailors and tank crew.

'War memoirs, like wine,' asserts Hills's *By Tank into Normandy*, 'do well to be kept in store for a while'.[31] In order to develop and sustain a clear focus on the contemplative nature of post-war veteran memoir, this study does not begin at the end of the war in 1945. Instead, it takes 1950 as its starting point. A number of reasons

[27] Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.166.
[28] Stuart Hills, *By Tank into Normandy* (London: Cassell, 2002), p.54.
[29] Ibid., p. 55.
[30] Geoffrey Page, *Shot Down in Flames: A World War II Fighter Pilot's Remarkable Tale of Survival* (London: Grub Street, 1999), p. 116. Previously published as *Tale of a Guinea Pig* (London: Pelham Books, 1981).
[31] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, p. 13.

informed the selection of this date as the first book-end of this research project, which subsequently draws upon memoirs published over the course of the next six decades. The years between 1945 and 1950 witnessed a turbulent transition from a wartime to a peacetime publishing climate, from which it is difficult to draw satisfactory conclusions about post-war military life-writing. First, many of the combat narratives which appeared in the late 1940s were frequently constructed in the same manner as the censored, and often overtly propagandised, wartime-published texts, perhaps because they too were often written during the war itself and left largely in their wartime-edited forms. This especially tended to be the case with posthumous publications, such as Guy Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead* (1946) and Keith Douglas's *Alamein to Zem Zem* (1946), but some living authors, such as Nicholas Monsarrat in his *Three Corvettes* (which was issued in October 1945), also did not revise the material they had drafted during the war.[32] Many combat narratives of the mid-to-late 1940s thus had a somewhat confused, hybrid, identity, and it is difficult to integrate them into a discussion of the character of military memoir as it began to emerge in the 1950s with greater distance from the war. Second, until 1950, many publishing houses were cautious about commissioning too many war-related titles. As an aspirant memoirist in the late 1940s, Robert Kee was disappointed to learn that various publishers were reluctant to accept large numbers of personal narratives written by former servicemen, since they felt that the British public were fed up with war and they expected that demand for these accounts would follow a similar trajectory to the period after the First World War, when a 'boom' in war books had taken almost a decade to occur.[33] With the end of paper rationing in 1949, however, publishers' precious supplies of paper were no longer restricted to a relatively narrow pool of titles deemed valuable to the nation's morale. Correspondingly, the publication lists gradually began to include an expanding variety of personal accounts which recounted experiences of war on many different fronts, and from the perspective of a multifarious array of combatants.

[32] Guy Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead* (London: Michael Joseph, 1946); Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem* (London: Editions Poetry, 1946); Nicholas Monsarrat, *Three Corvettes*, 10th ed. (London: Mayflower, 1972).
[33] Robert Kee, *A Crowd is Not Company* , rev. ed. (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 7.

Nevertheless, whilst the great range of military memoirs published by British veterans does offer a vast quantity of evidence about the diversity of frontline experiences, it also hinders cohesive investigation of these narratives and further streamlining of this source base is essential. The Second World War was somewhat 'messy' in terms of categorising service personnel as 'combatants', since transport and supply branches, such as the Royal Army Service Corps, were also trained in the use of weapons and frequently found that the front line moved to encompass them. This thesis employs a rather purist definition of 'combatant', focusing upon accounts written by servicemen whose primary martial function was to confront the enemy directly in battle. It thus focuses on the memoirs of infantrymen, tank crew, aircrew and sailors. Furthermore, for the sake of recovering and clarifying the 'ordinary' combatant's recollections of frontline experiences, this study does not include narratives penned by 'extraordinary' personnel; for instance, special forces soldiers who fought with the Special Air Service, Special Boat Service, Long Range Desert Group, Commandoes, nor other irregular units such as 'Popski's Private Army'. Nor does it focus upon the memoirs of POWs, or those who served in an intelligence capacity, as theirs are different tales yet again. The memoirs documenting the so-called 'forgotten' war in the Far East have also been excluded as the deeply racialized perceptions of the Japanese enemy that shape these texts render the veterans' representations of combat very different to those of their comrades who faced a German or Italian opponent. Nevertheless, a small number of narratives from across these omitted categories have been drawn upon for their useful comment upon the construction, intention and function of war memoir.

This research project thus maintains a firm focus on the memoirs of veterans who experienced 'the sharp end' of war as fighting men of junior or lower rank, serving with the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Fighter and Bomber Commands, armoured and infantry units within the British army, and the submarines and 'small ships' (destroyers, corvettes, and armed trawlers) of the Royal Navy (RN). Among each of these branches of the armed services, personal narratives most commonly cluster around defining wartime battles, campaigns, or theatres of war. For example, Fighter Command memoirs typically chronicle the Battle of Britain which took place in the summer and autumn of 1940, whereas Bomber Command narratives predominantly

relate the night-time strategic bombing campaign conducted by the crews of the 'heavy' four-engined Lancaster aircraft between 1942 and 1945. The Royal Navy's veteran-memoirists tend to relate tales of convoy escort duty and submarine wars in the northern waters of the North Sea, Atlantic and Arctic Circle. Army narratives of former infantrymen and armoured crew typically recount experiences of battle in key campaigns across North Africa between 1940 and 1943, Italy between 1944 and 1945, and north-west Europe between 1944 and 1945. It is on these areas of common ground that this thesis concentrates, exploring in detail similarities and differences in the veteran-memoirists' experience, understanding, and representation of these defining wartime events. It is thus from this body of personal narratives, constructed by men from all three services, that the primary source base for this study is drawn, consisting of some seventy RAF, RN and army memoirs in total.

The identification of these sources was underpinned by combing through the British National Bibliography (BNB), a catalogue of all the book titles released and distributed weekly and annually, which commenced in 1950. Regrettably, precise statistics for the overall numbers of published Second World War memoirs are extremely difficult to calculate, due to certain limitations within the BNB cataloguing system. It was the responsibility of individual publishers to supply their list of current and forthcoming titles to the BNB, and self-publishers and small publishing houses sometimes failed to fulfil this task. Additionally, due to the vagaries of the BNB's classification system, which underwent numerous changes after its inception, it seems that many books that were in fact memoirs were listed under other, unhelpfully broad, headings such as 'Second World War'.[34] Nevertheless, having conducted a prolonged search throughout the many volumes of the BNB printed since its introduction, it is

[34] The BNB's mixed use of the terms 'Biography', 'Personal Narrative' and 'British' also offered certain critical methodological challenges. Often these terms were applied misleadingly. On average, until 1974, the classification system altered every few years. After 1974, it was common to find that titles which were published in one year might not appear in the catalogue until up to five years afterwards. This introduced a further level of doubt that a comprehensive list could be made, as it seemed likely that titles were slipping through the net. At the same time, the numbers of collaborative accounts and compilations of experience were increasing, yet these were also filed under 'Personal Narratives'. From 1960-64, naval titles were not even demarcated as 'Personal Narratives'. Collectively, these problems meant that the only way to be reasonably sure of producing an accurate, if not comprehensive, list of published memoirs was to order each individual title from the library, and identify it myself. During this project, it is estimated that up to a thousand titles were searched in this fashion.

possible to estimate that approximately three hundred former combatants published their memoirs between 1950 and 2010.[35] Most importantly, this research process enabled the identification of a large quantity of comparatively unknown memoirs, which balanced out the testimonies of memoirists who have achieved more popular recognition, and both types of narrative are subsequently woven into this investigation.

The selection of source material was also dictated, to a considerable extent, by what kinds of memoirs were being published throughout the last half of the twentieth century. For example, the naval war was at its most prominent in military life-writing during the 1950s. I traced sixteen naval memoirs that were published in Britain between 1950 and 1960, half of which were penned by submariners.[36] Several of these were written by senior officers, and so were excluded from this study, but the remainder have been incorporated into the discussion of the personal narratives of former naval personnel. After 1960, however, the British submariner memoir rather faded away. It is also important to note that the accounts of the Royal Navy's veterans remained predominantly written by officers. This study identified ten valuable memoirs of the convoy escorts' war at sea, published between 1955 and 2001, and all were penned by men who had held a commission. The fighter pilots' Battle of Britain narratives, too, were predominantly authored by officer pilots. Of the fourteen fighter aircrew memoirs drawn upon for this study which were published between 1956 and 2006, only one was composed by a former sergeant pilot.[37] In contrast, the Bomber Command personal narratives were almost equally divided between those penned by sergeant and officer pilots, yet until Miles Tripp's *The Eighth Passenger* appeared in 1969 the testimonies of either remained virtually non-existent. Thereafter in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bomber Command veterans released a surge of personal narratives and nineteen of their post-war accounts are integrated into this study.[38]

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[35] According to the definitions of Harari and Hynes as to what constitutes a 'war memoir'. This figure includes the memoirs of special forces personnel and prisoners of war, as a number of the former saw combat in capacities as both regular and irregular soldiers, whilst the latter often devote a considerable part of their narrative to depiction of their experiences in action before they were captured. The seventy memoirs used for this study were sifted out of this broad pool of personal narratives.
[36] According to the lists of published titles catalogued in the British National Bibliography.
[37] Bill Rolls, *Spitfire Attack* (London: William Kimber, 1987).
[38] These publications coincided with a number of public and scholarly debates surrounding the commemoration of the Command's chief, Sir Arthur Harris, and the role of Britain's strategic air offensive between 1942 and 1945, and were intended to 'set the record straight'. Due, perhaps, to this deeply vested personal interest in reshaping cultural, official and scholarly perceptions of the

Inspection of the personal testimonies published, with relative consistency over time, by former army personnel since 1955 revealed a similar number of valuable texts authored by both officers and lower ranks. This study thus explores ten memoirs of infantrymen who served in the North African and Italian campaigns and ten narratives drafted by infantrymen and tank crew who fought in the Allied battles to re-take north-west Europe after June 1944. Examined separately and collectively, this corpus of military memoirs offers an unparalleled insight into the experience, interpretation and representation of combat among Second World War frontline servicemen.

Approaching Memoir as a Historical Source

In 'able hands', Jeremy Black proposes, the military memoirs of servicemen help to recover the experience of conflict, yet he warns that placing too much trust in these documents may result in failure to meet the requirements of scholarship.[39] This echoes the opinion of literary critic John Sturrock, who warns historians to approach autobiography with care, counselling that they ought to question the extent to which artifice and literary convention might have influenced the 'historical' evidence in these accounts.[40] As these cautions indicate, the historical integrity and worth of the published war memoir has often been subjected to academic scrutiny. Among both scholars of war and auto/biographical literature, there is a long-running division of opinion over whether memoir really is a suitable source of evidence for historians. For instance, Noble Frankland, a veteran of wartime bomber raids and official historian of Bomber Command during the Second World War, held a fundamental distrust of personal reminiscence, explaining that memoirs are liable 'to be highly inaccurate factually'.[41] When he published an autobiographical account of his life's work as a professional historian, which included a brief chapter on his own war experiences, he hastened, therefore, to position his narrative as a 'history' rather than a memoir,

bombers' war, former bomber aircrew were comparatively more prolific in writing war memoirs than their comrades in other services. See Frances Houghton, 'The "Missing Chapter": Bomber Command Aircrew Memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s', in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, (eds.) Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 155-157.

[39] Black, *Rethinking Military History*, p. 46.

[40] John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.12.

[41] Noble Frankland, *History at War: The Campaigns of an Historian* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1998), p. 34.

explaining that he employed private recollections 'only where there [was] nothing better on offer.'[42] On the other hand, Norman Hampson, who served as a Royal Naval officer during the war and later became a renowned historian of the French Revolution, was 'agreeably surprised' to find that when he matched his own wartime letters and diaries to his memories of events there was a close correspondence. As such, he advises against dismissing memory and memoir as a reliable source of evidence.[43] This thesis concurs with Hampson's stance, but acknowledges that the concerns voiced by the other scholars must be taken seriously.[44] Consequently, this study seeks to find ways of approaching military memoir that prove how, in 'able hands', these documents may be utilised as important and valid sources of historical evidence.

The taint of historical unreliability that clings to veteran narratives leads Harari to suspect, like Frankland, that 'military historians rely on memoirs for the events of war primarily when they have no other choice.'[45] It is true that these texts are vulnerable to a number of methodological issues which Hynes identifies as 'truth-problems'.[46] Factors such as collaborative writing practices, limitations of language, the restricted vision of frontline combatants, 'infidelities of memory', and official or self-censorship, have all contributed to a long-held scholarly suspicion that war memoirs are not quite 'truthful' historical sources.[47] According to Hynes, these documents confirm that personal recollection is not a reliable source of testimony because they are 'restricted, biased, afflicted by emotion, and full of errors', and may therefore prove 'unsatisfactory' as history.[48] In this fashion, the war memoir is laid wide open to charges of inaccuracy, limited knowledge, and the fictionalisation of experience, which points towards an explanation of why memoir may be relegated to the margins of critical historical inquiry. Notwithstanding these concerns, with careful handling and a newly-minted methodology, this research into published Second World

[42] Ibid., p. 1.
[43] Norman Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War* (Caithness: Whittles Publishing, 2001), p. ix.
[44] Further light on the factual reliability of these published memoirs may be shed by corroborative material such as unit war diaries, or unpublished memoirs written by men who served in the same unit. For example, see the unpublished memoir of Douglas Proctor, *Section Commander* (held by the Department of War Studies). Proctor served as an NCO under Sydney Jary in the 4th Somerset Light Infantry. This is a useful addition, and sometimes correction, to Jary's *18 Platoon*.
[45] Harari, 'Military Memoirs', p. 303.
[46] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, pp. 24-25.
[47] Ibid., pp. 24-25.
[48] Ibid., p. 15.

War accounts suggests that the supposed 'truth-problems' of these narratives can frequently be dismissed or even turned to the historian's advantage.

The first charge which may be levelled against the war memoirs of junior officers and other ranks when assessing them as creditable sources of evidence is that the view of the serviceman in the frontline is simply too limited to provide more than a fragmentary testimony. This 'drawback' to the utility of memoir as a historical source is relatively easy to dispose of by recognising that the narratives of Second World War servicemen typically make little claim to providing a comprehensive 'bird's eye' view of combat. Instead, they generally acknowledge, with some ruefulness, that their authors had very little idea of what was happening outside the confines of their own immediate surroundings, and so do not purport to provide a sweeping overview of battle. Wisely, they leave this to the personal testimonies of their senior commanders, or draw upon the works of 'reputable' military historians to locate their own tiny corner of fighting amid the wider battle. Moreover, important developments in military historiography throughout the last forty or so years have given scholars a new licence to utilise war memoirs as an authentic source of historical evidence. Under the twin auspices of the 'new military history' and the 'war and society' approach, the 'worm's eye' experiential view of combat has, in its own way, become acknowledged as just as important a part of war studies as the meta narratives of battle produced by the senior officers. What the memoirs of junior officers and other ranks can contribute, thanks to their provision of localised and sensory detail about the experience of frontline battle, is an opportunity to stand for a moment in the boots of the airman, soldier or sailor. For the vast majority of historians of war, this is quite possibly the closest we will ever get to the battlefield and to comprehend the 'human factors' at the heart of the combat experience which, as Rear-Admiral Rupert Sherbrooke commented, 'are ultimately so important.'

Because veteran-memoirists frequently consulted old comrades or scholarly narratives in order to expand their restricted view of the battlefield, (and to check their facts), the question of the authenticity of authorship, and the extent of collaboration in the production of a war narrative, underpin much of the suspicion with which historians have regarded military memoirs as primary sources. Although memoirs are

normally marketed as single-authored works, they frequently embody authorial collaboration with a diverse range of family members, old comrades, literary agents and publishers. A modern trend of employing a professional writer or historian to assist in the creation of the narrative means that it is difficult for scholars to be sure that the veteran's solo voice is obtained. As Vincent Andrew Trott observes in his study of the authorship of First World War military autobiographies, the demarcation between veteran and collaborator frequently lacks transparency.[49] Focusing on the memoirs published by Henry Allingham and Harry Patch, two of the last surviving veterans of the 1914-1918 conflict, he unpeels multiple layers of collaboration between these men and the professional writers who helped them to assemble their narratives. Noting that the veterans' narrative voices were often framed by an interview process, in which the interviewer asked 'leading' questions, and took responsibility for transcribing the oral interview into written prose, Trott concludes that the significant collaborative element to these memoirs raises questions of how faithfully they reflect the personal memories and experiences of former soldiers.[50] Yet while this is a reasonable conclusion, it might equally be argued that collaborative writing practices in the production of a military memoir do not *necessarily* impair the value of its evidence. For instance, in a study of the collaborative production of British military memoirs published since the 1980s, Rachel Woodward and K. Neil Jenkings found that the authors they interviewed were untroubled that others had made an input to their books. So far as these veteran-memoirists were concerned, the contribution of former comrades, family, historians, or members of the publishing team, did not detract from the narration of 'their' story and they remained adamant that the narrative spoke with their voice alone.[51]

My own conversation with a former POW, Alistair Urquhart, whose memoir of military incarceration under the Japanese during the Second World War, *The Forgotten Highlander* (2010), became a bestseller, testifies to the importance of not writing-off narratives as valuable sources simply because of collaborative writing

[49] Vincent Andrew Trott, 'Remembering War, Resisting Myth: Veteran Autobiographies and the Great War in the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 6:4 (November, 2013), p. 331.
[50] Ibid., p. 331.
[51] K. Neil Jenkings and Rachel Woodward, 'Practices of Authorial Collaboration: The Collaborative Production of the Military Memoir', *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies* 14:4 (August 2014), p. 346.

practices. Urquhart was assisted by a journalist to write his memoir of captivity and torture in POW camps in Thailand and Japan. Like the veterans in Trott's study, his personal account was assembled through a process of oral interviews, in which the interviewer sought to tease out the veteran's wartime memories. At the end of each day, Urquhart read the journalist's written draft of the day's work, often insisting upon substantial alterations where he perceived the text was over-embellished or erroneous.[52] The final result was a book of which Urquhart was inordinately proud as he felt it was an accurate record of his experiences. Instructively, the memoir also exuded Urquhart's personality, to the extent that it mirrored his own speech patterns and vocabulary. Although it was the product of collaborative writing practices, the salutary point is that it ultimately spoke with the veteran's own, distinctive voice. As shall be seen, the veterans of the Second World War generally succeeded in retaining a firm grip over the form and content of their memoirs throughout the editing process and frequently refused, with some insistence, to allow their narrative to undergo commercially-motivated alterations which might compromise the account's 'authenticity'. To reiterate Hynes's argument, the most important criterion for a war memoir is that it speaks with 'a voice that is stubbornly distinct, telling us what it was like, for *this* man, in *this* war.'[53] Therefore, whilst it is necessary to acknowledge that writing a combat memoir is always, to some degree, a collaborative practice, it is equally important to recognise that most speak with the veteran's own voice, telling the story *he* wants to tell, and collaboration is not necessarily a reason to discount these sources.

Official and self-censorship also potentially threaten the historical integrity of a published war memoir. During the Second World War, memoirs automatically passed through intense official scrutiny to ensure that they did not compromise military personnel, equipment, locations or tactics. These books were also censored to ensure that they did not endanger public morale and many thus contained hearty, if somewhat clumsy, messages of encouragement to the struggling British nation. In the post-1950 memoirs, however, the censor's red pen is rather trickier to discern. These books lack the overtly propagandistic messages which the wartime memoirs pedalled, and it is

[52] Alistair Urquhart, interview with author, 31 January 2011.
[53] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. xv.

difficult to identify where silences may be attributed to officially-directed censorship. Nevertheless, the process by which Robert Woollcombe's memoir of service in a Scottish regiment following D-Day was vetted in 1954 provides a valuable indication of how peacetime censorship of military autobiography operated (albeit on a much reduced scale from that evident in wartime). Until the early 1960s, publishing editors were able to apply for censorship advice to Admiral George P. Thomson, who had served as Chief Press Censor during the war and subsequently took up the post of Secretary of the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry and Press Committee.[54] Woollcombe's editor, Cecil Day-Lewis, sent a draft copy of *These Were They* (the provisional title of the veteran's memoir which later became *Lion Rampant*) to Thomson in order to ascertain whether he thought it needed to be approved by the War Office before publication. Day-Lewis received a swift response from the Secretary, in which he explained that the War Office was understaffed and had a very large pile of manuscripts to be vetted. Providing, Thomson clarified, that the author of the war memoir was no longer a serving officer, and had never been employed by the Intelligence Service, then he would personally take full responsibility for clearing the manuscript without delay, commenting that Woollcombe's book seemed 'a harmless story about the last war'.[55] A week later, Day-Lewis duly received another letter from Thomson confirming that the book had been 'Passed for Publication on Security Grounds' and thus offered a 'safeguard' to both author and publisher.[56] For future reference, the Secretary explained, a publisher was only required to 'take notice' when the author of a book had been involved in intelligence work, in case he or she should reveal the methods used or the identities of colleagues, as publication of this kind of information could harm similar work in future wars.[57]

[54] Re-named the Services, Press and Broadcasting Committee in the 1960s, and re-titled the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee in 1993. Despite the changes of name, the committee was constant in its provision of guidance to press and publishers on subjects in which considerations of national security might be involved. For a detailed discussion of regulations surrounding the publication of memoirs from military personnel who served in the British Army since 1980, see Jenkings and Woodward, 'Communicating War through the Contemporary British Military Memoir', pp. 5-17.
[55] University of Reading, Records of Chatto & Windus Ltd (Hereafter UoR, CW/), 74/11, George P. Thomson to Cecil Day-Lewis, 26 November 1954.
[56] UoR, CW/ 74/11, Thomson to Day-Lewis, 3 December 1954.
[57] Ibid.

The Woollcombe case confirms that official censorship was relatively relaxed after the war. The memoirist's practice of self-censorship is, however, more problematic. In their study of post-1980 military memoirs, Jenkings and Woodward noted that the narratives were frequently mediated by the sensibilities of the author and those close to him. In multiple instances, the memoirist seemed to ask himself whether a certain anecdote or description was really necessary. Often, they found, the answer was 'no'.[58] The same self-censorship is true of the Second World War memoirs and is particularly manifested when the veteran discusses the deaths of comrades or criticises those with whom he served. It is not uncommon to find a qualifying comment at the beginning of the book which states that the author does not wish to cause distress to those living and so has chosen to disguise or omit certain incidents or people.[59] Yet whilst this does not always assist the historian in understanding 'the full experience' of war, and may even be interpreted as fictionalising the narrative to some extent, self-censorship is not necessarily a major obstacle to re-habilitating the war memoir as a valid source. After all, these are living documents which are intended to operate in the public realm, and so we must recognise that there are inevitable concessions to considerations of sensibility. It might be argued, moreover, that such courtesy to the sensitivities of former comrades, or those of his family, usefully indicates that these memoirs are written for a wider 'community' of veterans. Through such practices of self-censorship, the memoirist accepts a duty of care and responsibility for his fellow veterans which is surely worthy of attention.

The limitations of language itself might also be viewed as restricting the value of memoir as a source of information about the sensations of battle. In a study which explores the process of bearing witness to war and atrocity through the works of Primo Levi, Erich Maria Remarque and Tim O'Brien, Chris Daley voices the plaintive question of 'how can words describe a system in which language has lost its meaning?'[60] Whilst the events of a battle can be laid down on paper by a war memoirist

[58] Jenkings and Woodward, 'Communicating War', p. 16.
[59] For example, Peter Russell delicately explained that 'I have for obvious reasons changed the names of some of those with whom I lived'. These 'obvious reasons' were to avoid embarrassment to former comrades and their families. Peter Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich: A Lancaster Pilot's Rites of Passage* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2007), p. vii.
[60] Chris Daley, 'The "Atrocious Privilege": Bearing Witness to War and Atrocity in O'Brien, Levi, and Remarque', in *Arms and the Self*, (ed.) Alex Vernon, p. 182.

in good faith, there is undeniably an argument to be made that no prose can hope fully to express the horrors and sufferings bound up in such extreme violence. Indeed, in his investigation of three autobiographical narratives produced by former internees of China's punitive labour camps between 1949 and 1978, Klaus Muhlhahn concludes that the language of testimony is simply inadequate for expressing the traumatic impact of experience.[61] A frequent 'collision between events and the language available – or thought appropriate – to describe them' may thus be perceived as detrimental to the integrity of factual testimony in personal accounts of war.[62] Yet it is imperative to explore the language and imagery which military memoirists select to frame experiences of combat in their narratives as these choices reveal not only the ways in which the veteran comprehended his experiences but also the ways in which he wanted his audience to understand them. For instance, it is worth paying particular attention to the metaphors used to describe combat in these personal narratives. As James Olney notes, metaphor provides a way of knowing an experience for both author and audience, proffering a recognisable point of reference.[63] For example, as the first chapter of this thesis relates, due to the popularity of Nicholas Monsarrat's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Cruel Sea* (1951), the figure of speech of a 'cruel sea' acquired a certain cultural significance and was thus frequently employed by naval memoirists in order to comment upon their wartime relationship with the maritime environment.

Invariably, the memoirists themselves were well aware of the apparent limitations of language to represent their experiences. Former rear-gunner, Jim Davis, explained in his memoir, *Winged Victory* (1995), that

> No-one can ever write the facts about flying on operations with Bomber Command in World War II and convey to the reader the true terror, fear and suspense all Air Crew felt at going on such raids. Neither can words ever convey the emotions one felt in trying to survive 30 major battles. One had to live through this to truly feel the tension that went with this type of flying. One

[61] Klaus Muhlhahn, 'Remembering a Bitter Past: The Trauma of China's Labor Corps, 1949-1978', *History & Memory*, 16: 2 (Fall/Winter 2004), p. 123.
[62] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 169.
[63] James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 31-32.

> had to be there to feel all these terrors. Words would never paint the true picture.[64]

Another Bomber Command veteran, John Wainwright, agreed that 'Words can never describe war.'[65]

Nevertheless, it is through their words that we stand the best chance of recovering the combat experience and meanings attached to them by the combatant. On those occasions where language is viewed as inadequate to convey feelings of anguish or shame, silence itself might also be viewed as symbolic. As Jay Winter reminds us, silence is frequently a deliberate construction, as an active choice may be made to remain silent for a multitude of reasons.[66] The war memoirist's choices and balance of language and silence in his depiction of battle thus require closer scrutiny as they act as signifiers of the physical, psychological and emotional impact of combat upon the veteran. A key example of the conscious deployment of silence in the Second World War memoirs can be found in the narratives of the fighter pilots, of whom the majority remain tight-lipped on the controversial subject of psychological breakdown among Fighter Command aircrew. Where this topic is alluded to, it is rarely referred to by its official term, 'Lacking in Moral Fibre' (LMF). By contrast, their Bomber Command counterparts discuss the designation of fellow airmen as LMF at length and with some bitterness. The fighter pilots' reticence to discuss LMF might be attributed to a desire not to tarnish the 'heroic' public status of themselves or fellow flyers. By comparison, bomber aircrew tended to cite the LMF label as one of many ways in which they were maltreated by an ungrateful nation.

The former serviceman's own memory provides both inspiration and source in the creation of a war memoir, but, as Hynes observes, it may become an 'obstacle to the truth' because it selects and colours the past, filtering reality.[67] A longstanding

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[64] Jim Davis, *Winged Victory: The Story of a Bomber Command Air Gunner* (Ditton: R. J. Leach & Co, 1995), p.136.
[65] John Wainwright, *Tail-End Charlie* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 92.
[66] Jay Winter, 'Thinking about Silence', in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, (eds.) Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Gino and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 4-11. For further insight into silence as a source of information, see Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 61; Diana Gittins, 'Silences: The Case of a Psychiatric Hospital', in *Narrative and Genre*, (eds.) Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998).
[67] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 23.

criticism of war memoirs is that because they are retrospective accounts, as the temporal distance between the war and its recall increases, the fallibility of human memory means that certain factual information may slip the net of individual recollection. By virtue of their reliance upon memory, therefore, Harari claims that war memoirs are 'factually less reliable' than the more immediate forms of personal narrative created in the midst of war, such as diaries and letters, and so of less use to historians.[68] I would argue, however, that excessive quibbling over a memoirist's muddling of a date or location ultimately fails to serve meaningful historical discussion of the experience and impact of war upon fighting men. In the late 1970s, Noble Frankland and Christopher Dowling strongly emphasised this point in their introduction to the memoir of former paratrooper, James Sims: *Arnhem Spearhead* (1978).[69] The two men noted that the narrative contained several factual mistakes, including an erroneous assertion that it was German, rather than Dutch, military engineers who were responsible for the building of a particular pontoon bridge. Nevertheless, Frankland and Dowling insisted that

> These and other minor inaccuracies add to rather than detract from the authenticity of *Arnhem Spearhead*, since they show that the author has relied on his own impressions and experiences and has not adulterated his account by bringing it into line with other sources.[70]

In any event, as the narratives of Sims and his fellow veteran-memoirists demonstrate, the specific details of campaigns, units, casualties and dates may be obtained from other sources, and, whilst they certainly frame recollections of battle, they do not necessarily detract from the insight such works provide into the actual experience and impact of combat upon frontline servicemen.

In fact, the study of memoirs now requires a less dismissive approach to the fragilities of individual recollection. Since the 1980s a 'memory boom' has occurred across a wide range of fields in the humanities and social sciences, with an ever-

[68] Harari, 'Military Memoirs', p. 303.
[69] Respectively, Frankland and Dowling were Director, and Keeper of the Department of Education and Publications of the Imperial War Museum.
[70] Noble Frankland and Christopher Dowling, introduction to *Arnhem Spearhead: A Private Soldier's Story*, by James Sims (London: Imperial War Museum, 1978), pp. xii – xiii.

expanding interest in the subjects of memory and remembering.[71] Collectively, these studies have served to shift interpretations of private (and public) memory from passive to active, re-locating the changeability, flexibility and permeability of memory as a source of interest and advantage to the scholar. If challenges to the reliability of the Second World War veteran's combat memoir are to be made, they ought not to be on the grounds of the fallibility of individual recollection. Instead, a more pertinent question appears to be what memory itself preserves of the war experience, and in what terms the veteran's process of recall is framed. In a comprehensive study of war and remembrance in the twentieth century, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan pulled together major lines of scientific understandings of memory, finding that most experiences leave long-term memory traces, although these differ in density. The weight of a memory determines how well it may be recollected, with this density being moulded by the degree of drama or uniqueness of an experience. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the authors found that memories of combat were particularly dense, and therefore long-lasting, because the experience was intensely personal and dramatic, with harrowing moments conferring special density upon a memory.[72] In a recent study of over 1,000 Second World War British veterans, Nigel Hunt also found that many of the strongest memories held by these men pertained to battle, as the horror of the experience remained strong, and the published memoirs of these veterans confirm these findings. As Wainwright observed in his narrative of service with Bomber Command:

> War is a long-drawn-out, insidious fusion of never-ending boredom, splatterdashed with moments of terror. That is the very essence of war. The killings and the maimings, the burnings and the general destruction… *are* 'war'. The empty spaces between, are not… which is why the highlights hit the headlines.[73]

Indeed, as the second part of this thesis reveals, memoirists often displayed indignance at the suggestion that they might not have remembered their experiences accurately. Several insisted that images of war were 'burned' into their minds, testifying to the

[71] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[72] Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (eds.) Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 12.
[73] Wainwright, *Tail-End Charlie*, p. 26.

arguments of Winter, Sivan and Hunt that combat retained a searing presence in an individual's memory.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that memory may prove an unstable source, as it is open to conscious or unconscious manipulation.[74] Beneath the surface of personal recollection lurk the sharp rocks of time and trauma, upon which memory may easily founder. As Hunt and Robbins note, trauma in particular disrupts the processing of memory, existing as an unconscious, dissociated recollection which later may be prompted into consciousness through stimulation of reminders.[75] Fundamentally, it is 'a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence'.[76] Sometimes it is difficult to identify where the veteran-memoirist's memory has been corrupted or simply erased by traumatic experience. Equally, it is possible to over-identify trauma in these narratives and attribute every silence or inaccuracy to psychological damage.

Nevertheless, it is possible to navigate these challenges, often with the help of the veteran-memoirist himself. A number of the authors in this study endured psychological breakdown, or some form of what is now termed 'post-traumatic stress disorder', and their accounts proffer important evidence about the impact of wartime trauma and 'battle fatigue' upon the author's identity as both combatant and veteran. For example, long after the war, former soldier Alex Bowlby continued to suffer psychological damage from his experiences in Italy in 1944 and underwent a mental collapse in 1955 in which he 'heard' shells repeatedly screaming past his head. Significantly, however, he confessed that writing his memoir, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* (1969), enabled his recovery: 'As my world broke up I turned to the one thing I had left to hang on to – my book.'[77] Destroyer captain Roger Hill described a similar experience, explaining how he learned that 'one sheds one's sickness in books'.[78] Rather than lamenting the ways in which trauma erases memory, therefore,

[74] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 80.
[75] Nigel C. Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative' in *Oral History*, 26:2 (1998), p. 59.
[76] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 41.
[77] Alex Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, rev. ed. (London: Leo Cooper, 1989), p. 222.
[78] Roger Hill, *Destroyer Captain* (London: William Kimber, 1975), p. 6.

it seems wiser to focus upon how the act of creating a memoir helped traumatised veterans to articulate recoverable memories as an act of catharsis. Indeed, Bowlby contended that suffering a nervous breakdown in 1955 enabled him to recollect dialogue.[79] The salient point here is that if combat trauma did 'disarticulate the self and create holes in existence', the act of writing a personal narrative clearly helped the veteran to rearticulate his sense of wartime *and* post-war self, and to process his ordeal in order to gain some measure of personal relief. The methodological problems posed by memory may thus be turned to advantage by acknowledging that remembering is an inherently discursive, performative act of reconstruction of experience. The reconstructive nature of memory means that experience is transformed into recollection by uniqueness, importance, imaginative elaboration and confabulation.[80] To borrow a pertinent observation from Hynes, a war memoir therefore documents 'what can be made of remembered war.'[81] As such, these sources unfold how the war was lived in the memories of many former servicemen. Once this is recognised, an investigation of military memoirs allows us to further glance into the long-term impact of war upon the veteran, garnering evidence not only about what he remembers, but also the process by which he reconstructs and relates his memories of experience, and what he hoped to achieve by this.

The so-called 'truth problems of war narratives' are thus far from insurmountable limitations to the value of these documents. Nevertheless, factors such as collaborative writing practices, constraints of language, the restricted vision of frontline combatants, 'infidelities of memory', and censorship in a variety of forms, have all contributed to a long-held scholarly suspicion that war memoirs are not quite 'truthful' historical sources.[82] Mistrust of these narratives is largely based upon levels of 'fictionalisation' which these 'problems' individually and collectively bestow upon a text. For example, Fussell insists that the war memoir is not a personal history: it is 'a kind of fiction, differing from the "first novel" (conventionally an account of crucial youthful experience told in the first person) only by continuous implicit attestations of

[79] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 222.
[80] Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 118.
[81] Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration', p. 205.
[82] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, pp. 24-25.

veracity or appeals to documented historical fact.'[83] Furthermore, in turning memory into prose narrative, literary devices of lexis, syntax, structure and plot may equally be viewed as undermining the 'truth' of lived experience.

Yet the Second World War memoirists themselves were often piqued by suggestions that their narratives might be dubbed fiction and militated to categorise their memoirs as 'truthful' war stories. For example, former special forces' soldier, John Verney, clearly identified his two volumes of war memoirs, *Going to the Wars* (1955) and *A Dinner of Herbs* (1966) as 'a fragment of autobiography', insisting that as such they belong 'on the *non*-fiction shelves.'[84] In similar terms, in his memoir of service as a naval convoy escort commander, Denys Rayner explained that he had long wished to write a book detailing his wartime experience on the Western Approaches, but was unsure of the most appropriate medium in which to do so:

> As I saw it there were three possible alternatives – a fictional tale, a story of the war in those seas embracing everybody, and lastly an autobiography. Fiction I think always reads as fiction; it can never quite be believed, and one never knows where truth ends and imagination begins. To write the story of the Western Approaches as a serious war book would be to invade the preserves of the official historian to the Admiralty: and even so there would be many people left out who should have been mentioned. I have therefore very reluctantly chosen the third alternative. I say very reluctantly because I would rather have written about anybody other than myself; yet to attribute my experiences to another person would at once produce the illusion that I was writing fiction.[85]

Former prisoner of war, Robert Kee, was presented with a similar choice when he wrote an account of his experiences in German captivity. *A Crowd is Not Company* (1947) first appeared as a work of fiction in which Kee described the characters using the third person pronoun: 'viewed from the outside in the traditional God-like stance of the fiction writer.' However, conveying his experiences through this medium did not prove satisfactory:

> the very contrivance of fiction seemed to introduce a spurious note opposed to what I wanted to achieve… [I] remember the sense of relief with which I finally

[83] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 310.
[84] John Verney, *A Dinner of Herbs* (London: Collins, 1966), p. 7.
[85] D. Rayner, *Escort: The Battle of the Atlantic* (London: William Kimber, 1955), p. ix.

> decided to drop the structure of invention and stick to unashamed egocentric narrative.[86]

In 1982, his book was re-issued and unveiled as life-writing rather than fiction. Kee was relieved, explaining that he was 'in no two minds about its category':

> *A Crowd Is Not Company* is an autobiographical memoir, a self-centred account of how one Englishman of middle-class background in his early twenties saw and felt these war experiences at the time. For this reason nothing has been altered, added or removed.[87]

Others took pains to insist that little embellishment had been added to their narratives. In *Soldier in the Sand* (1961), Charles Potts described his unit's failure to capture a German officer when conducting a search in a local village and apologised to his reader for 'what I fear must sometimes be rather a dull tale'.[88]

It is notable that when veterans wished to embroider or sensationalise their experiences they often reverted to fiction as a mode of conveyance. Nicholas Monsarrat is perhaps the best-known example, (using his *Three Corvettes* as a reservoir of notes from which to compose *The Cruel Sea*), of a novel depicting numerous tribulations faced by the fictional corvettes, HMS *Compass Rose* and HMS *Saltash*. Monsarrat has frequently been attacked for compressing as many horrific events as possible into his story and thus providing an 'unrealistic' account of the experience of wartime convoy escorts. Yet he remained unrepentant, asserting that all the events described in *The Cruel Sea* had happened to people he knew personally, if not to himself.[89] After publishing his own war memoir, *Gun Button to 'Fire'* in 1987, Tom Neil wrote several novels detailing his, and other people's, experiences as fighter pilots, explaining that he wanted to dwell more on the effect of the 'many stressful and heart-rending aspects of war'.[90] In his *Questions of Guilt* (2008), he confessed to writing in 'somewhat more dramatic terms', and his stories detailed such controversial subjects as the looting of corpses on Malta, the destruction of 'friendly' aircraft, and

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[86] Kee, *A Crowd is Not Company*, p.7.
[87] Ibid., p. 8.
[88] Charles Potts, *Soldier in the Sand* (London: P.R.M. Publishers, 1961), p. 119.
[89] Liverpool Record Office (Hereafter LRO), 920 MON 1/6, Nicholas Monsarrat to Mr Schulson , 5 March 1962. The memoir of Sam Lombard-Hobson, Monsarrat's former commander, also corroborates that the novelist's stories were drawn from true events.
[90] Tom Neil, *Questions of Guilt and Other Wartime Stories* (Walton on Thames: Red Kite, 2008), p. 9.

pilot suicide in the air.[91] He contended that he adopted the fictional mode of writing because he believed that it offered 'the best means of more truly reflecting the excitement and horrors of the times and in order to get away from the more pedestrian descriptions of aerial combat and the parade of statistics and aircraft performances.'[92] Fiction therefore appears to have offered the veteran a space in which to explore and linger upon the horrors of war that memoir evidently did not. As Monsarrat noted, 'truth is not only stranger but shorter than fiction.'[93] The veteran-memoirists could therefore deny charges of embellishment to their narratives by proffering the non-fictionalisation of their experiences as a pledge of integrity.

This thesis argues that in order to move the study of war memoirs past the restrictions posed by the so-called 'truth problems', it is necessary to adopt a particular approach to these documents. Theories connected to the field of auto/biographical study prove enormously helpful in viewing these books in a more positive light as they establish that attempts to recover the past only by matching up veteran recollection with established 'fact' limits the usefulness of these texts. As Mark Freeman notes, 'if we think of "truth" in this context only in terms of its faithful correspondence to what was, then autobiographical texts must indeed be deemed illusory and fictional'. He argues, however, that there is little reason to think of truth in such a 'limited and simplistic' way.[94] Similarly, Laura Marcus muses that very few critics of autobiographical writing would demand that autobiographical truth should be viewed solely in terms of literal verifiability. She suggests that the seemingly intractable problem of 'referentiality' – the kind and degree of 'truth' that can be expected from autobiographical writing – may be resolved by discussion of the author's intentions and motivations. If the autobiography is 'sincere' in an attempt to understand self and experience, and to make these clear to others, then the 'auto/biographical intention' must be received seriously.[95] As will become evident, this thesis interrogates the intention and function of war memoir, deconstructing the veterans' motives for recovering and communicating experience, and the processes by which they attempted

[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., p. 9.
[93] Monsarrat, *Three Corvettes*, p. 79.
[94] Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 32.
[95] Marcus, *Auto/Biographical Discourses*, p. 3.

to retain the integrity of their narratives in order to bear witness as 'truthfully' as possible. Furthermore, within the field of auto/biographical study, it has long been recognised that life-writing is a process of 'collusion' between past and present.[96] The creation of an autobiographical text stems from, as Olney has argued, 'the vital impulse to order that has always caused man to create.'[97] Penning a war memoir allowed the veteran to shape and order his recollections of the past, imposing pattern and coherency upon experience. The narrativisation and emplotment of memory on paper thus granted a second reading of experience, offering the former serviceman a valuable space for reflection upon wartime combat. Indeed, Georges Grusdorf argues that, in its provision of a second opportunity to read experience, autobiographical writing may actually produce a 'truer' representation than the first as it adds consciousness to experience.[98] As Freeman posits:

> In relegating autobiographical texts to the status of mere fictions, we not only cut ourselves off from the possibility of attaining those insights that can accrue from the process of rewriting the self; we cut ourselves off from the possibility of thinking about historical truth itself in a deeper and more comprehensive way than is often allowed.[99]

He further notes that 'the central feature of rewriting the self [is] the process of conferring new meanings on the past in the light of the present.' In this sense, engaging in an act of autobiography enables a man to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of his history.[100] His image is fixed for eternity, which grants him the opportunity to cogitate at length upon the changes sustained to that self. Whether this process of inner reflection is implicit or explicit in a war memoir, self-knowledge is always a primary motive of autobiographical writing and so the historian is allowed a valuable glimpse into the veteran's self-fashioning of past and present identities. Crucially, therefore, the dialogue between a memoirist's past and present constructions of self also reveals something about the veteran's fashioning of that self at the time of writing. The dual impact of these documents is summarised by Jay Winter, who

[96] Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*, p. 11.
[97] Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, p. 3.
[98] Georges Grusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, (ed.) James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 38.
[99] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, pp. 32-33.
[100] Grusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', p. 43.

suggests that the stories related by soldiers tell us something of their experiences, whilst the act of narration tells us who they are at the time of telling.[101]

Architecture of the Thesis

The post-war narratives written by these men therefore offer an insight into 'what war was like' both on the battlefield and in the memories of former combatants. Accordingly, Part I of the thesis investigates what they are able to reveal about the experience and representation of combat. Chapter One examines the veteran memoirists' responses to the natural environment in which battle took place. It focuses on three seemingly featureless combat zones, including the Western Desert, the night skies above occupied Europe, and the northern waters of the Atlantic Ocean, North Sea and Arctic Circle, which appeared to the men who fought in these surroundings as 'blank canvases'. This chapter explores the ways in which these memoirists imagined and relandscaped their battle spaces and the symbolic significance with which these environs became overlaid. Chapter Two interrogates the working relationship between man and machine in these memoirs, focusing on the private meanings that combatants attached to the fighter aircraft, ships, and tanks in which they fought. These machines often prompted an emotional response from their crew and this chapter scrutinises the psychological combat partnership recorded between arms and the man. Chapter Three considers responses to killing and the enemy. It explores the modes through which the veteran-memoirists represented their acts of extreme violence during combat. Fighter aircrew, seamen and soldiers constructed a number of fantasies around the body of the foe, in order to enable them to commit the killing act, which were based upon a real or imagined concept of 'distance' between killer and victim. This chapter assesses the variety of psychological mechanisms that these memoirists used to dampen cognisance of the human identity of their enemy. Chapter Four draws further upon the theme of human relations in battle, contemplating the dynamics of personal relationships within a combat unit. Frequently, memoirists drew upon Shakespeare's famous phrase, 'band of brothers', in order to explain how they felt about their comrades. This chapter thus

[101] Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 116.

explores the representation of collective themes of leadership, courage and morale in the memoirs of British soldiers, sailors and bomber aircrew.

Part II of this thesis moves past the question of what these memoirs reveal about the experience and representation of combat, and in the final three chapters, these narratives are considered as a unified genre, identifying and evaluating why and how they came to be produced at all. Part II thus explores the construction, intention and function of Second World War veteran memoirs. Here, the source base has been extended to include personal testimonies authored by a wide – if somewhat disparate – array of former service personnel, including Wellington and Blenheim pilots, ex-prisoners of war, a Motor Torpedo Boat commander, and a private from the Border Regiment who fought in the Burma Campaign of 1944-45, in order to assist in the process of understanding the nature of published military memoir. Further enlightenment is obtained through the use of archival evidence. In particular, the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge, the Archive of British Publishing and Printing in Reading, and the Liverpool Record Office, contain valuable personal correspondence between publishing editors and veterans pertaining to the publication of war memoirs.

Drawing upon these sources, Chapter Five probes the motivation of former combatants to write accounts of their wartime experiences. At the root of each war memoir stood a man who believed he had an important story to tell, setting him apart from former comrades who did not choose, or were unable, to tell their own tales. This chapter explores this process of self-selection among the Second World War veteran-memoirists, identifying the audiences for whom these memoirists wrote their books. Chapter Six examines how these narratives were constructed. During the process of writing and publishing a war memoir, the veteran dedicated himself to securing the production of an 'authentic' account, a self-appointed task that frequently brought memoirists into conflict with their publishers. This chapter recounts the measures implemented by veteran-memoirists in order to ensure the creation and publication of a 'truthful' narrative. Finally, Chapter Seven recognises that, through the act of publication, the war memoir asserted the veteran-memoirist's power claims within the public domain. Questions of who had the right to speak about battle are embedded into

this genre of military life-writing, with the veteran frequently claiming the unimpeachable authority of the man who was 'on the spot.' This chapter provides a detailed exploration of three case-studies, in which veterans deployed their memoirs to defend their own reputations, as well as those of wartime units and commanders, and the adoption of certain military strategies, against scholarly, cultural and official 'misrepresentation'.

Through the lines of inquiry pursued in Parts I and II, this thesis significantly adds to the historical record of the Second World War by furthering knowledge of the ways in which former combatants lived, remembered, understood, and communicated their experiences of battle between 1939 and 1945. It also argues for the merit of published veteran memoir as a historical source. Contending that these narratives reveal something unique and important about their authors' participation in, and interpretation of, combat, this study therefore provides a response to Alex Vernon's assertion that 'we all need help understanding the most vital and valuable documents available about the human experience of war and the military.'[102]

[102] Vernon, *Arms and the Self*, p. x.

PART I

1. BATTLE SPACES

[T]he emptiness and the space worked upon men's imaginations and so entered into their soldier's and sailor's tales.[1]

War, as Paul Fussell saw the need to remind us in his investigation of First World War trench literature, takes place 'always within nature'.[2] A self-evident, and fairly fundamental, truth perhaps, but this observation provides a solid basis for exploring representations of environment in the memoirs of Second World War veterans. Fussell successfully encapsulates the concept of an irrevocable bind between the spatial boundaries of the natural world and human conflict, whilst also alluding to the fact that the latter is permanently sealed inside the former. Nature thus provides an immutable setting for the battles of mankind, yet the degree to which the twain were perceived by combatants as actively influencing each other requires further investigation. Well-established studies of combat experience in the Second World War have certainly recognised that a tangible relationship existed between a combatant and his natural surroundings, exploring the impact of terrain and weather upon his immediate well-being.[3] Yet there has been little scholarly attention directed towards the significance which combatants privately attached to these battlefields. Fussell's remark that war takes place 'always within nature' specifically refers to the intense symbolic significance which Western Front soldiers ascribed to a landscape of war that delineated the physical and psychological boundaries of their frontline experience between 1914 and 1918. The memoirs of Second World War veterans provide a similar insight into how the combatant imagined and relandscaped his old battlegrounds throughout the decades of reflection after the war. Nature, in these narratives, is depicted as more than simply a passive domain in which battle took place. Instead, the natural environment is reconstructed as a medium through which the veteran and his

[1] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 116.
[2] Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 231.
[3] For example, see Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*.

interpretations of war were shaped. Through an exploration of the memoirists' symbolic reconstructions of distinctive battle spaces in the elements of land, air and sea, it is thus possible to gain an understanding of the intensely personal meanings veterans ascribed to their individual wars 'within' nature.

Unlike many Second World War battlegrounds, several zones of combat appeared to the combatant as a 'blank canvas', devoid of defining geographical features. Such landscapes were overlaid by the memoirists' own symbolism in order to interpret and represent the natural environment in which they fought. Three of Nature's 'blank canvases' in particular demonstrate the similarities and contrasts which soldiers, sailors and aircrew projected onto their battle spaces. The Western Desert, the night skies above occupied Europe, and the northern waters of the Atlantic Ocean, North Sea and Arctic Circle, all represented isolated and barren arenas of conflict. The war memoirs of the men who fought in these desolate landscapes demonstrate a number of important ways in which the serviceman sought to understand and convey a seemingly featureless combat environment.

The Army and North Africa, 1940-43

Amid a vast geographical kaleidoscope of images of land warfare presented in the memoirs of infantrymen, the most iconic is arguably the North African, or 'Western', desert in which the British fortunes of war repeatedly swung back and forth between 1940 and 1943. Memoirists frequently portray the desertscape as possessing a form of arcane authority which continued to hold the veteran in thrall long after he had moved on. In a foreword to a revised edition of Keith Douglas's renowned memoir of fighting from Alamein and Zem Zem, his biographer proposed that the desert conflict was 'an extraordinary war. It was fought in a territory "neutral" to both sides, and being barren, a landscape almost neutral to man.'[4] This extrapolation of the warrior-poet's work offers a slightly misleading explanation of how British combatants interpreted the desertscape. In his narrative, the desert is certainly presented as 'barren', but the landscape's supposed neutrality to man is more difficult to locate. The ever-present threat of sandstorms, precipitant temperatures, dangerous wildlife, and risk of

[4] Desmond Graham, Introduction to Keith Douglas, *Alamein to Zem Zem*, rev.ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. xiii.

becoming engulfed by the fastness which Douglas and his fellow memoirists list in their narratives, suggest that the desertscape may well be understood as broadly 'neutral' in terms of failing to favour either Allied or Axis forces, but distinctly hostile in its relationship with the men who fought within its parameters. The desert's supposed bald 'neutrality' does not quite account for the special significance it held for its veterans, although Graham's reading of Douglas' memoir certainly highlights the import that this landscape assumes in the narratives of multiple former servicemen.

The Western Desert functions in these narratives as a natural setting into which the veterans' fantasies about combat are channelled. A hypostasis of landscape emerges which is based in tropes of isolation and detachment. As Mark Rawlinson explains in his study of wartime-published British writing, 'The desert environment, because it appeared a blank, was readily overlaid with interpretations'.[5] On the whole, experiences of fighting in the landscapes of other key campaigns such as Italy or Normandy tend to be portrayed mainly in terms of carnage witnessed or physical discomfort experienced. Yet the veterans of the desert invested their former surroundings with a unique symbolism which insisted that the combatant drew an active pleasure from the territory. For instance, Peter Cochrane found some satisfaction in the army's topographical name for the terrain, musing that 'West has always been a conjurative word, from the Western Isles to 'Westren wind, when wilt thou blow?'; I should have disliked being in an Eastern Desert.'[6] The desert environment became charged with important personal meaning for the soldiers, which consequently formed an integral part of their remembrance of the combat experience in North Africa. Christopher Bulteel, for example, recorded how, as part of an advance party sent into the Western Desert in 1943, he could still remember 'after fifty years, the spiritual thrill of turning off into the desert', while Ray Ward also wrote of how, in

[5] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 113.
[6] Peter Cochrane, *Charlie Company: In Service with C Company, 2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders 1940-44*, rev.ed. (Stroud: Spellmount: 2007), p. 12.

later life, he perceived that 'Grains of sand stick to me still, such was the effect of the desert'.[7]

The attachment of personal meaning to the desert in these accounts begins even before the soldier actually arrived there. On the journey from Alexandria into the battle zone, several memoirists were struck by the slightly incongruous presence of a signpost, seemingly standing in the middle of nowhere, which instructed that the 'Western Desert' lay ahead. To the right, in the opposite direction, the marker pointed the way back to Alexandria. Ward recalled that he was surprised to find that although the signpost conveyed a distance of seven kilometres back to the port, no corresponding radius to the desert was included. Quite simply, 'It was there. Vast and empty…"in the blue" as we called it.'[8] His sudden arrival into an immense, unfamiliar, and blank battlefield was thus obligingly inked out for him. For Bulteel this signpost on the edge of the desert carried a particular personal significance. As he followed the left fork of the sign away from the city, the manoeuvre represented 'a symbolic moment', inspiring the 'spiritual thrill' which he still associated with the desert fifty years later.[9] Like Bulteel, Ward also ascribed private meaning to the signpost, noting that when his transport passed it, 'Trucks packed with dead-eyed troops were retreating from the front and others, including mine, with wide-eyed innocents were heading for it.'[10] Although such a scene might have been witnessed in any battle zone across the globe, for Ward, the 'Western Desert' signpost loaded the moment with especial impact. On the border of the battleground, the signpost itself symbolised where he believed his identity as a soldier truly began. It seemed to demarcate the chasm between warrior and youth, between former and present lives. Behind him lay Alexandria and civilisation: the desert ahead promised fighting, comradeship and adventure.

For Ward and Bulteel, the signpost thus represented a literal, as well as a metaphorical, juncture at which the desert war became severed from the world outside

[7] Christopher Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier: The Wartime Memoirs of Christopher Bulteel M.C.* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 2000), p. 61; Ray Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara: An Eighth Army Story* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), p. 149.
[8] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 121.
[9] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, pp. 60-61.
[10] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 121.

its borders. The Western Desert could be imagined as a bubble, completely isolated from the rest of the conflict. It also offered an unusual semblance of mobility. Until the Allies' decisive victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, the desert war was characterised by fast-paced fluctuation of military advantage where the terrain saw perpetual advance and retreat on both sides. Bulteel's memoir suggests that the war of movement which dominated in the desert meant that the landscape itself seemed to offer an appealing battle space which held tantalising possibilities of martial glory and individual adventure. In early 1943, he was deployed from Britain to the Western Desert, a prospect he viewed with intense excitement:

> [T]ill that time, this was the only area in which we seemed able to wage successful war. We had had enough of the 'Dunkirk Spirit' in England. It was not only a couple of years out of date; but, splendid though it had been, no doubt, there was no blinking the fact that, by any military criterion, it had been a monumental defeat.[11]

Undeniably, Bulteel joined the desert war at a peak in British fortunes. By early 1943, the British were advancing inexorably through North Africa, placing the Axis forces under such pressure that they surrendered on 13 May. Arguably, therefore, he had not experienced the long, arduous slog of 1940-42, in which the British had experienced several bitter defeats and an alarming crisis of morale. Nevertheless, an apparent geographical and strategic disconnect from the rest of the war served to create an impression that the desert represented an autonomous battlefield carved out of the North African littoral in which opposing armies could wage an isolated, inherently private, contest. This concept of the desert as a segregated battle site was further thrown into 'bizarre' relief by the fact that the fleshpots of Alexandria and Cairo lay only several hours away.[12] Yet despite the proximity to the civilian world, as Ward explained, an enforced sense of self-reliance among the troops served to confirm their insulation in this environment: 'The desert army relied on wireless communication, often with distant HQs. There had been no core to the network. Signals were often

[11] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, p. 60.
[12] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 148.

distorted, depending on weather and topography.'[13] The desert thus became amplified as a self-contained arena of war. 'We were', Bulteel narrated, 'on our own now.'[14]

Samuel Hynes defines the type of soldierly representations of landscape which Bulteel and Ward portray as the creation of a 'desert-in-the-head', an imagined battlefield which is lent structure by physical geography.[15] Certainly, the topography of the Western Desert immediately provided combatants with a segregated, clearly delineated battlefield. Contained within an 800 kilometre long coastal plateau which stretched across Egypt and Libya, the Western Desert provided a large, yet distinctively framed, battlefield through which the combat experiences of soldiers were mediated. Although the aesthetics of the terrain itself were far from the shifting undulations of glowing sand which at least one veteran had hoped for – Ward, for instance, was most disappointed to find the panorama stark and unyielding, a monotonous vista of 'hard flat sand, loose stones and thorn bushes, rocky low ridges and shallow wadis, with none of the photogenic sand dunes seen in *Lawrence of Arabia*' – the seeming immensity of the landscape proffered its own unique appeal.[16] In fact, the allure of the desert as a battleground lay in its very provision of a blank canvas for war. Notably, although Ward was initially disillusioned by the 'monotonous vista' of rocky and barren territory, he rapidly felt the pull of an irresistible attraction to the landscape, which he came to identify as the 'perfect battlefield'.[17]

As he exemplifies, the desert memoirists exhibit an entrancement with the sheer sense of space offered by the landscape. Collectively, these texts suggest that the desert's vast savage indifference to the men battling inside its borders both frightened and fascinated the combatant, indelibly shaping his understanding of his environment as a 'perfect' site of battle. In the first instance, the terrain seemed resistant to man's efforts to inscribe localised military cartography upon it. As Bulteel noted, the bland vista was 'always one of the hazards of desert warfare: no one ever knew where this mythical "front line" was, except the men who were actually doing the shooting.'[18]

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[13] Ibid., p. 165.
[14] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, pp. 60-61.
[15] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 138.
[16] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 131.
[17] Ibid, p. 128.
[18] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, p. 97.

Ward, too, reported the futility of trying to register positions in the Western Desert: 'We had maps, but apart from the coast road and a parallel railway there was nothing on them except low ridges and wadis. The maps looked like Admiralty charts; indeed, sometimes we navigated like sailors, by the sun and stars.'[19] Whilst the perils of battle ebbed and flowed for the desert soldier, therefore, he remained at risk from an ever-present threat of being consumed by the stark environment which 'seemed to swallow all that entered it.'[20] As a company commander, Charles Potts asserted that the danger of his troops becoming irretrievably misplaced in the desert occupied his considerable attention. Like Ward, he reverted to traditional methods of navigation by way of the night skies:

> I was always careful to see that the men knew how to find the North Star, so that if ever they were hopelessly lost, they could walk towards it, keeping it always to their left. This north-easterly course would bring them eventually to the coast road, and prevent them from falling into enemy hands.[21]

Yet this ever-present anxiety about vanishing without trace into the Western Desert's maw also served to amplify the impression of spatial detachment from the rest of the war.

This sense of the physical emptiness of the desert granted a welcome opportunity for the soldier to project his own martial fantasies onto the battlefield. As the significance attached to the 'Western Desert' signpost as a border between the civilian world and the battlefield demonstrates, the memoirists generally opted to overlook their comparative proximity to coastal urban settlements, such as Benghazi and Tobruk in Libya, despite these cities being sites of key battles in the North African campaign. If the veteran fought in these battles, the narratives display a marked tendency to treat them as separate from the rest of the war in the desert. Instead, they focus upon the interior of the Western Desert battle area, which they represent, not necessarily accurately, as denuded entirely of non-combatants: 'There was no civilian population to complicate the contest.'[22] Against the backdrop of global total war, the desert proffered a distinctive and unusual battlefield because it remained largely

[19] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 126.
[20] Ibid., p. 126.
[21] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, p. 9.
[22] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 128.

uncluttered by the trappings of civilisation. By envisioning the desertscape as leached of a civilian presence the soldier could imagine the desert as a 'clean' battleground, a natural habitat for warriors. John McManners, for example, noted that 'the desolation formed a sort of arena for battle without killing women and children and flattening homes.'[23]

In tandem with this 'purity' of the battlefield, the memoirists imagined that the natural environment affected the very nature of combat, and a dominant trope in these narratives is thus a perception that the landscape facilitated a welcome 'purity' in warfare, renewing ancient values of sportsmanship, mutual respect, and gallantry. It was not idealised because it was 'neutral', but rather because it appeared impersonally hostile to all combatants, thus creating an illusion of placing both sides on an equal footing. Ward perceived, for instance, that the 'vast and empty' setting represented an ideal arena for 'jousting armies' to manoeuvre with speed and agility, thus drawing a conscious parallel between desert warfare in the early 1940s and a mythical ideal of medieval combat.[24] Employing a similar discourse, McManners discerned a 'veneer of chivalry which sometimes overlay the sheer cruelty of war in the desert'[25]. This could lead to an affinity with the enemy borne of the sterility of the landscape. For example, Ward claimed that for men on both sides, the desert 'stripped everything to essentials. We were alone, far from home, fighting a private war.'[26] He argued that the isolation of the desert war led to experiencing 'an odd intimacy with the enemy – the sense that in our isolated, lonely battlefield friend and foes shared a similar fate', even going so far as to insist that 'At times it was difficult to tell the two sides apart.'[27] Indeed, in an environment in which both armies had to contend with extremes of temperature, fierce sandstorms, desert sores, fluctuations between drought and mud, and dangerous animal and insect life, frontline service in the desert was frequently represented as a battle waged on two separate fronts. As Potts remarked, 'It was not only a matter of fighting a human enemy, we had to fight the desert conditions also.'[28]

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[23] John McManners, *Fusilier: Recollections and Reflections 1939-1945* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2002), p. 71.
[24] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 121.
[25] McManners, *Fusilier*, p.71.
[26] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 128.
[27] Ibid., pp. 145-146.
[28] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, p. 146.

Ward opted to illustrate this relationship between combatant and landscape by inserting a succinct quotation from the J. Lee Thompson film, *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958): 'All against the desert, the greater enemy'.[29]

Perhaps surprisingly, despite the plethora of natural hazards posed by the desert realm, the memoirs of its veterans remain constant in their affection for this landscape. Ward recorded that his men retained a marked fondness for the desert even when they were transferred to Italy. For example, a move up to the Gustav Line in central Italy in February 1944 was distinctly unpopular with his Argylls, who did not appreciate the new terrain: 'Every man in the battalion would have given a year's pay to have been back in North Africa, footslogging through the hot dry, desert day.'[30] Importantly, this statement raises the issue that the 'desert-in-the-head' construct presented in these narratives was refracted through a prism of the veteran's other wartime experiences and post-war recollection. Bulteel's explanation of the anticipation he felt at being posted to the desert in 1943, for instance, was conditioned by an awareness of the dismal defeat into which earlier battles on the Continent had disintegrated, such as at Dunkirk, or in Greece and on Crete. Ward and Cochrane, on the other hand, used their post-desert combat experiences in the Italian campaign as a yardstick to relandscape this arena in their own recollections. Marching through Tuscany in July 1944, Ward was horrified by the devastation wrought by the Allied and Axis armies upon the surrounding countryside: 'Every few kilometres, we passed ruined villages – the calling cards left by the armies of both sides. Places that had existed peacefully for centuries had been abruptly visited by death and destruction'.[31] For Cochrane, as another old desert hand, the carnage of the invasion of Sicily and Italy also proved deeply distressing. He experienced considerable dismay upon landing at Taranto in January 1944: 'I realized with a jolt that this was a different kind of war, one which involved civilians… here were poor folk whose houses had been smashed, their belongings destroyed, fields unsown and animals killed'.[32]

[29] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 119.
[30] Ibid., p. 229.
[31] Ibid., p. 262.
[32] Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 110.

Significantly, the power of the fantasy of the desert war concept as isolated from the charnel houses of the European battlegrounds extended beyond the memoirs of North African veterans. For example, Donald Sutherland, who served with his tank crew in the Normandy campaign, also fantasised about an idealised form of combat in the desert. Musing upon the scenes of devastation which he met in the immediate aftermath of the D-Day invasion in northern France, he cogitated that 'One of the pleasanter aspects of the desert campaign must have been the almost total absence of non-military objectives, whether they were cattle or people and their possessions unfortunate enough to find themselves in the path of war.'[33] Infantryman Sydney Jary expressed the same sentiment in his depiction of the Allied push through north-west Europe in the winter of 1944-45. Upon setting up his platoon HQ in the village of Schiefendahl on the Dutch-German border, he was distressed to witness the despair of a German civilian who was forced to evacuate her cottage in order to make room for his men. 'It was at times like this', Jary reflected, 'that I wished that we could fight our war in the desert.'[34] At the crux of the desert fantasy woven into military memoir, therefore, stands the symbol of the desert as separate – physically and morally –from the self-acknowledged degradation and revulsion of total war. This is perhaps best illustrated by Cochrane, who asserted that in the desert 'the fighting went on without damaging anyone but soldiers, all the battles were in terrain that nobody had tried to inhabit: war was idiocy, but it was self-contained.'[35]

Bomber Command and Occupied Europe, 1942-45

Core tropes of isolation and blankness also shaped the ways in which bomber aircrew reconstructed the sky as a battle space in their memoirs. From the winter of 1942-1943, as the Allied strategic air offensive built up over occupied Europe, the majority of Bomber Command's operations were conducted nocturnally. At the same time, key changes were implemented to the ways in which the bombers utilised the night sky. Instead of planning attacks for moonlit nights, which left attacking forces vulnerable to Luftwaffe night fighters, the bombers now sought the cover of darkness. This change of tactics also coincided with increasing numbers of newly-trained

[33] Donald Sutherland, *Sutherland's War* (London: Leo Cooper, Secker & Warburg, 1984), p. 125.
[34] Sydney Jary, *18 Platoon*, rev. ed. (Winchester: Light Infantry Office, 2009), p. 94.
[35] Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 110.

aircrew filtering into the Command. In the memoirs of surviving flyers, therefore, representations of raiding Germany between 1942 and 1945 primarily focus on the night sky as an arena of combat. As in the desert memoirs, the natural setting is portrayed as vast and empty, yet there is a sharp disjuncture between the interpretations that desert and bomber veterans placed upon their respective environments. Whereas the former regarded nature as providing a 'perfect battlefield' designed to mould and complement combat, albeit in a harsh and hostile setting, the latter construed the night sky as an inherently benign and protective space splintered by war, within which an artificially illuminated battle arena was branded into the darkness.

During the long and frequently tedious run to the target, aircrew, in particular pilots, gunners and bomb aimers, spent hours staring into monotonously featureless airspace. As Bomber Command's new offensive hinged (where possible) upon carrying out attacks on cloudy or moonless nights, the flyer's vision was invariably restricted to what John Bushby described as the 'immeasurable blackness of space'.[36] Yet, while Frank Musgrove embodied the feelings of many aircrew in his remark that flying through the night was a thoroughly 'boring business', a dominant theme in these narratives emphasises that the bomber equated his lightless surroundings with safety.[37] Boredom, after all, was hardly life-threatening. Within the 'immeasurable blackness' of the night sky, the darkness itself became symbolically charged with protective qualities. Night was imagined as preserving the well-being of the crew as it appeared to offer a perception of isolation which many found distinctly appealing. As in the desert, privacy was a quality the combatant prized in his natural surroundings. Yet, whilst desert troops employed tropes of isolation in order to imagine themselves as old-fashioned warriors bound together with their enemy by a semblance of equality wrought by landscape, bomber aircrew sought a more literal emptiness from their surrounds. Battle in the air was a more unequal experience for the men of Bomber Command than for their counterparts in the desert. The key airborne threat was Luftwaffe night fighters, which were fast, manoeuvrable and able stealthily to direct their fire into the bomber's most vulnerable spots in order to ignite its cargo of high

[36] John Bushby, *Gunner's Moon: A Memoir of the RAF night assault on Germany* (London: Ian Allan, 1972), p. 81.
[37] Frank Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers: An RAF Navigator's Perspective* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2005), p. 32.

explosives. The psychological impact of these aircraft upon the bomber crews is illustrated by Michael Renault, who remarked that 'I had innumerable fears as a bomber pilot but none so horrific as those of attacks by night fighters. It was the knowledge that one was immediately at a disadvantage that frightened me.'[38] Even with the presence of rear-gunners to guard the aft of the Lancaster, it proved extremely difficult for bomber crews to defend themselves against this menace. An uneasy knowledge that their four-engined bombers remained more or less at the mercy of the Luftwaffe night fighters thus shaped aircrew perception of the darkness as a shield.

Many cherished a fervent hope, therefore, that the darkness would render them invisible, allowing them to slink through the night undetected. Ron Smith, for instance, mused that there seemed a 'blessed' quality to the darkness, which he interpreted as a 'cloak that offered such welcome anonymity.'[39] As he exemplifies, inconspicuousness was a treasured state to aircrew who knew that if they closed with the enemy the chances of survival were small. To this end, Bomber Command had already made an effort to ensure that individual aircraft would be veiled from sight of the German aerial and ground defences. The implementation of the bomber stream in 1942 was intended to confuse the defenders and afford the attacking force some protection. By concentrating aircraft en masse into a block which travelled together along common routes at meticulously designated heights and speeds, the objective was to blanket the enemy's radar so that lone bombers were more difficult to single out. 'Like wolves', Philip Gray observed, 'the big planes travelled in packs.'[40] Significantly, however, in these narratives, the veterans' claims of protection in the night sky are not attributed to the safety in numbers offered by the bomber stream. Indeed, quite the opposite seems to be true: any external security these men discerned during their mission was ascribed entirely to the natural shield of darkness. For example, Gray noted that the enveloping blackness encouraged an 'illusion that we were the only plane around', rendered invisible to enemy eyes by the obscurity of the night.[41] Although ruefully

[38] Michael Renault, *Terror By Night: A Bomber Pilot's Story* (London: William Kimber, 1982), p. 160.
[39] Ron Smith, *Rear Gunner Pathfinders* (London: Goodall Publications, 1987), p. 79.
[40] Philip Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past: The Lives and Losses of a Lancaster Crew in 1944-45*, 3rd ed. (London: Grub Street, 2005), p. 41.
[41] Ibid., p. 132.

acknowledging that this was a 'ridiculous' notion, considering that his Lancaster was merely one of hundreds in the raiding bomber stream, like Smith, Gray insisted that the darkness bestowed a much-needed 'cosy' element to the experience, providing a salve to strained nerves.[42] The extent to which aircrew invested the darkness with protective qualities is further illustrated by Musgrove who, upon leaving the target area over Dortmund, plotted a course which took his aircraft north, out of the bomber stream, and forwards alone in the blackness. With hindsight, he reflected that

> We were, in fact, making ourselves highly vulnerable. By detaching ourselves from the main bomber stream, we could be more easily picked off by fighters. But we did not feel more vulnerable; we felt safely enveloped by the dark night, blessedly distant from Dortmund's searchlights and flak.[43]

Musgrove's account of re-routing his Lancaster away from the target area underscores a dominant theme of light as a hazard in these narratives. Significantly, despite knowing the dangers posed by night fighters to his lone aircraft, he concluded that the anti-aircraft defences of Dortmund represented a more immediate threat. His description of these defences as 'an apparently solid wall of searchlights and flak' positions light as the greater enemy in the target area.[44] Although the night fighter held the key to defensive success for Germany, from the winter of 1940-41, and at the instigation of General Josef Kammhuber, the Reich poured money into defences on the ground, using some 7,000 searchlights in support of the anti-aircraft batteries in Germany alone.[45] If an aircraft was unfortunate enough to be pinpointed by a radar-controlled searchlight, it was pinioned against the night sky by the beam, which was then rapidly joined by other searchlights until the plane was held in a cone of light. The sickening terror of being 'coned' in this fashion is one of the defining features of these memoirs – for each member of the crew this was, as Musgrove noted, 'a singularly desperate predicament'.[46] Peter Russell heartily concurred with this sentiment, explaining that 'It is a horrible feeling, dangerously close to hopelessness. For often we had seen an aircraft coned, seen it diving and turning, just as helpless as

[42] Ibid., p. 132.
[43] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 26.
[44] Ibid., p. 26.
[45] Max Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 3rd ed. (London: Pan Books, 1999), p. 241.
[46] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 25.

a wounded bird in a cat's clutches'.[47] Another pilot, Peter Johnson, also portrayed the intense fear he experienced when his aircraft was 'coned' for the first time:

> The near blindness induced by eight or ten of these very high-powered beams coming from every side produced a frightening sensation of being caged by light. No matter how you struggled, the dazzling beams would hold you and you lost all sense of movement. It was as if you were motionless in the sky, shells exploding all around you, waiting for the one which would destroy you.[48]

Entrance to this arena of battle was abrupt, and the impact of the transition from benevolent darkness to aggressive luminosity was disorientating for aircrew. Indeed, these memoirs collectively depict an intense disconnect between the flight through the night sky and subsequent arrival in a target area which was staked out in multiple kinds of light. Johnson, for instance, recorded that he had enjoyed feeling cocooned in the relative safety of a 'black vacuum' on the flight to Essen, when the target area suddenly 'sprang into life':

> [A] mass of searchlights, slowly, methodically, scanning the sky over a huge area. At the same time streams of tracer, some white, some coloured, followed the searchlight beams at quite low heights and lastly, at levels from well above our height to four or five thousand feet below came a dazzling display of twinkling stars, the Ruhr barrage of heavy ack-ack.[49]

The contrast between the benign night and the lights of war thus appeared chillingly stark. Upon entering the concentrated space above the target, the velvet tranquillity of the night sky instantaneously morphed into a coruscation of intensive and lurid light displays in which large quantities of high explosives, coloured Target Indicators, fighter flares, photoflashes and anti-aircraft searchlights jarred bewilderingly. The psychological impact on aircrew was documented by Smith who, upon arriving above Berlin in 1944, was loath to relinquish the perceived protection of the darkness in which his crew had travelled. He recorded that he was bewildered by the scenes outside his Perspex turret: 'suddenly we were over the Big City and I was petrified at the ghastly panorama all around. After the long hours of searching the night sky from the coast to be suddenly propelled into the brilliant hell over Berlin produced a freezing

[47] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 150.
[48] Peter Johnson, *The Withered Garland* (London: New European Publications, 1995), p. 175.
[49] Ibid., p. 166.

of the mind.'[50] Interestingly, his choice of the word 'hell' to portray the airspace over the mark echoed that of Guy Gibson, some thirty years earlier, in which the target zone was described as 'a living nightmare.'[51]

This depiction of the airspace over a German city as a displaced space filled with mental torment also dominates other aircrew memoirs. Against the dark backdrop of the night sky, it seemed to various veterans that out of the natural environment, the lights generated by combat had hewn a battle zone which was inherently unnatural. Several bomber memoirists turned to discourses of the supernatural as the most efficacious mode of expressing the lurid chaos which dominated this setting. For example, Norman Ashton's lexical choices in describing the target zone over Dusseldorf in May 1943 provide a typical representation of the scenes which aircrew witnessed at night:

> The fierce red glow of bursting bombs, the white shimmering of incendiaries, the brilliant glare of target indicators, the blinding flashes of the photo flares, the red-gold strings of 'flaming onions', and the whole witches' cauldron of fire and belching smoke, was like hell let loose.[52]

This representation was mirrored in Russell's portrayal of the airspace above Essen in October 1944:

> the scene below was fantastic. Fire raged over a large area, peppered with white explosions and lit every few seconds by a greater flash, obliterating in its vicinity all other sight of the red and orange conflagration as 4000-pounders, 'cookies', one from almost every aircraft, fell into the target area.[53]

Such was the impact of man-made light in this environment that Russell could only summarise the spectacle surrounding his aircraft as 'like an evil fairyland'.[54] Some explanation for the supernatural tropes with which these representations were invested is proffered by Arthur Gamble. Appalled by the scenes he witnessed over Duisberg in 1944, the memoirist insisted that the battle space appeared 'almost beyond description', indicating that suitable imagery to reproduce this tormented and alien

[50] Smith, *Rear Gunner Pathfinders*, p. 23.
[51] Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, p. 233.
[52] Norman Ashton, *Only Birds and Fools: Flight Engineer, Avro Lancaster, World War II* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 2000), p. 15.
[53] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 101.
[54] Ibid., p. 101.

setting was difficult to locate.[55] In order to reconstruct light's apparent perversion of the night sky convincingly, the veteran was thus prompted to search outside the realm of the mundane and familiar.

In these memoirs, former aircrew clearly interpreted the lights spawned by battle as a visual, actual and psychological menace. Within the environment of the night sky, light was therefore viewed as synonymous with danger, whereas darkness became symbolised as merciful and protective. Daylight raids, as Harry Yates noted, did not carry quite the same sense of fear inspired by the illumination of the night: 'Sunlight leached away much fieriness from bomb impacts and flakbursts and substituted quantities of dust and smoke. Everything became greyer and less pulsatingly dramatic.'[56] Russell, concurred, commenting that in a daylight raid 'I was not forcibly made conscious of the fires and brilliant explosions on the ground, or even of the frightening pyrotechnics all around us in the air, or the waving arms of the searchlights, as I was at night.'[57] Yet while the night sky served to magnify the horror of the brightly lit target area, this amplification of the terror of the lights of battle further reinforced the construct of the darkness, outside the 'brilliant hell' of the target area, as a sanctuary for aircrew. Even inside the luminous parameters of this airspace, Gray posited, the darkness seemed able to rob flak bursts of the distress they induced in daylight. In the sunlight of a daytime raid over Gelsenkirchen, he found himself terrified by the lingering smoke puffs of exploding shells and flak bursts, 'hanging there in their hundreds like delegates of doom and disaster.'[58] By night, he claimed, the 'number one terror merchant during the day, was greatly subdued'.[59] Against the intense fear inspired by the artificially-created lights of war, the night sky was thus interpreted as offering both safety and reassurance to the bomber crew. As in the desert memoirs, the isolation and sense of emptiness associated with these natural environments was craved by the combatant. The extent to which the bomber associated the blank canvas of the night sky with refuge may be deduced from the sheer sense of

[55] Arthur Gamble, *The Itinerant Airman* (Ilfracombe, Arthur H. Stockwell, 2003), p. 117.
[56] Harry Yates, *Luck and a Lancaster* (Shrewsbury: Airlife: 1999), p. 177.
[57] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 127.
[58] Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past*, p. 88.
[59] Ibid., p. 132.

relief with which Musgrove described routing his aircraft away from Dortmund into 'blissfully black space'.[60]

The Royal Navy and the Northern Oceans, 1939-1945

Thousands of feet below the bombers' war, seafarers found themselves in surroundings which they interpreted as the very antithesis of a benevolent combat setting. For naval memoirists, the open stretches of the Atlantic, Arctic Circle and North Sea formed a natural arena which, like the desert and the night sky, was also overlaid with discrete tropes of spatial isolation and interior vacancy. Like the desert troops, the sailors were all too aware of the natural dangers which characterised their battle space. Graeme Ogden's remark that operations in the North Atlantic consisted primarily of an intensely personal 'battle against the elements' voices the extent to which the seafarer contemplated his relationship with the natural environment in terms of a perennial struggle waged between man and sea.[61]

In the vast and frequently storm-haunted expanses of the Atlantic, North Sea and Artic Circle, sailors were acutely conscious that survival rested at least as much on the force and direction of wind and wave as upon defeating the German foe. The ferocity of oceanic weather meant that it was all too easy for escorts to become detached from their convoys, sometimes with fatal results. In the early years of the war, a dearth of available ships meant that merchant vessels could not be provided with an escort right across the Atlantic. Instead, incoming convoys were met in the Western Approaches by a naval escort which had just accompanied an outgoing convoy. Peter Gretton recalled that bad weather and moonless nights rendered this task especially difficult for escorting destroyers:

> On a dark night it was by no means easy to keep in station; and it was not rare to find one or even two escorts adrift at dawn. In these circumstances the fear of enemy action receded into the background, and we had to concentrate on the purely domestic matters of keeping with the convoy and of avoiding weather damage.[62]

[60] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 26.
[61] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 74.
[62] Peter Gretton, *Convoy Escort Commander* (London: Cassell, 1964), pp. 50-51.

With the instigation in June 1941 of deep water convoy escorts all the way across the Atlantic, the situation facing the accompanying naval crews became even more hazardous. The merchant fleet was composed of a wide array of tankers and freight ships of all sizes, ages, and conditions. In poor weather, a merchant ship which was too old, too slow, or insufficiently watertight could not maintain convoy speed or position, and so frequently fell out of line. As Gretton explained, one of the escorts would be detailed to locate the straggler and shepherd it back to the protection of the convoy. Yet this could be a remarkably hazardous duty for naval personnel, as Ogden discovered to his own cost. The memoirist recounted that his anti-submarine trawler, HMS *Lady Madeleine*, turned back to search for a merchant ship which had become detached from his convoy in bad weather. Unluckily, upon setting out on this mission, the trawler immediately got into difficulties due to the depth of the swell. Well and truly lost in a running sea, Ogden, in command of the vessel, faced an unenviable choice. If he increased the speed of his ship to outrun the storm, he would put a dangerous strain on his engines and steering gear. If, however, he maintained a slow pace, there was every risk that the heavy seas would pour down the smoke stack and put out the fires in the engine room. Describing this incident, he confessed that he was 'thoroughly frightened':

> I had done the one thing that I had always dreaded, and we were in a position where we could easily lose our ship and our lives – but not in the face of enemy action. Small ships quite often disappeared in Atlantic gales, and nobody knew their fate. To fight one's ship and die in battle was one thing, but to be 'lost at sea', for the reason the captain didn't know his job, was an appalling thought.[63]

The risks sailors such as Gretton and Ogden faced in the desolation of the maritime setting were viewed as subject to the caprice of Nature and these narratives suggest that the sailor understood his connection with his natural environment in the complex terms of a human relationship. Indeed, the symbolism which these men attached to the cold northern seas was often charged with an extraordinary level of emotional intimacy. In describing the Western Approaches, Jack Broome observed that the sailor was faced with a seascape which could, 'like a woman, be frightening, vicious, exhausting. Then, like the same woman it could be beautiful.'[64] With all sectors of the

[63] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 90.
[64] Jack Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter* (London: William Kimber, 1972), p. 76.

northern oceans oscillating between periods of storm and calm, it was thus tempting for many sailors to imagine that the waters indulged in 'moods' equivalent to those of a feminised human.

In this setting, Nature thus posed an ever-present threat to man and machine. For all that Winston Churchill might declare in the House of Commons in September 1939 that the war at sea was one of 'science and seamanship', in extreme conditions in open waters, neither of these could wholly guarantee the sailor's survival if the ocean appeared to be in an ill humour. In these memoirs, therefore, the ocean is represented as possessing an innately treacherous quality which was based upon an apparent capriciousness of environment. Intriguingly, this imagery particularly pervades the memoirs of submariners, who display an insistence that the ocean could be fundamentally devious and malicious. For the most part, they portray a certain indifference to the sea during periods when their boats were submerged. As Commander Edward Young observed, the tranquillity of the depths of the ocean led to a feeling that the submarine was relatively sheltered, enveloped in a protective blanket of calmer waters, and he asserted that he 'always felt happier underwater'.[65] Yet, when they were obliged to surface, they were frequently astonished by the ferocity of conditions above, and correspondingly display remarkably similar attitudes towards the sea as the men who crewed surface vessels. For instance, although submarine captain William King perceived something 'honest' about the long rolling swell to be found in the Atlantic, he wrote vividly of his intense dislike of the North Sea, whose comparatively shallow waters piled waves into 'ugly, steep, tumbling affairs'. [66] Indeed, throughout these texts, the submariner's bewilderment at the apparent cunning and spite of the sea remains apparent. Young, for instance, was instructed to winter in the Arctic Circle, and graphically described the misery of keeping watch on his surfaced submarine through the long, wild nights. He characterised his hours of watch-keeping on the bridge as a test of endurance, recollecting that the water 'leaps over the gun platform and springs up at you with seemingly deliberate malice.'[67] Similarly, Alistair Mars recorded being blown off course by a squall near the French coast whilst

[65] Edward Young, *One of Our Submarines* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), p. 64.
[66] William King, *The Stick and the Stars* (London: Hutchinson, 1956), p. 35.
[67] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 67.

running only seven fathoms (thirteen metres) from the surface: 'It was an incredible situation. Despite all our learning, contraptions and gadgets, despite our technical knowledge, charts and machines, the sea had tricked us.'[68] Across all these narratives, the claim that the sea was a malicious element resounds assertively.

The sense of malevolence which the submariners identified in their environment also echoes throughout the accounts of their surface counterparts. Both sets of veterans insisted that the sea appeared to find an active and sadistic pleasure in inflicting torment upon seafarers and ships. Indeed, there is some suggestion in these memoirs that the sea's aggression posed a greater potential threat than the German enemy. For example, writing of the North Sea in the early months of the war, King remarked that

> The official naval prayer asks for 'deliverance from the dangers of the sea and the violence of the enemy.'… this description became reversed. The enemy was only a small peril, as he would hardly be able to see or hear us, and his minefields had been dispersed by the lashing waves. The danger to pray against now was the sea![69]

Various sailors directed a special antipathy towards the perceived vindictiveness of the northern seas. Broome bluntly referred to the Atlantic as a 'bastard', whilst Ogden described how *Lady Madeleine* spent three months on convoy escort duty in this ocean 'thrashing about… tormented by cruel seas and howling gales.'[70] Significantly, the latter's choice of adjective to demonise the sea was mirrored in other naval memoirs. Gunnery officer Robert Hughes provides an illustration of this in his account of escorting Murmansk-bound convoys through the Arctic Circle. In his depiction of the destruction of the SS *JLM Curry*, which cracked amidships, broke in half, and sank rapidly, he wrote bitterly that 'the cruel sea swept over her grave'.[71] He employed the same phrase to portray the sinking of the minesweeper HMS *Leda*, 'which had spent so much time in these cruel seas'.[72] Similarly, Broome spent the first winter of the

[68] Alistair Mars, *Unbroken: The Story of a Submarine* (London: Frederick Muller, 1953), p. 55.
[69] King, *The Stick and the Stars*, p. 35.
[70] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 36; Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 74.
[71] Robert Hughes, *Through the Waters: A Gunnery Officer in H.M.S. Scylla 1942-43* (London: William Kimber, 1956), p. 143.
[72] Ibid., p. 67.

war providing an escort in the Channel and Western Approaches. He recalled that 'the sea was teaching us in its cruel way to be a crew – or else'.[73]

Intriguingly, as the lexis of these veterans suggests, much of the relandscaping of the sea in published war memoirs appears to draw upon a specific frame of reference laid down by bestselling novelist, wartime memoirist, and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve officer Nicholas Monsarrat. As an officer who served on convoy duty in the Atlantic and on the East Coast runs between 1942 and 1945, in wartime, Monsarrat had published autobiographical accounts of his naval experiences before releasing, in 1951, a widely acclaimed novel which drew upon the same material. A tale of the convoy sailor's gruelling battle against the ocean, *The Cruel Sea* became an instant and enduring bestseller, and in 1953 was turned into a popular film bearing the same name. As the title suggests, both novel and film employed an explicit frame of reference which personified the sea as a sadistic enemy of the sailor. The adjective 'cruel' was repeatedly stamped as a leitmotif throughout the book and the film opened with a voiceover by Jack Hawkins, who played the lead role:

> This is a story of the Battle of the Atlantic, the story of an ocean, two ships, and a handful of men. The men are the heroes; the heroines are the ships. The only villain is the sea, the cruel sea.[74]

Through Monsarrat, the phrase 'cruel sea' thus became established as highly recognisable in post-war British popular culture. In the second volume of his autobiography, *Life is a Four Letter Word* (1970), the title of his chapter on the war reinforced his belief that he had fairly captured the nature of the sea, reading simply, 'It *Was* Cruel' [memoirist's own italics].[75] As such, it is perhaps not wholly coincidental that the memoirs of other naval veterans published after 1951 demonstrate a remarkable tendency to tap into an identical rhetoric of the sea as villain.

It is of course difficult to ascertain the precise extent to which Monsarrat's work informed memoirists' reconstructions of their own wartime relationships with the sea. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that his representation did have an influence upon the ways in which other veterans wrote about the northern oceans. As

[73] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 32.
[74] *The Cruel Sea*, directed by Charles Frend (GDF, 1953).
[75] Nicholas Monsarrat, *Life is a Four Letter Word*, Vol. 2 (London: Cassell &Company, 1970), p. 1.

the testimonies of Ogden and Hughes exemplify, the epithet 'cruel' makes a frequent appearance in representations of the sea. But it is the memoir of Monsarrat's own wartime commander, Sam Lombard-Hobson, in which the greatest impact of the 'cruel sea' construct is demonstrated. As the novelist's commanding officer in HMS *Guillemot* on the East Coast convoys in 1941, and a close personal friend after the war, Lombard-Hobson was ideally placed to comment upon his former lieutenant's representation of the sea:

> Monsarrat's epic story of the U-boat war certainly describes… every ocean crossing [as] a relentless struggle against the cruellest of cruel seas. In actual fact, taken over the whole period, the great majority of convoys got through without interference or mention; and the Atlantic, more often than not, is agreeably kind.[76]

Crucially, it was not Monsarrat's investment of the ocean with human qualities to which his former commander objected here; merely the charge that the sea possessed no redemptive characteristics. Indeed, Lombard-Hobson recorded that he remonstrated with Monsarrat after the war, informing the novelist that the ocean itself was not at fault: '*war* was cruel, not the sea, and that only the ill-prepared or foolhardy, showing lack of respect for its power, regarded the sea as unkindly.'[77] He believed that his former junior officer's personal relationship with the sea had become tarnished by the brutality of battle he had witnessed, and his representation of the ocean as 'cruel' was simply 'the schizoid' nature of Monsarrat's own character:

> I am sure, at the bottom of his heart, that Monsarrat must have had a love for the sea: he had been a yachtsman in his earlier days, and he was a born seaman. But war, which he loathed, was to drive him to write of the sea as cruel.[78]

According to Lombard-Hobson, the veteran had simply projected his own feelings of wartime bitterness onto the natural environment.[79] By this logic, therefore, it might well be argued that the commanding officer's own description of the Atlantic as 'agreeably kind' owed much to his own more tolerant personality and resilience to war. Yet it is telling that even challenges to Monsarrat's lexis were framed in personifying rhetoric. Lombard-Hobson's insistence that the Atlantic ought to be

[76] Sam Lombard- Hobson, *A Sailor's War* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1983), p. 54.
[77] Ibid., p. 135.
[78] Ibid., p. 133.
[79] Ibid., p. 135.

remembered as 'agreeably kind' suggests that sailors found it difficult to relinquish anthropomorphised interpretations of the maritime environment.

Summary: Landscaping Battle in Military Memoir

Although the ways in which former bomber aircrew, desert soldiers and sailors imagined and reconstructed their battlegrounds employed different choices of imagery and lexis, their representations nevertheless share a fundamental assumption that the natural environment played a dominant role in the definition and remembrance of combat experience. Whether the environment was imagined as remorselessly indifferent to human conflict, cunningly malicious, or seen as a welcome shelter against man's battles, the natural world is relandscaped in these texts as far more than a simple domain within which war happens to occur. Landscape thus became invested with distinctive symbolism which allowed the veteran to make sense of his battle space, particularly in geographical locations which appeared to the combatant as something of a 'blank canvas'.

In order further to understand their relationship with the natural environment, several memoirists placed their own, and others', narrative reconstructions of battlegrounds under scrutiny. For example, Denys Rayner and Ray Ward both attempted to deconstruct the symbolism with which landscape was commonly reconstructed in war memoirs. Naval veteran Rayner displayed little patience with tropes which personified the northern waters. In his narrative, he declared that he had deliberately restricted his writing to ships and men alone: 'I do not write of the sea, which has no personality of its own and does not change. The sea is neither cruel nor kind. It is supremely indifferent, and wholly lacks sensibility.'[80] Published in 1955, only two years after the box office success of *The Cruel Sea*, his words might well be interpreted as an attempt to steer popular understandings and cultural representations away from the imagined malevolence of the ocean. If so, he singularly failed, as the anthropomorphisation of the sea flourished throughout the majority of memoirs which followed his own. In stark contrast to Rayner, former soldier Ward articulated a personal willingness to subscribe to the tropes through which the North African arena

[80] Rayner, *Escort*, p. x.

was understood, arguing that they posed a source of solace to the ex-combatant. Poignantly, he suggested that analogies of chivalric idealism which shaped the soldier's representations of the desert sprang from a conscious effort to draw a positive meaning from battle there, reflecting that 'many veterans of the fighting found the myths that embellish the campaign more comforting than the often grim reality.'[81] To an extent, therefore, the entire construct of the Western Desert as an isolated 'perfect battlefield', or indeed the night sky as 'blessed', may be understood as partly the product of the veteran's desire to detach himself from the human pain and loss which accompanied his combat experience.

[81] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 128.

2. MACHINES OF WAR

Even this grey machinery of murder
Holds beauty and the promise of a future.[1]

In 1942, Norman Hampson wrote these lines whilst serving aboard HMS *Carnation*, a Flower-class corvette. They highlight this sailor's construction of a meaningful personal attachment to his ship as a source of alleviating the grim conditions of wartime operations at sea, and the post-war memoirs of Hampson and other seamen are punctuated with similarly expressive representations of the small ships and submarines of the Royal Navy. Like sailors, aircrew and tank crew also cast their weapons in a starring role in their accounts of frontline service to such an extent that several scholars suggest that martial technology has become overly-prominent in a variety of representations. For instance, John Ellis comments that during the Second World War:

> the machines came of age. Caterpillar tracks became a reasonably reliable form of advance, aircraft achieved ever-better performance figures, submarines posed a still more critical threat… *Arma virumque cano* [I sing of arms and the man], announced Virgil. But in the popular epics fashioned out of the two world wars, the man dominates the First and the arms the Second.[2]

Similarly, in a recent popular history of the experiences of the wartime Royal Navy, Glyn Prysor complains that the sailor has been relegated to a marginal position in representations of the naval conflict:

> The war at sea appears at first glance to have been somehow less human than other campaigns, shaped more by technology and intelligence, strategy and firepower, than by people. Much of the sailor's experience of war was unfamiliar: an array of complex machinery and novel technology… All this has resulted in an almost unavoidable anthropomorphism: ships, not their sailors, are too often seen as the main characters. Yet ships were weapons, not protagonists.[3]

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[1] Norman Hampson, 'Corvette', reproduced in Brian Gardner, *The Terrible Rain: The War Poets 1939-1945* (London: Methuen, 1966), p. 117. Originally written aboard HMS *Carnation* in 1942.
[2] John Ellis, 'Reflections on the "Sharp End" of War', in *A Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939-1945*, (eds.) Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 15.
[3] Glyn Prysor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Viking, 2011), p. 3.

The corpus of veteran memoirs originating from this conflict is certainly riveted with tales of weapons, but the balance and nature of the relationship that Ellis and Prysor identify between man and machine in these texts requires some investigation and repositioning. Whilst the narratives of British Second World War veterans are frequently loquacious in describing the tools of their various martial trades, claims that the tale of the man is subsumed into that of the machine are difficult to verify. Machines do indeed star in these narratives of combat experience, but they share the billing jointly with their crew. Indeed, in these memoirs, the men who operated ships, aircraft and tanks fundamentally represent human and mechanical combatants as locked together into a battle unit, and it is this interdependent working partnership which takes centre stage in their accounts of war.

In a discussion of how to achieve a bond between an infantry soldier and his weapon during the Second World War, the American general S.L.A. Marshall noted that 'fashioning the machine to man's use in battle was but half of the problem. The other half was conditioning man to the machine.'[4] On a grander scale, the same statement is equally relevant to the men who crewed ships, submarines, aircraft and tanks. They too had to learn to adapt psychologically to their weapon. Representation of a rather symbiotic relationship between man and arms is therefore a dominant theme in these personal narratives. These accounts suggest that some machines *were* regarded by the combatant as 'protagonists', if only because investing them with anthropormorphic qualities provided the human antagonist with a measure of comfort or hope. Like the memoirs of the naval personnel, the narratives of the men who served in Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, and the crews of the armoured units that fought in Normandy in 1944, record that their authors also found ways of mentally acclimatising to their machines in order to form an efficient battle partnership. This chapter thus explores the representation of a variety of relationships that the former crews of aircraft, ships and armour identified with their own 'grey machinery of murder'.

[4] S.L.A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command*, rev. ed. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 22.

'She was a damn fine little ship,' wrote William Donald, 'and only a sailor knows what those words really mean.'[5] As this statement exemplifies, the emotional meanings that seafarers ascribed to their vessels were complex, intense, and difficult to convey fully to non-mariners. Nevertheless, this powerful attachment forms a central pillar of their written testimonies, offering an opportunity to understand the importance that the seaman attached to his ship as a fellow protagonist during the war. In these records of sailors' relationships with the Royal Navy's 'grey machinery of murder', the memoirists identify their vessels as cherished feminine companions that could help to stave off the feelings of isolation and fear which accompanied the war at sea, and increased their hope of safe return. Indeed, Robert Hughes voiced the sentiments of all the other naval memoirists in this study, when he reflected that the operational partnership between sailor and craft was underpinned by a 'strange affection for the ship herself.'[6]

As Hughes's choice of the adjective 'strange' to describe the sailor's mysterious affinity with his vessel indicates, supernatural beliefs exert some influence over these memoirists' identification and representation of an acute psychological bond between the Navy's men and machines during the Second World War. Their accounts indicate that seamen drew upon arcane maritime superstition as a buffer against a strange and frequently hostile environment. To a large extent, the sailor's relationship with his vessel was shaped by the natural environs in which he served. As the previous chapter illustrated, seamen operated in an inherently unpredictable natural setting which could turn 'cruel' and hostile in an instant. The crews of the naval convoy escorts in northern waters were particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of wind and wave, as the 'small ships' were frequently too old or poorly designed to cope with heavy weather out in the ocean.[7] Naval historian Brian Lavery posits that the appalling natural dangers of the maritime environment rendered conditions for the convoy sailor during the Battle of the Atlantic 'almost as horrific as on the Western Front in the First

[5] William Donald, *Stand By For Action: A Sailor's Story* (London: William Kimber, 1956), p. 49.
[6] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 149.
[7] At only 190 feet long, for example, the corvettes which constituted the main escort vessels through the Atlantic were designed for coastal warfare, rather than deep water service. Although essentially seaworthy, they offered their crews a horrendously uncomfortable voyage.

World War', whilst Lord Moran, himself a survivor of the trenches, supposed that 'Life in a destroyer in northern seas in this war must be rather like trench warfare in a bad part of the line in the last war'.[8] This parallel between ocean and trench experience is an interesting one, as it suggests that naval personnel on escort duty might be viewed as 'sitting ducks' in much the same fashion as trench soldiers were often perceived as imprisoned in muddy passivity. Important developments in First World War historiography propose, however, that the soldier in the trenches was not quite as passive as the old 'lions led by donkeys' approach suggested, and this research also offers a fresh way of looking at the sailors' modes of endurance in the Second World War. Like the trench soldiers, who often subscribed to superstitious belief and ritual as a means of asserting personal control over their immediate environment, the sailors' representations of the 'strange affection' they felt for their ship must arguably be viewed as part of a similar quest for individual security and reassurance amid a thoroughly frightening environment.[9]

A common denominator in all of these naval testimonies is that the machines of the sea were referred to as 'she' and invested with imagined qualities of sentience. As the gendered descriptions of Donald – 'she was a damn fine little ship' – and Hughes – 'strange affection for the ship herself' – illustrate, therefore, gendered personification lies at the heart of the naval veteran's representation of his relationship with his ship or submarine. The mode of personification drew upon centuries of seafaring tradition which locates a vessel as a cognisant female, and there are multiple explanations for why ships are feminised in this fashion, all of which are based upon folk lore. One theory holds that in ancient times boats were dedicated to goddesses in the hope of attracting their favour and protection whilst at sea, whilst another suggests that sailors named their vessels in honour of their womenfolk whom they were leaving behind, as a way of taking their loved ones to sea with them. An extensive body of salty jokes avows that a ship parallels a woman because of the high levels of maintenance and respect which both demand. In any event, traditional sea lore holds

[8] Brian Lavery, *In Which They Served: The Royal Navy Officer Experience in the Second World War* (London: Conway, 2008), p. 70; Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, rev. ed. (London: Constable & Robinson, 2007), p. 100.
[9] Alexander Watson, 'Self-Deception and Survival: Mental Coping Strategies on the Western Front, 1914-18', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41:2 (April 2006), pp. 260-261.

that sailors embarking upon a long voyage invested their vessels with all the gendered qualities of a nurturing and loving, if occasionally unpredictable, spouse as a way of reassuring themselves that they were under the protection of a faithful and benevolent companion.[10] Significantly, despite all the twentieth-century technology which modernised the Royal Navy's ships and submarines, the memoirs of its veterans suggest that they remained keen to subscribe to the old superstition that their vessel offered benevolent female companionship through the hazards of wartime sea-going. For instance, Donald avowed that a ship 'is not just a matter of steel and iron and wood, she has a personality of her own.'[11] Likewise, Hughes remarked that HMS *Scylla* was a 'Proud Lady' and 'seemed to have a personality of her own'.[12] Sydney Hart affirmed that his new submarine, HMS *Thrasher*, was 'As full of whims as a highly-strung woman'.[13] Displaying a familiar insistence that his submarine was 'almost human', Charles Anscomb reflected at length on his relationship with HMS *Parthian*. One came to feel, he asserted, that 'she is alive… with her good and bad humours, her tricks and her tantrums and her loyalty and strength too.'[14]

There is a fascinatingly esoteric suggestion in these narratives that sailors did not believe that a ship was born with her 'personality' inbuilt. Hughes, for example, perceived that HMS *Scylla* had acquired a 'strange quality' which came to ensnare his

[10] Laurie Churchman suggests that the origins of this practice of referring to vessels in the feminine pronoun date back to ancient Greece. Laurie Churchman, *The Art of Boat Names: Inspiring Ideas for Names and Designs* (New York: International Marine/McGraw-Hill, 2009), p. 10. Traditionally, superstition and sexism are offered as popular explanations of the prevalence of seafarer's discussion of ships as females. Pieter van der Merwe, a naval historian at the National Maritime Museum, explains that it is 'likely' that the tradition 'relates to the idea of goddesses and mother figures playing a protective role in looking after a ship and crew.' Pieter van der Merwe, 'Ask a Grown-Up: Why are boats called she', *The Guardian*, 1 February 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/feb/01/ask-grown-up-boats-called-she (accessed 2 November 2015). In 2002, a debate arose when Lloyds List, a 268 year-old newspaper and provider of shipping news, announced their future intention to call ships 'it' rather than 'she'. In an article in *The Telegraph*, a Royal Navy spokesman publicly refuted the suggestion that the Navy would adopt a similar stance, insisting that 'ships have a soul.' Andrew Hibberd and Nicola Woolcock, 'Lloyd's List sinks the tradition of calling ships "she"', *The Telegraph*, 21 March 2002, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1388373/Lloyds-List-sinks-the-tradition-of-calling-ships-she.html (accessed 2 November 2015). For further confirmation of the type of salty jokes in which some modern sailors continue to draw parallels between ships and women, please see Rear Admiral Francis D. Foley, 'Why We Call A Ship A She', *Naval History*, 12:6 (1998), p.43.

[11] Donald, *Stand By for Action*, p. 14.

[12] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 149.

[13] Sydney Hart, *Discharged Dead: A True Story of Britain's Submarines at War* (London: Odhams Press, 1956), p. 138.

[14] Charles Anscomb, *Submariner* (London: William Kimber, 1957), p. 105.

affections.[15] Similarly, while inspecting his new command, HMS *Storm*, an S-boat in the basin at Cammell Laird shipyard, Edward Young visualised the development of his virgin submarine's persona in the months ahead:

> By that time she would have acquired a past and a familiar personality of her own. Now she was still a composite of steel parts, inanimate and separate, not yet co-ordinated to a common purpose. History would not begin for her until the moment she moved in the water under her own power.[16]

These statements offer intriguing insights into how these seamen envisaged the formation of their ship's 'personality'. The verb 'to acquire' is often employed, inferring that an identifiable character was something which a vessel attained over time, rather than something that was specifically congenital. The belief that a ship retained a mortal identity is extended further into the supernatural by the insistence of several memoirists that their vessel possessed not only a persona, but a specific 'soul': an ephemeral core which renders a living entity human. For example, Hart wrote of being drafted to HMS *Triad*, a T-class submarine which was laid down in Barrow in 1939. Describing the submarine's very first dive, he reflected that 'she seemed in some indefinable way to have acquired a soul.'[17] Importantly, however, like Young, he located this development of a human spirit in the process of setting sail, once the vessel and her crew had commenced their professional partnership. The same concept also characterised representations of new surface ships gaining vitality through the unity of man and machine. Of *Scylla*'s Commissioning Day, Hughes wrote that 'The loudspeaker system came to life with the many orders to the ship's company, the bugle rang out at intervals, and the ship began to breathe.'[18]

Perceptions of this 'strange quality' of a human-like mortality were not solely reserved for newly commissioned vessels. Naval memoirists who had joined older ships also related the existence of a communion of spirits in which crew and craft became emotionally fused. Rayner speculated that the origins of his 'special bond' with his elderly W class destroyer, HMS *Warwick*, had developed from an arcane

[15] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 149.
[16] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 142.
[17] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 29.
[18] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 15.

connection between the ship and those who had formerly sailed in her. Embodying a telling hint of superstition, he wrote that:

> the men who have lived in her leave behind either an aura of happiness or the gloom of unhappiness, either of which becomes as much a part of the ship as her own steel structure. *Warwick* had so happy an atmosphere as to be almost startling. As soon as your foot touched her deck you became aware of it. She radiated a human warmth from the whole of her slim figure.[19]

The suggestion here is that a ship drew its personality or 'soul' from the men who crewed her. Running alongside this, however, is also a view that only particular ships retained a firm enough grip upon the memoirist's emotions to be invested with tropes of humanity. In his perception that *Scylla* was endowed with 'that strange quality which some ships acquire', Hughes articulates that other vessels were unable to possess similar attributes.[20] Further narratives bear out this view. For instance, Hart perceived that HMS *Triad* had come to acquire a soul 'like every other ship found worthy', which implies that not every vessel was deemed sufficiently special to have developed this impression of humanity. [21] By these superstitious terms, if a ship carried a crew of men who were ill-fated, ill-disciplined, or simply 'unhappy', that 'strange affection for the ship' could not be forthcoming. These testimonies thus serve to reinforce the concept that a good relationship between a sailor and ship was founded upon equal partnership. If the crew were slack or miserable, they could not contribute to the upkeep and smooth running of their female companion, thus upsetting the delicate balance of reciprocal responsibility for each other's well-being.

Pedantically, of course, any pairing of combatant and machine must invariably be physically interdependent, yet where the fighter pilot tended to veil this immutable fact in comforting affirmations of his own individual power, the seamen recognised their partnership as far more equally-weighted. As Noel Coward's character, 'Captain Kinross', in the 1942 naval film, *In Which We Serve*, informed his crew, a 'happy and efficient ship' was central to the survival of all. Furthermore, he expounded, 'In my experience, you can't have one without the other.'[22] A 'happy and efficient'

[19] Rayner, *Escort*, p. 169.
[20] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 149.
[21] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 29.
[22] *In Which We Serve*, directed by Noel Coward and David Lean (British Lion Film, 1942).

relationship between sailor and ship was thus rooted in the acceptance that each was reliant upon the other for its safety. Fundamentally, as Hampson pointed out, 'A warship at sea is a self-contained unit; you cannot ring up headquarters for advice or instructions.'[23] Relating the first night aboard his new command, the anti-submarine trawler *Lady Madeleine*, Ogden reflected that 'perhaps in no other sphere of war were men so dependent on one another and upon the ship in which they served'. 'I did not realize then,' he announced, 'that a ship and her complement are bound together with the ties of life and death'.[24] Expanding upon this sentiment, Hughes explained that sailors tended to perceive a special bond with their ship because 'She had shared our dangers and brought us safe to harbour. She was our home.'[25] As this remark highlights, whilst the connection forged between man and ship had a pragmatic basis in physical mutual reliance, from an emotional perspective the vessel could be invested with traditionally prized feminine qualities of nurturing and protecting, providing welcome physical and psychological succour for the crew. These connotations of security and shelter therefore served to amplify, and romanticise, the seaman's emotional response to his ship into something which resembles the bonds of reciprocal love that knot together a successful marriage, testifying to the old naval saw that seamen were 'married' to their vessels due to the length of time they spent together and the experiences they shared on their voyage. Indeed, the ways in which these men tapped into centuries of seafaring folklore and invoked the reassuring qualities of protectiveness, nurturing and love which might be found in a good spouse suggest that the naval veteran viewed the unique partnership with his machine as something akin to a treasured love affair. Several memoirists even discuss being parted from their ship in a manner which is more akin to the ending of a love affair. For example, Hart described leaving HMS *Truant* in romantic terms: 'parting from her was like having a leg cut off. Only a man who has grown deeply attached to a ship can understand the loneliness of a separation from her.'[26] Similarly, separated from his beloved HMS

[23] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. 31.
[24] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 19.
[25] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 149
[26] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 128

Parthian, Anscomb was singularly unimpressed when he joined HMS *Tempest* in October 1941, noting bitterly that 'my old love had died hard.'[27]

A curious form of spiritual romance is thus woven into the seaman's narrative representations of his wartime relationship with his ship. Whilst not all ships engendered the same levels of 'strange affection' in their crew, the intimate connection that many sailors experienced with their vessels is revealingly depicted in a mixture of superstitious and loving tropes. Macintyre's description of HMS *Hearty* in January 1940 encapsulates the naval memoirists' romanticisation of the partnership between man and machine. This, he announced, was 'the ship that I knew I could lose my heart to.'[28]

Fighter Command and the Battle of Britain, 1940

High above the unforgiving waters of the 'cruel sea', a somewhat different, albeit equally romanticised, relationship unfolded between the airmen and their machines. The Battle of Britain, fought over the south-east of England during the summer of 1940, has been etched into British culture and remembrance as an iconic event in the military narrative of the Second World War, in which the aircraft of Fighter Command became almost as adored national treasures as their highly fêted pilots. Rarely have the machines of war been so entrenched in the affections of combatant and public alike, and the British public's love affair with the Hawker Hurricane, and especially the Supermarine Spitfire, has continued for another seventy years. The devotion these machines inspired in their aircrew proved equally enduring. Indeed, the intensity of fondness which the Hurricane and Spitfire unleashed in 'The Few' compelled Richard Hillary's so-called 'inarticulate' breed of aerial warriors to lyricize about their aeroplanes in an intimate discourse which irradiates their memoirs.[29] Strikingly, the relationship forged between these aircraft and their flyers does not appear in any other type of fighter narratives. For example, one Beaufighter Mark II pilot described his machine as 'downright evil', noting that it 'seemed to

[27] Anscomb, *Submariner*, p. 106.
[28] Donald Macintyre, *U-Boat Killer* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1956), p. 10.
[29] Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, rev.ed. (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 43.

breathe an air of malevolence'.[30] Similarly, Richard Hough, a Battle of Britain veteran who wove his personal recollections throughout a scholarly account of 1940, described his later experiences of flying the Typhoon in less than glowing terms: 'I never loved her… One reached an armed truce, an understanding brought about by a balance of terror.'[31] In his history of the Battle of Britain, Stephen Bungay supposed that the peculiar bond of 'The Few' with their aircraft was forged out of 'the power eros'.[32] Yet the love of the fighter pilot for his machine, as it is mediated through these narratives, appears forged less by sensual sentiment than by a somewhat egocentric desire for personal possession and control. Thus far, some scholars have demonstrated an understandable tendency to focus upon the ways in which aircrew – Spitfire pilots in particular – represented their aircraft in gendered terms of beauty and femininity.[33] Such identification of a gendered element to the flyer's rapport with his aircraft, however, constitutes only a minor element of the complex relationship between Fighter Command's men and machines during Britain's 'finest hour'.

The physical connection of man and machine provided a basis for the development of an intense emotional bond. For example, due to the 'snugness' of the cockpit, Duncan Smith remarked that he felt 'part of the Spitfire, a oneness that was intimate.'[34] For tall, broadly-built men like Tim Vigors and 'Johnnie' Johnson, the sensation of physical closeness to their machine was further increased by their shoulders rubbing up against the fuselage.[35] Although Hurricane pilots benefitted from a more spacious cockpit, a similar sense of literal fusion between man and machine was also apparent. Drawing upon a survey of various fictional and non-fictional literary sources which documented this affinity, Martin Francis's study of the RAF and wartime British culture recognises a strong 'sense of flyer and aircraft becoming a single, merged entity.'[36] His interpretation of this unified 'entity' suggests that the

[30] Graham White, *The Long Road to the Sky: Night Fighter over Germany* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2006), p. 6.
[31] Richard Hough and Denis Richards, *The Battle of Britain: The Jubilee History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. 96.
[32] Stephen Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy: A History of the Battle of Britain* (London: Aurum Press, 2000), p. 82.
[33] Francis, *The Flyer*; Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy*.
[34] W.G.G. Duncan Smith, *Spitfire into Battle*, rev. ed. (London: John Murray, 2002), p. 22.
[35] Tim Vigors, *Life's Too Short to Cry: The Compelling Memoir of a Battle of Britain Ace* (London: Grub Street, 2006), p. 136; 'Johnnie' Johnson, *Wing Leader* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p. 26.
[36] Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 166.

man became subsumed by the machine: 'the mechanization of the flyer's body appeared so advanced that human presence in the aircraft had been erased completely'.[37] Yet the corpus of fighter pilot memoirs reviewed here testifies that the opposite was true and that some delicate re-setting of this viewpoint is required. The case for this adjustment is made by Smith's claim that 'you buckled the Spitfire on', an observation also made by Bill Rolls, who noted that the aircraft felt 'as though you had it strapped on you'.[38] Rather than the body of the flyer becoming 'mechanised', therefore, these men thought that the balance of power in fact lay the other way around, perceiving the aircraft as an appendage of the pilot. Indeed, Smith's remark that 'the Spitfire became an integral part and an extension of one's own sensitivity' highlights the fact that the flyer's relationship with his aeroplane was shaped by dynamics of power, and both he and Rolls proffer a delicate reminder that, ultimately, the machine was responsive to the pilot's own will.[39]

It was, however, a common aircrew perception that their aircraft harboured animate qualities, and like the naval authors, flyer memoirists often insisted outright upon the sentience of their machines. Tom Neil, for example, roundly declared that his aircraft was 'alive!'[40] Investing 92 Squadron's Spitfires with the mortal essence of human beings, Geoffrey Wellum announced that they 'live just like the rest of us, they understand.'[41] Others conveyed their machine's imagined vitality through the conference of personal pronouns and stereotypical gender roles upon their aircraft. The Spitfire, in particular, was commonly envisaged as ineffably female. With its fluid lines, narrow fuselage, elliptical wing, and the jaunty angle of its nose, the aircraft seemed to Hough 'essentially a feminine machine, dainty, provocative, not always predictable.'[42] Merton Naydler, a Spitfire pilot who flew with the Desert Air Force in North Africa, concurred, observing that this aircraft was 'a feminine-looking little plane, and as deadly as any female of the species.'[43] Notably, these testimonies are

[37] Ibid., p. 166.
[38] Smith, *Spitfire into Battle*, p. 86; Rolls, *Spitfire Attack*, p. 22.
[39] Smith, *Spitfire into Battle*, p. 86.
[40] Tom Neil, *Gun Button to Fire: A Hurricane Pilot's Dramatic Story of the Battle of Britain*, rev. ed. (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2010), p. 40.
[41] Geoffrey Wellum, *First Light* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 145.
[42] Hough and Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, p. 92.
[43] Merton Naydler, *Young Man You'll Never Die* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2005), p. 24.

based upon its performance in addition to its appearance. Hubert Allen, for instance, ruminated that 'In certain of her mannerisms she was nearly as awful a bitch as the loveliest woman I ever met.'[44] Through this lexis, the design faults of the Spitfire, such as overly sensitive controls, poor vision to the rear, and an inadequate battery of weaponry, could be disguised as quirks of a distinctive character, lending further weight to the illusion that the aircraft possessed cognisance.

The full nature of the fighter pilot's emotional connection to his aircraft is, however, illustrated less through gendered symbolism than by a distinctive iconography which cemented the notion of the aircraft as a living creature. The majority of Battle of Britain memoirists turned to the animal kingdom in search of suitable imagery to craft this representation. Perhaps surprisingly, obvious ornithological sources of inspiration were little tapped. Smith's allusion to his Spitfire as a 'golden eagle' provides almost the sole example of a flyer likening his aircraft to the birds of the air.[45] Instead, these pilots typically imagined their machines in either equine or canine terms. Innate differences in aesthetics and combat performance between the Spitfire and Hurricane, however, resulted in a marked disparity in the type of breeds to which these machines were likened. The two models of aircraft were frequently compared against each other, with the veteran drawing upon these animal references as a device for parading the comparative attributes of each type of machine. Allen, for example, acerbically announced that the Spitfire represented 'a race-horse where the Hurricane was a hack.'[46] Naturally, Allen was a Spitfire pilot. Pilots of the 'Hurry', however, were just as quick to praise their aircraft. Geoffrey Page, who had been transferred from a Spitfire squadron to fly Hurricanes in the Battle of Britain, commented that 'whereas the Spitfire had all the speed and grace of the greyhound in its sleek appearance, the Hurricane portrayed the excellent qualities of the bulldog, being slower but much more solidly built than the other.'[47] Similarly, when his squadron was refitted with Hurricanes in June 1940, Neil was placed in a prime position to compare his new machine with his former Spitfire. In general, he mused,

[44] H.R. Allen, *Battle for Britain: The Recollections of H.R. 'Dizzy' Allen DFC* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd, 1973), p. 11.
[45] Smith, *Spitfire into Battle*, p. 10.
[46] Allen, *Battle for Britain*, p. 11.
[47] Page, *Shot Down in Flames*, p. 30.

'we were not disappointed. While it may not have had the refinements of a Spit, our recent acquisition was rock-solid and possessed of an obvious ruggedness and strength. No shrinking violet, this!'[48] With its thickset structure, the Hurricane provided a steady gun platform, and Neil correspondingly perceived that in the air its pilot detected a 'feeling of steadiness' in his aircraft, a 'no-nonsense' manner, which the Spitfire lacked.[49] This led him to affectionately describe 'the old Hurricane' as 'strong as a carthorse' in low altitude clashes with bombers, where the fighter operated at its best at around 15,000 feet.[50]

The Spitfire, however, so its pilots asserted, was simply 'in a different class.'[51] If the Hurricane constituted the workhorse of Fighter Command, the Spitfire was bred for speed and pleasure. After learning to fly on cumbersome training aircraft, Tony Bartley was agreeably surprised by the speed of the Spitfire, drawing the same analogy as Allen that this aircraft constituted a 'racehorse' whereas other aircraft (including the Hurricane) were dismissed as a 'hack'.[52] In terms of eye-catching aesthetics and the responsiveness of the way it handled in combat, the Spitfire appeared the epitome of high-class breeding. Indeed, Johnson, Vigors and Wellum individually articulated a firm opinion that the aircraft embodied all the attributes of a 'thoroughbred', with the latter positing that his Spitfire waited for take-off 'trembling' like a pedigree racehorse 'at the start of the Derby.'[53] The superior aerodynamics of its elliptical wing, and the sensitivity of its controls, meant that the Spitfire possessed the ability to confront the dangerous German fighter, the Bf. 109, on more or less equal terms, with good odds of victory. This is consequently reflected in the choice of simile which the Spitfire pilots selected to represent their machine. The connection of this aircraft to thoroughbreds and greyhounds, bred for the specific purpose of winning races, irrevocably bound the Spitfire up with key associations of being a champion.

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[48] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 40.
[49] Ibid., p. 39.
[50] Ibid., p. 86.
[51] Allen, *Battle for Britain*, p. 11.
[52] Tony Bartley, *Smoke Trails in the Sky*, rev. ed. (Wilmslow: Crecy Publishing, 1997), p. 9; Allen, *Battle for Britain*, p. 11.
[53] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 138.

Greyhounds or bulldogs, thoroughbreds or carthorses, these allusions all combine to produce a discrete discourse with which the fighter pilot memoirist deliberately invested his aircraft. With the whole spectrum of the animal kingdom available to choose comparisons from, it is notable that the majority of these authors opted for dogs or horses. Since both of these animals are traditionally faithful companions of man, the decision to represent their aircraft in these terms indicates that the memoirists viewed their machines in much the same light. Hough, for instance, described the rapport with his Hurricane as like a 'man-and-working-dog relationship.'[54] Further illumination upon the depth of this connection is cast by Neil, who reflected that 'I felt about aircraft much as I had done about my old dog… a combination of loyalty and love. Silly, really, but it was a genuine and deep-seated emotion.'[55] These choices of imagery to communicate the fashioning of this bond might be further explained as evidence of the flyer's unceasing struggle to dampen ubiquitous combat fears. On the ground, a fighter squadron was, as Neil wrote, 'very much a close-knit family affair', yet the fighter pilot's experience as a combatant was largely solitary.[56] Although members of a squadron endeavoured to protect each other in the air as far as possible, Roger Hall explained that, 'In the middle of an aerial fight you were really your own master'.[57] Once in the cockpit, therefore, the flyer's spatial detachment from his fellow pilots meant that self-reliance was the key to survival, a fact which elicited trepidation as well as excitement in the fighter pilot. When his squadron was scrambled, Smith explained that 'for all the nearness each one of them was as remote as a star.'[58] Bartley also declared that 'One of the unique and most alarming experiences in one's life must surely be to find oneself alone in an aeroplane for the very first time, completely dependent upon oneself to get back to mother earth.'[59] He too reflected at length that the airborne pilot experienced intense feelings of isolation: 'Air combat was a personal, individual challenge, because we fought alone… We had no comrades marching shoulder to shoulder. No pipes or drums, and

[54] Hough and Richards, *The Battle of Britain*, p. 84.
[55] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 145.
[56] Ibid., p. 28.
[57] Roger Hall, *Clouds of Fear* (Folkestone: Bailey Brothers and Swinfen Ltd, 1975), p. 40.
[58] Smith, *Spitfire into Battle*, p. 46.
[59] Bartley, *Smoke Trails in the Sky*, p. 9.

the loneliness was sometimes more frightening than the bullets.'[60] In these accounts the investment of aircraft with stereotypical equine and canine qualities implies, therefore, that the author interpreted his machine as a vital source of companionship when he was airborne.

Furthermore, the flyers' choice of imagery to represent their aircraft also underlines an entrenched desire for individual control over all aspects of combat. To this end, the selection of dogs and horses as symbols of their aeroplanes underscores a significant imbalance in the dynamics of power in this relationship between man and machine. By imagining the aircraft as a working animal, the flyer could invest it with the reassuring character and responsiveness of a living companion. By the same token, however, the flyer could set himself up as the superior partner in this relationship. Tethered to the canine and equine tropes – in particular the latter – is an overt lexis of private control which articulates the pilot's urge to exert a sense of personal dominance over his machine. Depictions of the fighter pilot becoming the 'master' of his 'mettlesome' aerial mount abound in these narratives.[61] For example, Wellum remarked of his Spitfire that it appeared to have the demeanour of a 'horse watching the approach of a new and unknown rider and wondering just how far to try it on and generally be bloody minded.'[62] Similarly, Neil mused that his aircraft seemed to be 'pulling hard like a wayward horse' which he subsequently 'reined in'.[63] Johnson too explained that, upon taking off, 'it was time to take a firm hand with this little thoroughbred, for so far she had been the dominant partner in our enterprise.'[64] These assertions of the fighter pilot's supremacy over his machine might be construed as a further response to the fears generated by combat. Among aircrew of both Fighter and Bomber Command, it has been recognised that such fears 'often had more to do with the presence or absence of personal agency than with an objectively defined degree of danger.'[65] The memoirs of the former certainly suggest that their isolated position in sole command of fast, manoeuvrable aircraft allowed them to subscribe to a heartening

[60] Ibid., p. 59.
[61] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 33.
[62] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 101.
[63] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 32.
[64] Johnson, *Wing Leader*, p. 27.
[65] Francis, *The Flyer*, p. 113.

myth that they were in full control of their own fate. In particular, the frequent depiction of aeroplanes as horses in these narratives echoes D.H. Lawrence's description of that animal as 'the symbol of surging potency and power of movement, of action, in man.'[66] In representing his relationship with his aircraft in such terms of dominance, therefore, the former fighter pilot's expressions of determination to 'master' his mechanical mount might be interpreted as assertions of 'personal agency' that helped to calm his anxieties about battle.

Significantly, K. W. Mackenzie referred to his squadron's Hurricanes as 'trusty steeds', a description which conveys all the qualities of faithfulness, reliability, and personal control that the flyer clearly sought from his machine.[67] This phrase, however, also serves to inject a spice of chivalric romance into the heated aerial clashes of 1940. On the whole, the 'Knights of the Air' discourse which has become so attached to popular (and invariably some scholarly) understandings of 'The Few', is conspicuous by its absence in Battle of Britain personal memoirs. Yet, as Mackenzie's association of the term 'steeds' with Fighter Command's aircraft illustrates, it is through the flyer's relationship with his machine that a faint tint of knightly combat colours these literary representations of battle. Samuel Hynes, perhaps speaking in his own capacity as veteran combat pilot-turned-literary-critic-turned-war memoirist, recognises in the relationship a flyer developed with his aircraft an irresistible allure of finding ancient martial romance. After the industrialised mass slaughter of the Western Front during the First World War, he claims, an individual's ability to control his movements in battle 'restored' the combatant's enjoyment of war.[68] This, however, is quite a generalisation, and the narratives of 'The Few' actually show very little inclination to romanticise their battles, as the later discussion of their representations of the killing act demonstrates. Nevertheless, it is certainly fair to state that these texts corroborate to some extent Hynes's declaration that, in these machines, 'men could once more take pleasure in the dangers they faced, because they could choose what action they took

[66] D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, (ed.) Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 102.
[67] K. W. Mackenzie, *Hurricane Combat: The Nine Lives of a Fighter Pilot* (London: William Kimber, 1987), p. 57.
[68] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 123.

against them.'[69] Arguably, therefore, the nature of the loyal and companionable working partnership constructed between aircraft and pilot allowed the latter a rare chance to indulge in an element of rose-tinted self-deception. By imagining his aeroplane as a 'trusty steed', he could harness a nostalgic glimmer of romance to his battles as one of the nation's airborne champions.

Tanks and the Normandy Campaign, 1944

The tale of the tank lays bare an entirely different facet of the connection between men and arms during the Second World War. Quite literally more down-to-earth, the memoirists' accounts of tank warfare during the Normandy campaign of the summer and autumn of 1944, and throughout the following Allied push deep into occupied Europe, portray partnership with this 'grey machinery of murder' without any redemptive qualities of beauty or companionship. Particularly amid the rubble of Normandy, the relationship of tank and 'tankie' is depicted as sour and singularly lacking in pretensions to romance of any kind. Devoid of reassuring fantasy, the combatant's mood towards his machine in this context was one of dour pragmatism, as the imagery used by tank commander Ken Tout embodies. Of the sensation of dropping through the hatch into his Sherman M4 shortly before the battle for Caen in August 1944, Tout wrote that 'We have suddenly become subterranean. Death beetles inside a steel wall. Mobile troglodytes.'[70] The experience of tank crew is thus immediately set up as dark, primitive and somewhat hapless. Markedly lacking here are the individual myths of personal agency to which the fighter pilots could subscribe, or the superstitious, tender co-dependency with which the seamen represent their vessels.

Indeed, throughout the memoirs of British tank crew who participated in the battles in north-west Europe after June 1944, there is a stark absence of any of the palliative qualities with which the fighter pilots and sailors invested their machines. There is no trace of femininity or comforting illusion in this partnership, no sense that the tank was imagined as a sentient and compliant ally. Here machines are wholly inanimate, metal hulks devoid of any personifying characteristics which might have

[69] Ibid., p. 123.
[70] Ken Tout, *Tank!* (London: Robert Hale, 1985), p. 43.

helped to soften perceptions of war for their crews. To some extent, the brittle relationship of tank crew and armour may be interpreted as a product of the specific combat environment in which these men found themselves. For instance, whilst Montgomery's own private tank in the fast-paced desert war two years earlier was flippantly referred to as 'the army commander's charger', in Normandy during the summer of 1944, there appeared little scope to similarly romanticise tanks as dashing warhorses.[71] Stuart Hills recorded that, in comparison to the Western Desert, the terrain in Normandy was deeply unsuitable for armour:

> some of our desert veterans longed for the open spaces of Libya and Tunisia, where tanks could manoeuvre and fight an altogether different type of battle to this close-range slugging match of attrition in which they were now involved, but we had little option and had to endure in our turn. The main difference, apart from the ranges at which the respective battles were fought, was the nature of the ground. In rolling desert, where attacking or defending tanks remained hull-down and invisible in small depressions, there were advantages for both sides.[72]

In the dense woods, narrow sunken lanes and small, hedged-in fields of the Normandy bocage, tanks found it difficult to manoeuvre, and frequently suffered the indignity of becoming stuck in ditches or wedged in tight lanes. The confinements of this landscape thus meant that tanks lost their advantages of speed and mobility, often presenting a sitting target to marauding Germans. Hidden behind the numerous hedgerows or in the thick woodlands of this countryside, a single well-placed enemy soldier carrying an anti-tank weapon could skulk in wait for the tanks, which could rarely prevent or even detect his presence until it was too late. The German *Panzerfaust* posed a considerable threat, as it was both cheap to produce and easy for a lone soldier to carry.[73] The portable nature of this weapon, used in conjunction with a landscape which was inherently hostile to tanks, thus menaced the Allied machines. In the desert, Hills bitterly noted, there had been 'no danger of an infantryman with a hand-held Panzerfaust suddenly popping up from nowhere to fire at close quarters.'[74] Despite the might and firepower of the tanks, therefore, these armoured behemoths largely relied for protection upon infantrymen operating outside the shield of a steel shell, a fact

[71] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 167.
[72] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, p. 102.
[73] Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, p. 129.
[74] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, p. 102.

which did not help to endear their machines to the tank crews. Yet by 1943 the essential value of close co-operation between infantry and armour had been recognised, and by the time of the Allied push through North-West Europe in 1944, had become a virtual precept. All of this meant that the autonomy of the tank was considerably lessened after D-Day. This combination of the adverse Normandy terrain, the ever-present threat of the *Panzerfaust*, and official partnership with the infantry served to rob tank crews of the fundamental freedom of movement requisite to illusions of martial romance. From the start of the Normandy campaign, therefore, tank men were not granted much opportunity to form any semblance of romantic attachment to their machines.

It is also clear from these memoirs that another environmental factor fed into the tank veteran's lack of inclination to invest his war experiences with any kind of romantic illusion. Whereas the fighter pilots and seamen had the advantage of operating in comparatively 'blank canvases' of landscape which granted space and liberty for a man's imagination to roam and construct comforting beliefs, the tank man in Normandy simply tried to shut his mind off from war altogether. '[E]ach of us', wrote Tout, 'digs a little dug-out in the rubbish of our adolescent beliefs and ambitions. And burrows for comfort into the most secret places of the soul's darkness to avoid the outer realities.'[75] The 'outer realities', however, were difficult to ignore. In these memoirs, a narrative keystone is a vivid description of the author's shock at the destruction wrought upon a normally pleasant and pastoral landscape. Such is the collective horror of these men at the carnage witnessed that descriptions of the scenes are shifted into a realm of frightening inversion that is characterised by anti-pastoralism and a thick layer of macabre surrealism. In the aftermath of D-Day, Donald Sutherland and his crew were pushing through Normandy:

> This was to prove a horrific experience. There was not a copse, not a thicket, which did not house its quota of mangled dead. The roadsides were lined with them and in the fields the grotesquely bloated bodies of farm animals, their stiffened legs pointing to the sky, lay like children's toys thrown carelessly aside.[76]

[75] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 13.
[76] Sutherland, *Sutherland's War*, p. 132.

With equal distaste, Hills wrote of leaving the beachhead and moving inland:

> We set out in our spanking new Sherman through roads and fields littered with the bloated corpses of dead cattle, besieged by flies and by now stinking to high heaven. Here and there were the unburied bodies of soldiers of both sides, grotesque waxwork figures which seemingly had no connection with reality.[77]

Although these memoirists did not remain static, in so far as both moved steadily through the wasteland to the front line, it was virtually impossible to remain physically or psychologically detached from the destruction which lay around, behind and ahead of the crew. Hills, for example, commented that in the narrow lanes, tank crews had to exercise great care not to run over the dead.[78] Stopping for a brief respite and a brew, Tout's men found the mangled remains of a German soldier in the tank tracks.[79] Whereas combatants in other services and battle spaces were arguably granted a valuable boost to their morale by the mobility of their machine, in this context, the inexorable propulsion through Normandy thus posed little comfort to tank crews, littered as it was with grotesque portentous reminders of lurking nemesis. Sutherland mused that:

> [I]t was impossible to avoid seeing the dead, their bodies and faces caught in the grotesque posturing of broken puppets. To glance with professional interest at a 'brewed-up' Tiger or Panther tank in order to assess the manner of its disablement was to see the torso of the driver half out of his escape hatch or the mangled remains of the commander sprawled on top of the turret.[80]

For Hills, the close proximity to the decaying shells of men and tanks 'brought home to me with a trembling horror what I was now going to face and perhaps suffer. I knew then that more scenes of carnage would inevitably follow'.[81] Similarly, as he drew near the front line, Foley observed ominously that 'The trees gradually became leafless skeletons, turning bare, shattered arms towards the darkening sky. Rusty, burned-out tanks dotted the flattened cornfields as sombre reminders of what might lay in store

[77] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, p. 90.
[78] Ibid., p. 90.
[79] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 94.
[80] Sutherland, *Sutherland's War*, p. 132.
[81] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, pp. 90-91.

for us.'[82] These narratives therefore suggest that, to the tank crew, their machine appeared inextricably woven into a macabre tableau of present and future destruction.

Despite the tank's graphic links to the surrounding carnage, an odd dichotomy is manifest in the serviceman's recorded psychological connection with this machine. The 'steel wall' of which Tout wrote is represented as sought and dreaded in equal measure by tank crew. Whilst the machine became unavoidably associated with the surrounding deathscape in the fields and woods of Normandy, it also provided the combatant with a reassuring physical buffer against the foe. Participating in Operation *Totalise*, an Allied offensive in August 1944 which deployed massed tanks to breach the enemy's position at Caen, Tout's squadron advanced rapidly through the night. Much to his unhappiness, in order to further speed progress, he was ordered to get out and help his tank to find a way through the dense countryside on foot. Denuded of his machine, he felt distinctly uneasy:

> A few pedestrians like myself emphatically wave fag-ends to keep the monsters away from crushing flesh and blood. We are not at ease out here on our feet, treading the dangerous earth. We are not infantrymen. We inhabit a different element, as different as are sea and air.[83]

Similarly, as tank commander, Bellamy's task was to ride in the turret of his Cromwell, passing directions to the crew inside and keeping a sharp lookout for signs of the enemy. Recollecting that he would infinitely have preferred to travel inside the machine, he wrote of a 'terrible feeling of vulnerability that one has in a tank turret. It is very high and thus seems visible to all for miles around.'[84] Yet it could also prove counter-productive to rely too much on the protection offered by the 'steel wall' of the tank. Such dangers were highlighted by the plight of Hills' gunner, whose nerve cracked and was consequently forcibly removed from the front line by ambulance:

> Nobody quite knew what had happened, but for some reason he would not come out of the tank. He slept in it, ate in it, refused the opportunity even of a game of football, which he loved. Sam speculated that he had become 'armour-

[82] Cedric John Foley, *Mailed Fist: With A Tank Troop Through Europe* (London: Panther Books, 1957), p. 56.
[83] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 60.
[84] Bill Bellamy, *Troop Leader: A Tank Commander's Story* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p. 62.

> conscious', needing to feel that he had that security of being inside the tank all the time.[85]

Whereas the fighter pilot and seamen experienced some degree of pleasure in their machines, therefore, the tank is predominantly represented by its veterans with an indelible sense of menace. Tout, for example, recounted an anecdote in which his Sherman passed by a very frightened stray German soldier. Attempting to envisage how his tank appeared to the petrified youngster, he wrote that 'I realize what we look like to him: thirty tons of crushing steel, fifty feet of churning iron track swaying towards him like a diabolic mincing machine. And our great gun, yawning steel-black, probing down, straight at his head.'[86] The tank also posed a 'diabolic' threat to the well-being of its own crew, even in the most innocuous of circumstances. Several of these narratives articulate a common myth which circulated among front line crews during 1944 and 1945. Bellamy, for instance, related that when he was at rest during the night, he deliberately parked his tank alongside his sleeping trench. Others, however, were tempted to make other arrangements:

> Some of the crews had thought to dig trenches and then run the tank over the top as a shelter but I had been told that in another regiment one of the crews did this and the tank then settled in the mud, slowly asphyxiating them.[87]

The view from the interior of the tank was also heavily laden with menace. Perhaps more so than memoirists from other services, fear of being trapped within the metal structure haunted the thoughts of these men. As Hills observed, when under mortar fire, particularly from the traumatising Nebelwerfer, tank crews suffered agonies of mind:

> The impact on a tank, which might resolve itself in physical concussion or, at worst, incineration, could lead to near panic and a shattering of morale. We cowered in our compartments under the intensity of these bombardments, knowing full well that there was no safer area to which we could try to move. Claustrophobia and the inability to escape from it were an added strain on our nerves – one felt literally hemmed in by the prospect of death or serious wounding and quite unable to end the onslaught. It was understandable, therefore, that such conditions led to some men becoming 'bomb-happy'.[88]

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[85] Hills, *By Tank into Normandy*, p. 130.
[86] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 67.
[87] Bellamy, *Troop Leader*, p. 87.
[88] Hills, p. 131.

The 'protection' offered by this armour could turn in an instant against the men it sheltered: 'In a moment our mobile home can be transformed into a self-igniting crematorium… a self-sealing mausoleum… or a self-detonating bomb, its own walls shattering into lethal shards of sharp steel projected in wild ricochets, back and forth through the confined space.'[89] Tout's repetition of 'self' here serves as a brutal emphasis of the machine's capacity to morph into a death trap for its crew.

Although the fighter pilots suffered from a similar threat – particularly the Hurricane pilots, who remained unpleasantly aware of the ill-positioned reserve fuel tank's propensity to ignite under fire – they could mask it to some degree by divining pleasurable qualities in the battle partnership with their aircraft. Similarly, although ships and submarines could with equal rapidity turn into metallic tombs for the men they carried, their crew could draw reassurance from fashioning an emotional connection with their vessel. For armoured crew however, conditions inside the tank sealed a lack of desire to colour their relationship with the machine in shades of romantic illusion. From an olfactory perspective, it failed to insulate its crew from the stench of death outside the tank's hull: the reek of dead animals and humans from the surrounding countryside 'creeps in through the periscope fittings like a live, breathing fog.'[90] It also failed to protect the eyes of its crew. Visibility, limited at the best of times from inside the tank, could be rendered acutely painful when travelling in convoy, as Bellamy discovered:

> Dust thrown up by the tracks presented us with an additional problem as our front mudguards had been ripped away by the dense hedgerows, and the dust and grit always seemed to blow into our eyes. This was especially bad for the driver and co-driver, as they were actually sitting between the tracks, peering out through small round apertures which funnelled the dust stream into the tank. By the end of the day we were all filthy, mouths full of grit and eyes raw. Conjunctivitis was prevalent.[91]

Suffering equally in the turret, Bellamy lamented that he was unable to wear protective goggles as they prevented him from using his field glasses. Ricocheting temperatures in the tank's interior posed a further source of discomfort for these 'mobile troglodytes': 'At best it is simply a cramped, bruising caravan, alternating between

[89] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 13.
[90] Ibid., p. 53.
[91] Bellamy, *Troop Leader*, p. 70.

arctic cold and equatorial heat.'[92] Adding to this sensory discomfort, the engines alone produced deafening noise which Tout described as 'All-pervading'.[93] The firing of the guns added to that cacophony:

> If you're the sort of person who operates an electric riveting gun inside boilers for a living, you would have felt completely at home in [the tank]. With all hatches closed the two Besas made an incredible din. The smell of hot gun oil intermingled with the acrid cordite fumes and made our eyes shed streams of tears. All the fume extraction fans were going, of course, but they weren't designed to cope with such a terrific burst of firing.[94]

In these narratives, therefore, there is little sense of scope to establish a positive psychological connection between man and machine. Instead, the partnership is depicted as essentially unhappy, physically and mentally: 'The mind seeks to escape from its claustrophobic confinement and its subjection to horrific noise levels, tortures beyond the concept of any medieval sadist.'[95]

Amid the tangled Normandy bocage, machines thus categorically failed to invest combat, and recollections of combat, with any air of romance for their crew. Indeed, as the testimony of Tout proclaims, going to war in a tank in 1944 actively stripped battle of any shreds of pretension to romance:

> Shorn of the glamour of lances and pennants and galloping horses and trumpets… for all the armour and weaponry, the internal husk, myself, is a frail human being, able, in a fraction of a second, to transmute into a screaming maniac or a heap of blood-stained khaki tatters with a stripe on its sleeve. Or an evil-smelling cinder.[96]

During the early stages of the Allies' attempt to reclaim Europe, therefore, it is clear that the partnership between man and machine offered little joy to armour crews. Instead, the 'tankie' was simply forced to endure this grimly functional relationship as best he could, and it is this sense of bleak fortitude which shapes their depictions of this machine.

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[92] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 13.
[93] Ibid., p. 14.
[94] Foley, *Mailed Fist*, p. 73.
[95] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 14.
[96] Ken Tout, *Tanks, Advance! Normandy to the Netherlands, 1944* (London: Robert Hale, 1987), p. 119.

Summary: Machines and Men in Military Memoir

It is evident that many factors influenced the ways in which a combatant interpreted, and represented, a relationship with his machine. The natural setting clearly played a dominant role in determining the imagery and discourses in which these memoirists chose to imagine their mechanical partner, as did the specific nature of the fighting, and the type of machine in which they served. Yet several veterans also reflected that the personality of the serviceman himself was integral to the forging of a successful combat partnership with his aircraft, tank, ship or submarine. They argued that some types of disposition were simply unsuited to particular machines. For example, Peter Russell, a pilot who served with Coastal and Bomber Commands remarked that he felt his personality would not have been apposite for fighter aircraft: 'There were many whose ambition it was to be a fighter pilot. Certainly, it appealed to the more extrovert. Nobody could call me that.'[97] Anscomb concurred that a man's natural disposition dictated his aptness for a seafaring role: 'A true sailor is a natural man, with a surge of heart too big to be explained. His is no trade. It is a calling.'[98] Insisting that the requisite character traits, or 'symptoms', for a sailor were akin to 'those of a great passion', he thus provides some explanation for the former seafarer's sentimental romanticisation of his relationship with maritime vessels.[99]

From a more expansive perspective, the multiple discourses used by these memoirists to depict a combatant's connection to his mechanical companion offer important insights into this alliance. Whether these tropes assert the individual power and control of martial romance, or the reassurance and optimism of a superstitious, romantic bond, or simply a grim, pragmatic fatalism, they combine to reinforce the centrality of the human experience at the heart of these 'epics'. The veterans' choices of lexis and imagery to represent their relationships with these machines serve as a persistent reminder that at the core of the latter stood at least one man pumping life and action throughout hull and fuselage. Thus, even though machines suffuse these narratives of war experience, it cannot be concluded that they 'dominate' to the exclusion of the human combatant. Rather, what emerges from these memoirs is an

[97] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 20.
[98] Anscomb, *Submariner*, p. 11.
[99] Ibid., p. 12.

insight into the variety of modes through which the veterans understood and ascribed importance to the soldering together of man and machine in martial partnership. As the next chapter explores, the meanings which combatants attached to this partnership between human combatants and the machines of war also helped to mediate their responses towards the enemy and the act of killing.

3. KILLING AND THE ENEMY

'The characteristic act of men at war is not dying, it is killing.'[1]

Extermination of a designated enemy is unquestionably a primary task of frontline combatants, yet Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Grossman's thought-provoking study outlines that overcoming man's innate resistance to killing poses a perennial problem to any military establishment.[2] The ongoing problems of trying to formulate a theory about what makes men perform such acts have been well outlined by John Keegan.[3] Nevertheless, the memoirs of Second World War veterans suggest that the serviceman took responsibility into his own hands for crafting personal psychological mechanisms which enabled him to kill. The more formalised processes of military training are pushed aside in these narratives, which instead privilege the importance of the serviceman's own imagination in shaping his physical and psychological responses to combat. Each service constructed different fantasies about the enemy which they drew upon to help them negotiate their own acts of killing, and their representations of this task are framed by critical perceptions of 'distance' from the enemy. Grossman suggests that the progressive mechanisation of battle by the mid-twentieth century was highly influential in helping the combatant to overcome natural inhibitions to slaying, as martial technologies facilitated an important level of mechanical, psychological, emotional, moral, cultural or social 'distance' between killer and victim.[4] If the target was rendered faceless in the serviceman's imagination, it could be perceived as somehow less human and he could emotionally disassociate himself from the act of killing. The memoirs of British Second World War veterans indeed affirm the necessity of attaining this psychological and emotional 'distance' from the enemy in order to kill, and much attention is given in these narratives to the processes by which the combatants sought to enable themselves to commit the killing act.

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[1] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 1.
[2] Dave Grossman, *On Killing*, rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009).
[3] John Keegan, 'Towards a Theory of Combat Motivation', in *A Time to Kill*, (eds.) Addison and Calder, pp. 3-11.
[4] Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 57.

In further probing the question of how servicemen carried out extremes of violence in modern warfare, Joanna Bourke identifies 'numbed consciences' and 'agentic modes' as two critical processes.[5] In the former instance, men simply damped down moral cognisance and emotionally shut themselves off from the consequences of their actions; in the latter, combatants claimed a sense of authority over their deeds in order to subscribe to a reassuring belief that they could control their own fates. These two processes can be clearly identified in the narratives of sailors and aircrew. Yet strangely they do not appear at all in the narratives of soldiers. Instead, a resolute silence is walled around discussions of the killing act across the battlefields of Europe and North Africa between 1939 and 1945. Rather than fashioning his narrative upon the process of how he brought himself to kill, like the sailors and fighter pilots, the soldier-memoirist opted instead to recount other aspects of his dealings with the enemy, particularly feelings of affinity with German infantry, prisoners of war and the dead. In muffling their tales of killing, the soldiers' memoirs thus tell a markedly different story of combat relations in which they intensively personalise images of their enemy and insist that emotional closeness existed between opponents.[6] This chapter thus explores three different modes in which British combatants emotionally engaged with the enemy during the Second World War, and the alternative ways in which they later chose to represent their violent deeds in their memoirs.

The Royal Navy and the Northern Oceans, 1939-1945

The Royal Navy was demonstrably the most successful of the three services at maintaining a sense of emotional distance from its adversaries. Unlike the fighter pilot or soldier memoirists, naval authors most frequently adopted the 'numbed conscience' mode towards their enemy. Because, as Grossman notes, of the mechanical distances at which the war at sea was conducted, the British mariner knew on an intellectual level that he was fighting a human enemy, but was granted the option of emotional denial that he was killing real men.[7] Norman Hampson reflected that this sense of remoteness explained

[5] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 5.
[6] No such relationship between enemies is depicted in the memoirs of former Far East personnel, in which the Japanese are portrayed in highly racialized terms of deepest loathing.
[7] Grossman, *On Killing*, p. 58.

> one of the reasons why I had opted for the navy: you didn't even see the men whom you killed, or who killed you. It was perhaps less brutalizing than close combat in the army, but it tended to leave you insensible, even if it did not make you sadistic.[8]

The 'insensible' approach of the British seafarer towards his opponents was further fostered by the natural environment in which the naval war was carried out. As Robert Hughes commented:

> The sea is a clean battlefield. The stricken ships slide into the deep, and the floating wreckage is soon dispersed by the ceaseless wash of the waves. You see no shattered buildings, no rotting corpses, nothing but the eternal sea and sky.[9]

With the visible results of his deadly act swiftly hidden by the ocean's shroud, it was comparatively easy for the seamen to convince themselves that they were killing machines rather than men.

Ship-to-ship engagements were rare on the deep-water Atlantic and Arctic convoys, but major threats to British naval and merchant vessels were posed by Axis submarines and aircraft. The plight of stricken German submarine crews prompted some cracks in the British sailor's assumed air of 'insensibility', although memoirists who recounted experiencing a degree of empathy with the foe were quick to approve of the overall justice in the enemy's fate. For example, despite witnessing the mauling of convoy PQ16 in May 1942, Graeme Ogden proclaimed that he experienced 'admiration' for U-boat sailors, insisting that '[U-boats] are clearly manned by brave determined crews. If I survive this contest, one day I should like to talk to a U-boat commander and learn his side of the picture.'[10] Evidently the fact that the German submariners also belonged to a community of seafarers struck a resounding emotional chord with several memoirists, who attest that it was possible to applaud the courage and ability of this enemy whilst simultaneously deploring his work. Donald Macintyre gives further credence to this concept, noting that he had longed to join the tussle between British sailors and German submariners: 'In anti-submarine warfare contact with the enemy would be at close quarters, and the fight would develop finally into

[8] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. 56.
[9] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 91.
[10] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 101.

personal combat in which good seamanship might well decide the issue.'[11] Jack Broome corroborated that some satisfaction could be taken in pitting one's 'seamanship' against that of the enemy. As a thirty-eight year old pre-war submarine commander in the Royal Navy, he had been bitterly disappointed to find himself on the wrong side of the Admiralty's ruling that wartime submariners must be under thirty-five years in age upon the outbreak of war in 1939. Like a handful of what he described wryly as 'doddering' former submarine commanders, he was appointed to an aged destroyer in the hopes that his specialist knowledge would prove useful in the anti-submarine war. 'Thieves to catch thieves' was his view of the role.[12] To his own surprise, he enjoyed his new duties: 'I instinctively saw the attacking problems of U-boat skippers probably much the same as they did, which often gave me a chance to upset their tactics.'[13] In British naval parlance, submarining was inexplicably known as 'the Trade' – arguably, acknowledgement of craftsmanship at sea could, to some degree, transcend flags of nationality. Recognition of the U-boat crews as talented seamen in their own right thus underpins these remarks, granting the German submariner a face and acknowledgement of his sea-faring talent which was categorically denied to his Luftwaffe counterpart.

In contrast, the naval memoirists refused to recognise the skill or human identity of German aircrew due to an especial loathing that enemy aeroplanes attracted from sailors. During the early years of the war, as Germany occupied the French and Norwegian coastlines, the air threat to British shipping steadily increased as airfields were taken over or newly built in order to lengthen the Luftwaffe's reach. The primary German airbase at Banak in northern Norway particularly menaced Russian-bound convoys along the rim of the Arctic Circle. In the first instance, the Luftwaffe was deployed to pinpoint the mass of ships and vector other German aircraft and submarines to the location, before participating in the actual destruction of the convoy. Correspondingly, naval memoirists who served on these icy voyages vociferously aired their condemnation of this airborne enemy. Sailing for Murmansk with PQ18 in 1942, Hughes recollected that he 'hated aircraft with a deadly hatred, and fired at them

[11] Macintyre, *U-Boat Killer*, p. 16.
[12] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 30.
[13] Ibid., p. 25.

with a cold fury'.[14] Two convoys earlier, Ogden had also reached the same state of loathing for this foe, and he offers a vivid depiction of the mental torment suffered by surface crew when one of these planes appeared overhead. On this occasion, the memoirist and his anti-submarine trawler provided part of the escort for PQ16 in May 1942, which was only marginally more fortunate than its ill-starred successor, PQ17. Ogden recorded that their fate was sealed when a single reconnaissance aircraft was sighted in the sky on 24 May, causing him a 'sickening feeling':

> this solitary enemy aircraft was the messenger of death and disaster for P.Q.16. From now onwards the convoy's fate would be held in the retina of a German pilot's eye. Its struggle to avoid destruction by twisting and turning would now be of no avail. There could be no escape. The barbed harpoon had been plunged into the whale's side, not to be withdrawn until it captors had killed it and its blood had turned the pale Arctic sea to crimson.[15]

An almost identical sensation was reported by Roger Hill in the destroyer HMS *Ledbury* only weeks later when a Blohm and Voss scout sighted PQ17 and began to shadow the convoy. Hill's simple description of the aircraft as 'evil' offers deeper insight in the levels of fear and loathing with which escort sailors regarded this enemy.[16] To Ogden, the unceasing presence of their airborne tracker represented a malevolent omen:

> As I watched this evil shadow through my glasses, I thought of it as a gigantic bat, a *fledermaus*, a spectre consorting with a butcher, a Schlachter. I knew for certain that P.Q.16 was under sentence of death; it was now only a question of how many of our ships and their crews were going to perish in the icy waters of the Arctic seas.[17]

To a considerable degree, the label of 'evil' which was affixed to these German planes was born of an intense feeling of helplessness which the very appearance of these machines generated. On summertime Arctic convoys, 'There was no darkness in which to hide in those northern latitudes and we were under observation by our executioners for twenty-four hours a day.'[18] The searing awareness of vulnerability which these sailors experienced was not diminished when the time came for Action Stations against

[14] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 119.
[15] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 114.
[16] Hill, *Destroyer Captain*, p. 42.
[17] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 115.
[18] Ibid., p. 115.

the aircraft. For example, Hampson felt that his role of relaying the captain's orders to the guns was too passive to promote any reassuring sense of personal agency:

> When we were in action against a submarine, it did not occur to me that this was any different from our exercises off Tobermory and that this one might bite. Air attacks were a very different matter, since all I had to do was to watch the enemy coming at us. That petrified – or, to be more accurate, jellified me.[19]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, there is a marked sense of psychological 'distance' between these memoirists and the crew of the enemy aircraft. In these narratives, it is the machine itself onto which the combatant projects his emotional response – the German aircrew simply do not register with these sailors, as Hampson exemplifies in an anecdote documenting his experiences in the Mediterranean. Escorting a convoy through the Gulf of Sirte in May 1943, the ships were attacked by dive bombers and torpedo bombers. The former sailor's dismissive report of the onslaught typifies the naval memoirists' dispassionate representations of killing German aircrew: 'It was said that several of the torpedo bombers had been shot down but no one ever asked what had become of their crews.'[20]

Significantly, although the British seamen evidently regarded the Luftwaffe aircrew as synonymous with their despised machines, the naval memoirists firmly separated man from machine in their representations of the Kriegsmarine. As in the case of the Luftwaffe machines, the U-boat is represented as a foe in its own right, but in their accounts of engagements with enemy submarines, barbed animosity is directed towards the vessels from which the Germans plied their trade, rather than the crews *per se*. Although it was just about possible to recognise and even admire the human enemy's qualities of seamanship, his submarine is portrayed as an abomination in the naval memoirs. The very term 'U-boat' is charged with special meaning, raising connotations of treachery, black cunning and malevolence. Despite Ogden's glowing testament to the courage of the German submariners, for instance, he referred to their vessel simply as 'the devil'.[21] In his autobiography, Nicholas Monsarrat elucidated

[19] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. 46.
[20] Ibid., p. 56.
[21] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 101.

upon the singular hatred which British seamen directed towards the enemy's submarines:

> As a lapsed pacifist, I was still glad that I didn't have to fire guns, which could shed blood and were terribly noisy anyway… Depth-charges were quite different, as all the world knew. They didn't really kill people; they just sank U-boats, metal objects which were trying to kill *us*. The convention that whereas we had submarines (noble and skilful), the hated Hun actually used U-boats (wicked and treacherous), was still a persistent gloss on history.[22]

The sheer level of British abhorrence of these machines is further illustrated by a specific verb that was used to describe their demise. U-boats were not destroyed by the Royal Navy, they were 'killed'.[23] The sense of fulfilment in dispatching a German submarine is exemplified by Macintyre, who wrote that the 'hunt for, the stalking of, and the final killing of a U-boat had always seemed to me to be the perfect expression of a fighting sailor's art… sea warfare had become largely a matter of mathematical computation'.[24] Indeed, Macintyre found such satisfaction in destroying these vessels that he titled his memoir *U-boat Killer*.

Importantly, 'mathematical computation' also firmly characterised the Royal Navy's view of the enemy from the other end of the periscope. On the whole, the British submariners' memoirs proffer a cold and mechanical approach in which the destruction of U-boats and ships is conducted with a calm dispassion that borders on indifference. A certain silence surrounds the submariner's feelings about killing enemy ships and men in these narratives, which carries a suggestion that perhaps the topic was taboo for those in 'the Trade'. Certainly, Hart's description of destroying a target off Norway provides an example of the emotionally-detached language in which the submariners' kills are typically represented. The simplicity of his assertion that his boat now had 'at least one sinking to our credit' illustrates a distinct lack of concern about the fate of the German crew.[25] The dead ship is never mentioned – once the torpedoes hit home, it simply disappears from the submariner's thoughts.

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[22] Monsarrat, *Life*, p. 27.
[23] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 25; Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p. 16.
[24] Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p.16.
[25] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 5.

To some extent, the sheer physical distance between a submarine and its target may be held accountable for this psychological remoteness. As William King remarked, 'Submarines are seldom able to confirm their successes by observation.'[26] It was very unlikely that a boat would linger to watch the aftermath of its actions; even should it do so, as Hughes pointed out, wreckage was rapidly claimed by the waves. Hart provides further insight into the submariner's emotional detachment from the killing act, reporting an attack on a schooner off the African coast which he surmised contained supplies of ammunition for Rommel: 'she was a mass of potential death for our hard-fighting, hard-pressed, fellow-countrymen.'[27] Underpinning the memoirist's detached attitude is therefore a conviction that he was not a killer of 'innocent' ships. Subsequent corroboration of this is offered by Hart's laconic description of torpedoing another enemy ship: 'we heard that ominous dull knocking sound that signified success, and the Axis lacked a sizeable ship. Just how her crew felt about it wasn't our business – little we cared.'[28] Hart's clarification of the process by which submariners sank enemy vessels provides further explanation of how these men managed to retain psychological remoteness from their role as agents of death. From underwater, the killing act seemed to lend itself to an emotionless state:

> I would like to explain that to torpedo a ship travelling… at a speed of over twenty knots is not the work of a bullet-headed, death-or-glory, boaster. It is a job for a cool, highly-trained technician… It demands a scientific calculation that can cause two objects to meet at a distance of over a mile, one travelling at one speed at right angles to the track of another travelling at quite a different one.[29]

There was, he asserted, certainly no room for any element of 'By Guess and By God' about the operation.[30] Destroying targets from underwater at long-range via an intricate web of dials and machinery inevitably created a mental barrier between submariner and victim. Killing, as Hart noted, was for the submariner an innately scientific process of velocities, depths and angles, which correspondingly had a mechanising effect on the crews' emotional responses to the enemy in their sights.

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[26] King, *The Stick and the Stars*, p. 66.
[27] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 91.
[28] Ibid., p. 94.
[29] Ibid., pp. 149-150.
[30] Ibid., p. 150.

Infrequently, minor breaches of the 'numbed consciences' of these men can be glimpsed in these narratives. Yet where these are voiced, they reveal something more of the submariner's peculiar ability to clamp down upon his emotions. Hart attempted to predict what the result of his submarine's torpedoes might be:

> as likely as not the crash of an exploding torpedo was the first indication of danger that our targets received. Just how did those bewildered enemy seamen feel when that devastating blow-up occurred?... Was there wild, hysterical panic, for instance? Or was there the cool, fatalistic acceptance of emergency that, God be thanked, usually follows disaster under British ensigns – White or Red? It was easy for an imaginative man to picture the scene as destruction came – the surge of panic, the frenzied efforts to preserve life; the screeching grind of torn metal ripped to shreds; the stench of death – phew![31]

Similarly, Alistair Mars admitted to experiencing a rare 'moment of pity' for the crew of an Italian merchant ship off Genoa, musing that they were 'doubtless sleeping off their vino and garlic lunch'.[32] Nevertheless, the fact that both men recourse to racial caricatures in this fleeting connection with their targets suggests that the impulse to empathise with the doomed men was kept under firm control, reducing the enemy to two-dimensional stereotyped figures. Edward Young's experience of rescuing the signalman of a U-boat 'killed' by his submarine, HMS *Saracen*, provided an unusually personal encounter with the foe, and he recorded being somewhat disturbed when the German 'became conscious for a brief moment, long enough to open his eyes and look straight at me with an appalling expression of despair and hatred'.[33] Significantly, however, the former British officer abides by the collective tacit refusal to dwell upon the submariner's role as agent in the destruction of others. He simply recounts this anecdote and moves on with his narrative, firmly shuttering the window of reflection it provides. Having survived the rarity of looking upon the enemy's face, the submariner's 'numbed conscience' clearly remained intact.

The memoirists of the Royal Navy thus exhibit a collective desire to remain emotionally detached from the enemy at sea. Arguably, the surface sailors' distinction between human and mechanical combatants was rooted in a sense of passivity that was instilled by the ability of German aircraft and submarines to arrive, kill, and depart

[31] Ibid., pp. 90-91.
[32] Mars, *Unbroken*, p. 67.
[33] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 92.

with relative stealth and impunity. Whilst some feeling of fellowship existed in their recognition of the skill of the Kriegsmarine's seamanship, the British sailors' loathing of their machines led to their broad adoption of 'numbed consciences' as means of enabling acts of violence. The Navy's submariners remained especially resistant to any mood of empathy with the foe. On occasion, the death throes of a stricken vessel could be clearly heard by them. Yet, with no sympathy at all, Hart reported that it was 'an eerie sensation to hear the crumple of a ripped-open ship as she sinks deep to the sea's bed. These uncanny sounds are quite audible inside a submarine, and instead of being disconcerting, they create a feeling of triumph.'[34] He remained resolutely convinced that the hallmark of a 'good submariner' was the firm repression of imagination in order to concentrate on the business at hand.[35]

Fighter Command and the Battle of Britain, 1940

Imagining the consequences of their violent deeds also proved psychologically destructive for the aircrew of Fighter Command in 1940. Their memoirs suggest that Battle of Britain pilots attempted to adopt a curious mixture of 'numbed consciences' and 'agentic modes' as a means of killing. In 1942 Richard Hillary claimed that, the fighter pilot was 'lucky' because he possessed neither the 'personalised' emotions of the soldier on the battlefield, nor the 'dangerous' emotions of bomber crew revelling in structural destruction.[36] The fighter pilot, thought Hillary, was in fact 'privileged to kill well' because his emotions were those of 'the duellist – cool, precise, impersonal.'[37] Again, the importance that fighter aircrew attached to feeling in control of their environment, actions and emotions is made plain. Hillary's words display an evident subscription to the eternal 'Knights of the Air' discourse which surrounded – and still surrounds – 'The Few', yet the numerous post-war memoirs of his comrades from 1940 demonstrate that this idealised ability to kill 'well' proved rather more difficult to sustain than *The Last Enemy* implied.

Faint traces of Hillary's fantasy of the flyer as a 'duellist' who fought coldly and impersonally can certainly be identified in these narratives, which often bear a

[34] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 114.
[35] Ibid., p. 105.
[36] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, p. 97.
[37] Ibid., p. 97.

passing resemblance to those of the submariner, in so far as both sets of memoirists allowed themselves to fantasise that machines, rather than men, were skilfully fought and clinically dispatched. Although the fighter pilots fought at considerably closer quarters than the submariners, K.W. Mackenzie's summary of aerial battle as 'a challenge, impersonal, machine against machine' mirrors the attitudes expressed throughout the naval memoirs.[38] Echoing Hart's description of the 'good' submariner, Roger Hall supposed that the ideal fighter pilot must sever all emotion in battle, becoming 'callous and cold and ruthless'. Scrutinising his initial instinctive horror to witnessing the fiery demise of a Junkers 88, he sternly perceived that his response was inadequate: 'I felt that I should be quite useless as a fighter pilot if I couldn't control my thoughts and imagination.'[39] Tim Vigors, on the other hand, was rather pleased that he seemed to have acquired this prized state of emotional detachment from the enemy, as his account of downing a Bf. 109 over Dunkirk demonstrates: 'I was aware that I had killed a fellow human being and was surprised not to feel remorse'.[40] 'Johnnie' Johnson further affirmed that 'when the Messerschmitts hit the ground and burst apart, we had no thought for the fellow inside.'[41] Similarly, Tom Neil reflected that Fighter Command aircrew were becoming 'impervious' to the daily business of death and injury, wondering 'Was it because we did not actually see the crashed aircraft, the terrible burns, or the gory remains? Probably be different if we did.'[42]

His surmise proved correct. These narratives suggest that it was virtually impossible for the flyer to remain wholly devoid of 'personalised' emotions throughout the Battle of Britain. Indeed these books are littered with accounts of moments of especial clarity when compassion and vivid horror broke through the fighter pilot's assumed shield of psychological remoteness from the killing act. On occasion, the impact of battle upon the enemy flyer's body was rendered disturbingly visible, as Neil himself discovered. Upon destroying a Dornier, the memoirist reported that:

[38] Mackenzie, *Hurricane Combat*, pp. 45-46.
[39] Hall, *Clouds of Fear*, p. 57.
[40] Vigors, *Life's Too Short to Cry*, p. 163.
[41] Johnson, *Wing Leader*, p. 302.
[42] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 117.

> two large objects detached themselves from the fuselage and came in my direction, so quickly, in fact, that I had no time to evade. Comprehension barely keeping pace with events, I suddenly recognized spreadeagled arms and legs as two bodies flew past my head, heavy with the bulges that were undeveloped parachutes.[43]

Struggling to deflect a Bf. 109, Tony Bartley was rescued by his flight commander, who dispatched the German machine with a long burst of fire: 'The aircraft flick rolled, then spewed out its pilot. I was close enough to see his helmet fly off, a white face and blond hair streaming grotesquely. He didn't pull the rip cord.'[44] Even in dogfights where the body of the enemy was not immediately visible, hidden from sight inside the disintegrating aircraft, some victories were equally fraught with horror for the British flyer. Geoffrey Page was especially upset by a brief tussle with a Stuka, which he reduced to 'a flaming inferno'. He recorded that this incident shook him to his core: 'Somehow it had been different in all the other fights… Then it had been a completely impersonal affair and I hadn't witnessed the death throes of the doomed plane.'[45] In the sharp ferocity of battle, the fighter pilot was not often granted the leisure to observe or reflect upon his results, yet in the rare instance that he did not immediately have to turn his attention towards another enemy, a dreadful cognisance of his actions could take hold. Page recollected how 'Sitting dazed in the cockpit I flew the aircraft home mechanically', his thoughts lingering upon the 'horror' of 'destroying two other human beings'.[46] A similar response to a kill was documented by Geoffrey Wellum, who shot down a Bf. 109 and watched it fall into the sea, 'a horrible and lonely place in which to die.'[47] Like Page, on the flight home he was surprised by the depth of his reaction to the act: 'What a world. Geoff, you've just killed a bloke, a fellow fighter pilot.'[48]

As these two memoirs indicate, some flyers found it difficult to overcome normative social taboos surrounding killing. Although killing in wartime, and especially during the threat of invasion of Britain's shores in the summer of 1940, was of course officially sanctioned at the highest levels, upon experiencing such moments of horror at meting out such violence, several authors wondered if their actions were

[43] Ibid., pp. 94-95.
[44] Bartley, *Smoke Trails in the Sky*, pp. 11-12.
[45] Page, *Shot Down in Flames*, p. 63.
[46] Ibid., p. 63.
[47] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 209.
[48] Ibid., p. 207.

really morally acceptable. Experiencing some compassion for the 109 pilot he had consigned to the sea, Wellum reflected his deed was 'just about as callous and as calculating as you can get, just plain cold-blooded murder. The bloke didn't even know what had hit him.'[49] The emotive term 'murder' also found its way into the narrative of Page, who was unsure whether he was returning to the airfield 'a bloodied fighter pilot, or was it a murderer hiding behind the shield of official approval?'[50] As Wellum and Page demonstrate, killing as a fighter pilot was not necessarily a remote and impersonal affair, and raised moral questions which clearly haunted Fighter Command veterans for many years afterwards.

As close-range witnesses to the death of the enemy, these fighter-memoirists thus display precisely the kind of 'personalised' emotions which Hillary deplored. At the same time, however, the so-called 'dangerous' emotions that he associated with bomber crew – 'who night after night must experience that childhood longing for smashing things' – also find an outlet in their memoirs.[51] Having made his first kill above Dunkirk, Vigors recorded that he experienced 'that same satisfaction that I had known in Ireland when out pigeon shooting on a summer's evening.'[52] Wellum's account of attacking a Heinkel 111 – 'This is looking good. I think he's going. Yes, I've got him. And since you're going, take that for luck, you bloody son of the bloody Fatherland' – and the 'take that you sod' feeling of destroying a 109 carry a similar sense of bloodlust.[53] A strong fear of becoming too attached to killing echoes throughout a number of their narratives. Page, for example, was appalled to realise that when he incinerated the Stuka he registered not only 'horror' but also 'fascination' at his act.[54] So powerfully did this mixture of emotions affect him that he penned a letter to his friend, Michael Maw, in an effort to rid himself of the anguish they caused. The honesty in this letter is searing:

> Maybe I am a bit sorry for myself at this moment, but, and it's a great big but, I enjoy killing. It fascinates me beyond belief to see my bullets striking home and then to see the Hun blow up before me. It also makes me feel sick. Where

[49] Ibid., p. 207.
[50] Page, *Shot Down in Flames*, p. 63.
[51] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, p. 97.
[52] Vigors, *Life's Too Short to Cry*, p. 163.
[53] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 151; p. 181.
[54] Page, *Shot Down in Flames*, p. 63.

> are we going and how will it all end? I feel as if I'm selling my soul to the Devil. If only you were here. I need someone to talk to who isn't tied up in this game of legalized murder.[55]

Significantly, in writing this soul-baring correspondence Page was attempting to communicate with a friend who had died some months previously. This dialogue with the dead conveys an impression that the flyer was sufficiently bewildered and disturbed by his guilty pleasure in killing that he dared not express his fears to the living for fear of judgement at breaking the taboo. Had the stiff-upper lip of the wartime RAF not dictated otherwise, he might have learned that others shared his discomfort.

In the midst of all the discussions on killing in these narratives, the question of chivalry in aerial battle forms a staple feature. Whilst actually embroiled in combat, there was decidedly little room for acts of chivalry, and as Stephen Bungay notes in his history of the Battle of Britain, the 'Knights of the Air' often fought 'more like medieval foot soldiers peering through a visor and slashing with an axe at anyone they thought might be on the other side.'[56] Nevertheless, elements of a 'live and let live' system were claimed to characterise a combatant's approach towards enemy aircrew once they were forced to bail out, or 'take to the silk' in RAF parlance. Johnson avowed that the following tacit rules of air combat applied:

> When you sent a Messerschmitt spinning down out of control, the pilot either got out or he didn't. If he baled out, then the rule which we followed throughout the war was that he should be allowed to drift down to earth without being riddled with cannon fire. It was an act of chivalry which we had inherited from our forebears of the previous war; and despite accounts to the contrary, I never knew of a pilot who was shot at as he drifted helplessly to the ground.[57]

Neil insisted that these 'rules' applied to both sides. Relating the tale of a member of his own squadron, whose parachute inexplicably collapsed at 1,000 feet, he commented that 'It was rumoured that a Hun had shot at him on the way down but we did not believe that; no self-respecting airman, friend or foe, would do such a thing.'[58] Others, however, were less sure. Officially documented instances of men being gunned

[55] Ibid., p. 64.
[56] Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy*, p. 242.
[57] Johnson, *Wing Leader*, p. 302.
[58] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 57.

down in their parachutes may well, as Bungay has noted, be 'isolated examples', but several memoirists resolutely maintained that the possibility posed a distinct threat.[59] Having sustained direct hits to his oil and glycol tanks, Bartley initially made preparations to evacuate his stricken Spitfire and then changed his mind:

> I saw my enemy preparing for another attack, and knew it meant suicide to jump with him around. Escaping airmen over their own territory were fair game in some combatants' log book, and a friend of mine had been shot down in his parachute.[60]

He got back into his cockpit and nursed his plane into a crash landing instead. Hall wrote a particularly graphic account of witnessing a Hurricane pilot bailing out, only to receive bursts of fire from two marauding 109s:

> I saw the tracers and the cannon shells pierce the centre of his body, which folded like a jack-knife closing, like a blade of grass which bends towards the blade of the advancing scythe. I was too far away to interfere and now was too late to be of any assistance… the red I could see was that of the pilot's blood as it gushed from all the quarters of his body. I expected to see the lower part of his body fall away to reveal the entrails dangling in mid-air but by some miracle his body held together. His hands, but a second before clinging to the safety of the shroud lines, were now relaxed and hung limp at his sides.[61]

Hall's tale is interesting, as it is subsequently presented to the reader as a dream experienced by the memoirist. It is never made explicit whether or not he truly witnessed the demise of the Hurricane pilot, or whether the image was the product of a brain under excessive strain at the height of the battle. Suspicion, however, lies with the former explanation, due to a strange foreword written by Hall's editor in which he attempted to forestall a possible adverse public reaction to this murderous tale:

> It is to be hoped that this will not rekindle a hatred of the Germans that has been allowed to smoulder and die down over the past twenty-five years or so. After all, as the author takes pains to explain, men who fly in combat are often driven by sheer fright into a state of subhumanity.[62]

Here, the episode assumes an air of mystery. If the tale of the slaughter of the unfortunate Hurricane pilot was only ever a dream, it might be enquired just why the editor was so concerned that its repetition might spark an anti-German backlash. The

[59] Bungay, *The Most Dangerous Enemy*, p. 166.
[60] Bartley, *Smoke Trails in the Sky*, p. 37.
[61] Hall, *Clouds of Fear*, pp. 120-121.
[62] Ibid., p. 10.

very fact that such a placatory statement was deemed necessary reinforces the gravity with which the issue of shooting at parachutists was regarded among the RAF. Either way, the entire dispute over whether mutual chivalry in refusing to fire upon aircrew who had taken to the silk truly existed suggests perhaps a deeper desire to extract vestiges of honour from the frenzy of bloodletting in aerial combat. Arguably, this need to identify at least some elements of chivalrous behaviour in battle thus provided a balm for the fighter pilot's anxieties about taking pleasure in brutality as it bolstered their identity as a military elite fighting a 'clean' war.

Ultimately, therefore, these memoirs of the so-called 'Knights of the Air' do not, in fact, bear out Hillary's triumphant claim that the fighter pilot's approach to his enemy was that of a 'duellist'. Rather, they portray a rapid breakdown of the cool, impersonal emotional distance which these men imagined as the martial hallmark of the flyer and strove to attain. In their displays of the fighter pilot's simultaneous 'horror' and 'fascination' at killing, the narratives of 'The Few' lay bare the psychological torment which dogged many aircrew. The highest praise that Hugh Dundas could bestow upon his great friend and comrade, 'Johnnie' Johnson, as the highest-scoring Allied ace, was that 'he never became a desiccated killer-machine, which was the way with some other outstanding fighter leaders. He was always warmly human and his emotions were generous and earthy.'[63] Becoming an 'outstanding' fighter pilot was thus clearly associated with the surrender of normative, balanced emotions, and the painstaking efforts documented by these memoirists to resist both the numbing brutality and homicidal pleasures of aerial warfare thus testify that these men were in reality far from being privileged to 'kill well'.

The Army and Europe/North Africa, 1939-1945

Whilst Hillary's interpretation of the fighter pilot's identity as a killer requires some redefinition, he nevertheless accurately captured the peculiarly 'personalised' emotions of the soldier. In the memoirs of infantrymen, the Royal Navy's carefully cultivated insensibility towards the enemy is virtually untraceable, as are the overt displays of bestial savagery which so troubled the consciences of the fighter aircrew.

[63] Hugh Dundas, *Flying Start: A Fighter Pilot's War Years* (London: Stanley Paul and Co. 1988), p. 79.

Instead, the soldier memoirists, who rarely describe the act of killing, opted to focus upon a more intimate familiarity with the body of the enemy as a corpse, prisoner of war, and fellow soldier. On the whole, in these battlefield accounts, there is little trace of the emotional detachment which the seamen and aircrew sought, nor is there any acknowledgement of bloodlust. Indeed, former platoon commander Sydney Jary was moved to suppose that, from his perspective, war simply did not brutalise: 'Certainly no soldier of mine was made brutal, rather the opposite. War developed in 18 Platoon consideration for comrades and humanity towards civilians and prisoners-of-war.'[64] According to Jary, a unique reciprocal empathy between combatants sprang from battle. He claimed that opposing forces of infantry 'are joined by a bond of mutual compassion which few but the aristocracy of the battlefield can understand.'[65] What is apparent is that, unlike his counterparts in the other services, the British soldier was, in general, unable to maintain a mechanised distance which shaped his psychological responses to the foe. Instead, he found himself regularly confronted at close range by his enemy, on occasion literally face-to-face with his opponent, which for the memoirists created a pervasive sense of fellowship with the enemy, regardless of whether he was dead, captive or still active as a combatant. In this context, description of the process of killing no doubt seemed faintly distasteful.

In this process of humanising the opposition, familiarity with the enemy's body underpins the veteran's interpretation and representation of battlefield relations. The British soldiers acquired a degree of intimacy with the habits and character of their enemy which was denied to the sailors and airmen who might, under rare circumstances, just about be afforded a passing glimpse of their opponents. Often, the close proximity between opposing forces meant that frontline troops were able to gain a sensory familiarity with the very anatomy of their foe. For example, tank commander Ken Tout provides a valuable illustration of how he and his fellow combatants were able to acquire an intimate knowledge of the enemy's person before they even laid eyes on him:

> we have, since landing, invaded his shelters and his dug-outs after he has retreated. We have picked up his letters and tried to decipher the strange Gothic

[64] Jary, *18 Platoon*, p. 89.
[65] Ibid., p. 117.

> script. We have seen him surrender in his baggy, field-grey uniform and his easily recognizable pudding-basin helmet. We have also heard his guttural language and smelled his strange, animal smell, a foul odour acquired from chemically treated clothing (we also carry that smell on our khaki), constant proximity to putrefying flesh and consumption of rancid food.[66]

Smell seemed to register especially strongly with these memoirists, particularly when it emanated from the dead body of the enemy. Outside a Normandy village, Robert Woollcombe stumbled across a chalk pit of which he recollected that German corpses 'littered it like flies. Many must have been accounted for by artillery fire. Every yard there were bodies. The faint musty odour still comes back to one's nostrils in any weather.'[67] For several memoirists, their first close encounters with the enemy were with their corpses. Shortly after the great battle of Monte Cassino in Italy, Alex Bowlby found himself travelling in convoy through the ruined outskirts of the town:

> A row of black crosses, topped with coal-scuttle helmets, snatched our pity. The smell – the sour-sweet stench of rotting flesh – cut it short. Instinctively I realised I was smelling my own kind, and not animals. I understood what they must feel in a slaughter-house. These dead were under the rubble. If we could have seen their bodies it would have helped. The unseen, unconsecrated dead assumed a most terrifying power. Their protest filled the truck.[68]

To Bowlby, the stench of rotting flesh forcibly brought home a sense of recognition that the corpses were those of men like himself. Yet it was the invisibility of the dead that lent the enemy terror, rather than the fact that they were deceased. Again, imagination is portrayed as a severe handicap to the combatant. Unable to rationalise the dead by witnessing their faces, horror-filled fantasies about what they might look like terrified him. In contrast, he narrates moving through a 'backwash' of fallen enemy soldiers who had been caught in an artillery barrage. 'What had been man was now a bundle of rags... yet the bodies seemed curiously remote… They had none of the horror of the unseen dead.'[69] Clearly, once the body of the dead foe was rendered visible, with at least the remnants of human form and face, its power to strike fear in this combatant was drawn.

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[66] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 63.
[67] Robert Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), p. 63.
[68] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 20.
[69] Ibid., p. 33.

Others found that it was difficult to detach themselves emotionally from the dead enemy. Unlike Bowlby and Woollcombe, several memoirists insist that becoming acquainted with the decomposing anatomy of the enemy prompted a surge of emotions which variously included empathy, pity and respect. In Tunisia, for instance, John Kenneally walked past the corpses of German infantry whose attack on his position had been beaten off by the Irish Guards. Fresh from the horrors of fighting through burning Tunisian cornfields, in which many of his comrades lay dead or wounded, he did not expect to feel moved by scenes of carnage among the enemy: 'They had done much worse to my dead and wounded comrades'.[70] Nevertheless, he wrote that

> It struck me forcibly as I wandered amongst them that these guys were just the same as us; they suffered as we suffered, they died as we died or were going to die and the only difference between us was our uniforms. I respected them.[71]

Similarly unanticipated emotion was experienced by Ray Ward during the great Allied pursuit of the Axis forces through North Africa after the Second Battle of El Alamein in October 1942. Thanks to severe rain storms, the desert route rapidly became a sea of mud littered with the human flotsam and jetsam of Rommel's retreat: 'Makeshift German cemeteries appeared like islands in the quagmire' whilst 'Sodden bundles of fabric turned out to be corpses'.[72] Ward reflected that he was taken aback to feel 'saddened' by these sights: 'Odd that I should have felt that in some way the dead Jerries were comrades too.'[73]

A particularly instructive representation of the British soldier's relationship with the dead body of the enemy is provided by Rex Wingfield, an infantryman who served in the push through North-West Europe in 1944. Advancing upon a slit trench, he observed two Germans cowering in it. He perceived one of them to be 'wearily asleep'. The memoirist reported that he and his comrades were aghast when an officer directed fire from his Sten gun at the comatose German, who simply folded to the bottom of the trench. Crying with exhaustion, the surviving German – who Wingfield described with rough sympathy as 'all in' – informed them that his mate had already

[70] John Kenneally, VC, *The Honour and the Shame* (London: Headline Review, 2007), p. 75.
[71] Ibid., p. 84.
[72] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 177.
[73] Ibid., p. 177.

been dead before the officer opened fire. The incident evidently resoundingly struck a nerve with Wingfield, who reported a strong sense of revulsion at the entire episode:

> We looked at the officer with hate in our eyes. He had been a failure in carriers, mortars and anti-tanks, and now he was foisted on to us. This was his first day with us, and in our eyes he was guilty of desecrating the dead. The dead of both sides were sacred.[74]

This anecdote reveals much about the infantryman's attitude towards the enemy, both dead and living. In the first instance, Wingfield's condemnation of the officer, echoes Jary's claim that infantrymen from both sides were bound together by certain unspoken rules which this officer was clearly not party to. Secondly, this tale points towards the sanctification of the dead. Removed of their status as a threat, they are deemed 'out of play' and are consequently governed by different conventions. Yet the British officer did not know when he loosed off his Sten at the 'sleeping' German that the man was already deceased – his intention, it must be therefore be assumed, was to kill a live, helpless enemy. It might hence be surmised that Wingfield's outrage at the 'desecration of the dead' was also conditioned by notions of a fair fight and respect for the defeated enemy.

Evidence of similarly humane attitudes towards German prisoners is also studded throughout the pages of these personal narratives. Various memoirists found that the captive body of the enemy inspired at least as strong an emotional response as his corpse. Some, like John Foley, were initially taken aback that prisoners-of-war bore little resemblance to caricatured images in the British media. Upon landing shortly after D-Day, his first sight of the enemy arrived in the form of a group of captured Germans. He was surprised to find that they appeared 'just ordinary', 'rather scruffy' soldiers: 'So this was the *Herrenvolk*! But where', he enquired, 'were the blond and arrogant supermen we had heard so much about?'[75] For others, making the visual acquaintance of a live enemy transformed an imagined knowledge of the foe. Woollcombe, for example, experienced an unforeseen sense of connection with a prisoner who was 'clutching my legs and pleading for his life. One did not blame him

[74] R.M. Wingfield, *The Only Way Out: An Infantryman's Autobiography of the North-West Europe Campaign August 1944- February 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p. 97.
[75] Foley, *Mailed Fist*, p. 12.

for his terror.'[76] Indeed, through the extension of such empathy, the body of the captive enemy operated as a point of reference against which the British soldier could measure his own fears. As Tout recalled,

> We have simply waved at them, frightened, grey-faced men, frequently much older or younger than any of us, often shocked into incontinence, indoctrinated with a fear of being shot on surrender. We have waved at them in a rather sympathetic manner and have pointed them back towards the rear.[77]

Wingfield's memoir demonstrates a particular sympathy towards the enemy prisoners, as he saw in them a reflection of his own identity as both man and soldier. Whilst his unit received a group of Germans into their care, a shell landed nearby. Without pausing for thought, Wingfield grabbed the nearest prisoner and together they tumbled into the shelter of ditch:

> We clung to each other, trembling. The shell burst. The stark lunacy of war hit us both at the same time. Ten minutes ago we'd have cheerfully killed each other if it had come to that, and yet here we were instinctively protecting our mate – only the two mates happened to be wearing different uniforms.[78]

His rationalisation of his actions offers a valuable window into the concept of a special brotherhood amongst infantrymen:

> Our prisoners were Infantry and we received them as comrades. These blokes had been going through it just like us, only they'd had our Artillery thrown in as well. We knew what that meant. We'd had some. Regardless of race or uniform, we "flatties" were a people apart from, and superior to, other human beings. These Germans were men like us and they'd had a hell of a time since D-Day, shelled all day and denied sleep at night because they were retreating and being harried by the Allied Air Forces. We passed them food and cigarettes. It wasn't charity or pity, but understanding and comradeship. They understood too.[79]

It is worth noting the memoirist's specific insistence that he did not pity the captives: this was a connection between equals of a singular breed, worthy of special honour.

[76] Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant*, p. 56.
[77] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 63.
[78] Wingfield, *The Only Way Out*, pp. 72-73 .
[79] Ibid., p. 73.

As for the representations of battlefield relations whilst the living enemy was still 'in play', a quiet conviction in the ultimate justness of this conflict forms a baseline in these memoirs, as Charles Potts embodies:

> Before I had ever been in action, I had looked forward to it as an exciting adventure: now I regarded it as revolting business, a fearful penance that had to be endured for a good cause. I could never feel any animosity towards the Germans or Italians whom we were fighting. I considered that to fight them was a painful duty, like beating a criminal, or spanking a naughty boy. I believed the enemy's cause and their intentions to be wholly bad, and that it was my duty to obstruct them with all the power that lay in me; that in this I was merely an instrument of justice; and that the only way to make Jerry behave was to knock him down. I was much happier when he gave himself up as a prisoner, and saved us the indecent task of having to shoot him.[80]

Nevertheless, discourses of 'understanding and comradeship' do pervade these narratives. Admittedly, some battlefield roles were viewed with particular hatred by the British infantry. With their long record of atrocity, for example, the Waffen-SS were universally despised. The prisoner with whom Woollcombe experienced a flash of unexpected understanding had served with the 12th SS Panzer Division, which clearly coloured the British soldier's response to his plight: 'this Nazi… was one of the "Herrenvolk." One felt no compassion.'[81] Snipers, were also openly detested. As Wingfield explained, 'Ordinary Infantry were doing a job, like us, but snipers were low, nasty, mean fighters' who could 'hold us up out of all proportion to their numbers.'[82] It was felt that snipers did not play by the rules of open face-to-face battle, instead conducting 'bloody guerrilla warfare' as Kenneally explained with some venom, before announcing that 'every soldier hates snipers; the odds are always with them'.[83] Yet German units that were deemed honourable and worthy opponents were actively welcomed into the club, as John Horsfall noted of Walter Koch's 5th Parachute Regiment: 'we came to have a considerable professional regard and respect for them. Dangerous as enemies they fought a clean war, and pleasantries were passed whenever the circumstances permitted.'[84]

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[80] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, pp. 109-110.
[81] Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant*, p. 56.
[82] Wingfield, *The Only Way Out*, p. 62.
[83] Kenneally, *The Honour and the Shame*, p. 152.
[84] John Horsfall, *The Wild Geese are Flighting* (Kineton: The Roundwood Press, 1976), p. 45.

Within such parameters, a special bond was imagined between antagonists in the desert war. Ward was firmly convinced that the status of the desert as a 'perfect battlefield' generated a unique connection between British and German soldiers in which a peculiarly close physical association led to some merging of identities: 'At times it was difficult to tell the two sides apart. Each captured the other's rations, transport, equipment and clothing, causing occasional confusion on the battlefield.'[85] Significantly, the British soldiers in the desert also took a share in 'Lili Marlene', a popular song beloved by the German troops. On quiet days with no aerial or artillery activity to clog up radio communications, they tuned in to the Afrika Korps' frequency in order to pick up 'that sentimental, haunting melody that captivated soldiers on both sides.'[86] The extent to which the enemy's signature tune became an integral part of the British troop repertoire is illustrated by Bowlby who noted, upon joining his Rifles battalion in preparation for the invasion of Sicily, that his new comrades particularly favoured this marching song above all others. 'Lili', he noted, was not merely shared by his fellow riflemen, they had captured her in a deeply satisfying manner: 'Unlike some units, who apparently just sung the song in English, leaving it dripping with sentiment, the Battalion had given "Lili" the works. They had stripped off the schmaltz and turned her into a tart who liked it.'[87]

In addition to utilising each other's weapons, rations, transport and songs, Ward also detected that the desert armies shared a bond of professional respect which translated into warm mutual regard which was signified by their nicknames for each other: 'We didn't call Rommel or his men Nazis – just "Jerries". They called us "Tommies" or "Jocks".' [88] Battlefield relations in the desert rapidly became woven into a myth which was seemingly accepted on both sides. Rommel's own war memoir, titled *Krieg ohne Hass* (*War without Hate*), epitomises what one study of this arena describes as 'a bizarre comradeship of antagonists'.[89] Applauded for his decision to abide by the Geneva Convention, Rommel was, thought Ward:

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[85] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, pp.145-146.
[86] Ibid., p. 146.
[87] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 12.
[88] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 128.
[89] John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Alamein: War Without Hate* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 1. The notion of a 'war without hate' in North Africa has, however, rightfully been disputed. See Niall Barr,

> probably the Eighth Army's most popular general. I certainly felt that our morale and self-esteem were boosted by the knowledge that we were fighting a daring and honourable enemy. He had a reputation for "fair play". That virtually guaranteed him the respect of the British officer class. Perhaps we forgot about the regime he served.[90]

Ironically, Rommel became the poster-boy for the British soldier's fantasy of what battlefield relations ought to be in all theatres of war. In Europe, for example, Wingfield recorded that he drank a toast to the German commander upon his death in 1944, explaining that 'Rommel was not a man, but a god to both sides'.[91] Indeed, his simple tribute stands as the epitome of many of his fellow memoirists' emotional responses to the enemy, whether as living combatant, dead body or captive: 'He was one of us.'[92]

Among the soldiers' memoirs, therefore, descriptions of how the combatant experienced and understood the killing act are substituted by representations of a peculiar form of kinship with the enemy. The infantry memoirist preferred instead to discuss engagements with the enemy through a prism of affinity with the German soldier, insisting upon the existence of a reciprocal battlefield fellowship. These accounts thus assert that the British infantryman and his enemy were bound together in what Jary describes as 'mutual compassion', which brought a reassuring degree of humanity to the battlefield. The sense of emotional closeness to the enemy upon which these combatants insisted is explained with striking simplicity by Ward's plaintive reflection that 'most of us wanted to believe that some decency could survive the absurdity, chaos and cruelty of war'.[93]

Summary: Killing, the Enemy and Military Memoir

Among the different branches of Britain's armed forces, there were clear differences in the type of fantasy that combatants projected onto their opposition. The accounts of the war at sea and in the air collectively testify that it was far easier to carry out acts of extreme violence when the foe was in some manner dehumanised and

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Pendulum of War: The Three Battles of El Alamein (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004). Nevertheless, the salient point here is that these memoirists clearly subscribed to the myth of a 'clean' war in the desert.

[90] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, pp. 127-128.

[91] Wingfield, *The Only Way Out*, p. 94.

[92] Ibid., p. 95.

[93] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 128.

mechanised in their imaginations. Sailors and airmen were perhaps more fortunate than the soldiers in that they were granted an opportunity to employ the 'grey machinery of murder' as a kind of psychological shield from behind which they could elide moral responsibility for their actions, and express professional satisfaction in a job well done. Nevertheless, 'technology still failed to render the dead completely faceless' in the Second World War.[94] Despite the best efforts of machine-bound combatants to achieve a psychological remoteness from their target, they often found themselves willingly or unwillingly extending an emotive bond towards their opposition. These memoirs further attest that the protagonists experienced moments when their defensive mechanisms of 'distance' fractured and they forged a fleeting emotive bond with the foe. A reluctant recognition of the enemy's identity as a human being in these moments bestows upon the naval and aircrew memoirs an often uneasy tension with the author's designated martial function as a killer.

A similar anxiety stalks the infantry memoirs. If combat, as Hugh McManners posits, provides an opportunity for 'honest self-appraisal', narrative reconstructions of battle must logically do the same.[95] Prose reconstructions of confronting the enemy allowed a veteran to assess his own wartime identity as a killer. Ward's assertion that he and other soldiers needed the reassurance of believing in ideals of humane compassion among the bloody tatters of the battlefield suggests that these veterans keenly sought to identify themselves as 'decent' men when it was all over. In particular, their odd silence over the actual act of killing may perhaps partially be attributed to an understandable personal reluctance to recollect or discuss distressing graphic details of ramming a bayonet into another man's guts or obliterating him at close quarters. Another factor, however, may lurk behind these carefully shrouded representations. In substituting scenes of second-hand slaughter, the veteran tacitly asserts a lack of personal responsibility for the killing. The searing exactitude of Bourke's comment that twentieth-century soldiers rarely confessed to finding professional gratification in their engagements with the enemy because 'To describe combat as enjoyable was like admitting to being a blood-thirsty brute' is borne out by Nicholas Moseley's reflection on the difficulties of writing an accurate war memoir

[94] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 6.
[95] Hugh McManners, *The Scars of War* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 118.

about the Second World War, in which he mused that there is 'a whiff of immature triumphalism in stories about successful killing – unless one has paid the price of being killed oneself.'[96] Unable to hide behind the 'grey machinery of murder', the removal of cultural and emotional 'distance' from the enemy in their reconstructions of the battlefield allowed infantry veterans to reassure themselves that their own status as 'good' human beings remained intact.

The ways in which these memoirists interpreted, elaborated and restructured extremes of violence in their narratives thus reveal something important not only about how they thought they reconciled themselves to killing during the war, but also how they felt about their murderous actions decades afterwards. As Bourke observes, martial technology ultimately 'did very little to reduce the awareness that dead human beings were the end product. What is striking is the extent to which combatants insisted upon emotional relationships and responsibility, *despite* the distancing effect of much technology.'[97] The core tropes in which the memoirists couched their representations of engaging with the enemy may be explained thus: 'chivalry was evoked to stifle fears of senseless violence; intimacy was substituted for confusing anonymity; skilfulness was imposed to dispel numbing monotony.'[98] Respectively, the veteran-memoirists of Fighter Command, the Army, and the Royal Navy injected these discourses into their accounts of facing the foe in order to reassure themselves (and perhaps others) that they had not become brutalised by the wartime killing enterprise.

Nevertheless, whilst the serviceman's carefully constructed fantasies proved integral to his dealings with the enemy, imagination was a lonely act. Even when technology provided mechanical and psychological distance from the enemy, combatants forged elements of an emotional relationship with the enemy. Linked to this desire to personalise relations with the enemy to varying degree, was the enormous psychological importance memoirists attached to personal relationships within their own services. As S.L.A. Marshall noted, 'On the field of fire it is the touch of human nature which gives men courage and enables them to make proper use of their

[96] Nicholas Mosley, *Time at War* (London: Weinfeld and Nicholson, 2006), p. ix.
[97] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p. 7.
[98] Ibid., p. 68.

weapons.'[99] The next chapter thus interrogates the veterans' understandings and representations of human relations within their own units as a crucial mechanism of endurance in combat.

[99] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 41.

4. BANDS OF BROTHERS

The heart of the matter is to relate the man to his fellow soldier as he will find him on the field of combat, to condition him to human nature as he will learn to depend on it when the ground offers him no comfort and weapons fail.[1]

British Second World War memoirists foregrounded personal relationships within their units as the ultimate spur in battle. In seeking to convey the intense value that combatants ascribed to their comrades, the veterans frequently turned to Shakespeare's *Henry V* for inspiration. The playwright's immortal lines, 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers:/ For he today that sheds his blood with me/ Shall be my brother' held particular resonance for these men.[2] During the Second World War, *Henry V* had become irrevocably connected to the British war effort, as the play served as a national parable of British tenacity in the face of overwhelming odds. The 'band of brothers' excerpt from King Henry's famous 'Crispin Crispian' speech was memorably invoked in 1940 when Churchill alluded to the Battle of Britain pilots as 'the Few'. In 1942, Laurence Olivier's stirring declamation of this speech on a radio programme entitled 'Into Battle' served as 'a patriotic call to arms for embattled Britain', and was followed up two years later by the actor's immensely popular production of *Henry V*.[3] In this context, perhaps it is unsurprising that a number of veterans of the Second World War clearly invested Shakespeare's immortal lines with an almost talismanic status, and adopted the phrase 'band of brothers' to portray an idealised image of a close-knit group of warriors in their memoirs.[4] Even where veterans did not explicitly draw upon

[1] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 38.
[2] Shakespeare, *Henry V*, p. 491.
[3] Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004), p. 36.
[4] Several infantry veterans also invoked important scenes from the play to convey their own experiences on the front line. Ray Ward reminisced that some of his fellow officers would gather in his dugout during off-duty evenings in the desert to read *Henry V*, recording that they especially enjoyed the dialogue of the four captains: 'We identified with their thoughts on war, and the play's themes of brotherhood, bravery and honourable old age. We were responsive to its stirring rhetoric and the fact that the play does not shy away from the horrors of war.' Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 148. Shakespeare's famous scene depicting the battle of Agincourt particularly resounded with several memoirists. For instance, Edward Grace wrote that the evening before a big offensive in North Africa, 'the Commanding Officer walked around with encouraging words, rather like Henry V before Agincourt. We were all outwardly cheerful, making jokes and pretending the night was for adventure.' Grace, *The Perilous Road to Rome*, p. 16. Similarly, in his description of the prelude to the opening up of the Second Front, Robert Woollcombe quoted the Crispin's Day speech

this tag in their narratives, the sense of martial 'brotherhood' it embodied, and the core themes of leadership, courage and morale with which the playwright knitted together his 'band of brothers' also form central pillars of these veterans' discussions of relationships within their own combat units.

The idea of combatants as a 'band of brothers' has coloured modern understandings of what makes men fight and what keeps men fighting. In its twentieth-century guise as the 'primary group theory', the concept that men naturally subscribe to small-group loyalties has been absorbed into military doctrine. The basic tenet is that men will fight for their mates where they might not for their nation. The primacy of the small unit of soldiers as the main source of combat motivation was crystallised by S.L.A. Marshall shortly after the Second World War. Since then, military commentators have suggested some necessary refinements to the 'primary group theory', accurately noting that it does not allow for calculations of the importance of training, the impact of high casualties, increased flow of replacements, or 'misfits' in a unit.[5] Equally, the strength of small unit loyalties could not sustain a soldier indefinitely. Lord Moran's study of endurance among fighting men suggests that courage is finite. He believed that a combatant's resolve to keep fighting was analogous to possessing credit in a bank account: 'Courage is will-power, whereof no man has an unlimited stock; and when in war it is used up, he is finished. A man's courage is his capital and he is always spending.'[6] An individual's ability to endure could thus only be stretched so far. Nevertheless, there is much in Marshall's observations that is useful when applied to battlefield relationships with one's own side in these war memoirs, and it is worth reiterating his insistence that 'it is the touch of human nature which gives men courage and enables them to make proper use of their weapons.'[7] The memoirs of British veterans collectively demonstrate a remarkable congruence with this summary. Considerable attention is devoted to this

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as means of conveying the excitement and pride of the troops. Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant*, p. 39. Thus, *Henry V* could become employed as a touchstone for veterans' own interpretations of the battle experience. The 'band of brothers' tag itself was also explicitly referred to in several memoirs of former Royal Navy and RAF personnel. For example, see Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 38; Mars, *Unbroken*, p. 14; Johnson, *The Withered Garland*, p. 197.

[5] Hew Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41:2 (2006), p. 212.

[6] Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, p. xxii.

[7] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 41.

'touch of human nature' in their narratives of combat, assessing in painstaking detail the balance and interplay of human relationships within the 'band of brothers' who fought in the platoons, companies and battalions of the Army, the 'small' ships of the Royal Navy, and the four-engined heavy aircraft of Bomber Command.

The Army and Europe/North Africa, 1939-1945

'Without being over-sentimental,' asserted John Kenneally, 'men can love each other.' Reflecting on the nature of this affection, he identified the emotional relationships of men within a military unit as 'born of mutual suffering, hardships shared, dangers encountered, mutual experiences. It is a spiritual love and it is even stronger than brotherly love. It is called comradeship'.[8] This regard for the soldier's fellow fighting man forms a staple theme in the memoirs of former British infantrymen, throughout which the 'band of brothers' concept runs as a leitmotif. Binding their identities irrevocably to those of their comrades, these writers assessed their own value as combatants in the light of their place among this martial fraternity. Several memoirists perceived that the nature of the infantryman's war helped to weave the soldier into what one veteran labelled a 'unique, almost tribal fellowship'.[9] Ray Ward thought that infantry became emotionally linked by a commonality of specific experiences: 'All of us were ordinary men, of all types, cast in extraordinary roles, having to exist in the extraordinary conditions of the "poor bloody infantry" at the "sharp end of war".'[10] Whilst the same claim arguably applies to any branch of the services, Geoffrey Picot insisted with some pride that the infantryman was the 'king of warriors' because he did not have the protection of heavy machinery, and confronted the enemy on a far more intimate basis than any other form of combatant. The soldier could thus spend his much of his time in 'almost continuous crisis. Lacking the psychological comfort of a large gun, vehicle, ship or similar equipment, he can cling only to his pals, and they to him.'[11]

[8] Kenneally, *The Honour and the Shame*, p. 54.
[9] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 17.
[10] Ibid., p.17.
[11] Geoffrey Picot, *Accidental Warrior: In the Front Line from Normandy till Victory* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1993), p. 282.

In lieu of a machine upon which to lavish affection and imagine as a source of comfort in battle, the infantryman cherished his comrades as a stimulus to his own morale. A lynchpin of private, internalised, morale was simple determination not to let one's pals down by giving way to terror. Picot recorded how, in north-west Europe, he was shocked to discover that an 'insidious' fear was beginning to gnaw at his powers of endurance. When he took stock of how many of the men who had accompanied him in the D-Day landings had been killed, he realised that he was now one of the longest-serving men in the unit. Grimly calculating the law of averages, he assumed that he too would soon be killed, and found that his self-control began to unravel. 'It was then', he noted, 'that a subtle military factor rescued my morale':

> I could see that most men were absorbing the strain reasonably well, so I decided that I had better try to look as if I was. Only later did I learn that all were frightened and most took pains to conceal their fear. Nearly all of us played this concealment game. Thus, a man pretending to be brave gave bravery to his comrades; as they, with their pretence, likewise gave bravery to him.[12]

It is striking that Picot identified the upswing in his resolve as triggered by his comrades to be a 'military factor'. Martial discipline and coercion are other factors that force the soldier to overcome fear, yet they leave little trace in these memoirs. Peter Cochrane devoted some thought to the question of what kept men fighting, drawing the conclusion that 'cowed, unthinking obedience quite unfits a soldier for the modern battlefield.'[13] He asserted that military discipline in the Second World War was in the final analysis an internal affair, 'in a curious way, self-imposed'.[14] Both men display a conviction that the bedrock of discipline in battle was the soldier's own resolution and determination to continue in order not to let his comrades down, testifying to the veracity of Richard Holmes's observation that 'the bonds of mateship tied men willingly to the altar of battle.'[15] Indeed, advancing towards Hill 270 in the Avellino valley in southern Italy, Christopher Bulteel was spurred on by the near presence of others in his unit: 'To hesitate now would be treason.'[16]

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[12] Ibid., p. 28.
[13] Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 119.
[14] Ibid., p.119.
[15] Richard Holmes, 'The Italian Job: Five Armies in Italy, 1943-45', in *A Time to Kill*, (eds.) Addison and Calder, p. 210.
[16] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, p. 199.

This sense of comradeship extended beyond the front line. As a young gentleman ranker, Alex Bowlby became so absorbed into his predominantly Cockney 'band of brothers' in the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Rifle Brigade that he sought the shelter of their company even when the unit was resting. Rather than visit Assisi, he chose to go to see Bob Hope and Bing Crosby with his comrades because their company made him feel 'safe'. He recorded that

> So far I'd coped with fighting better than I'd hoped. I didn't want to meet anything that might weaken me. Putting it another way I was afraid of anything coming between me and the Company, afraid of losing the love and support I had found there.[17]

Bowlby's attachment to his fellow riflemen is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that the unit as a source of private morale was a two-way process. Whilst he did not want to 'weaken' his input to the collective deposit of morale, he was also able to withdraw sufficient funds to keep himself afloat. Conversely, men who boosted their own spirits by contributing to raising those of their comrades found that the resolution and rough affection of their fellows provided ballast for their own abilities to cope. Ward, for example, wrote that he drew private strength from the 'almost superhuman powers of endurance' of his Jocks, in whom he found 'a quiet determination to stick it out to the end, and more often than not a cheerful courage and fortitude that lifted my spirits'.[18]

As Bowlby's account illustrates, the military unit itself represented an important source of morale for the soldier, regardless of the personal relationships he formed with individuals within it. One of the key flaws in the primary group theory is that the ebb and flow of casualties and replacements naturally eroded the small group loyalties of soldiers, and Holmes warns that historians must not get 'too misty-eyed about the pulling-power of the regiment'.[19] Yet these memoirists avow that the 'band' was equally as important as the 'brothers' in providing motivation on the battlefield. Bowlby explained that, as the unit moved up through Italy in 1944, he became 'afraid of straying too far away from the Company… I had grown less dependent on individuals but, paradoxically enough, more dependent on the Company. It had given

[17] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 89.
[18] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 289.
[19] Holmes, 'The Italian Job', p. 211.

me the only real sense of security I had ever had.'[20] Similarly, when Cochrane bade farewell to his beloved C Company four years after joining it in 1940, he noted that 'Like an old knife that has had three new blades and two new handles, it was and it wasn't by then the same company.' Whilst the men who served under him had changed countless times, he insisted that 'Charlie Company' still retained its identity as a unit.[21] The 'Regiment' also became the source of emotional support. Bulteel recorded that during the invasion of Salerno, his unit was tasked with taking an enemy-held hill crest. As he climbed through streams of Spandau fire, he reported 'wondering all the time why I was charging at all':

> Was it for my king and country? Was it for freedom? Was it for my family, my neighbours, for the women and children with whom I'd been brought up? Was it for personal glory? No, no to all of these, a thousand times no.
> It came to me in a blinding flash: I was fighting with my men, my comrades. I was charging with my regiment… The Coldstream Guards were going to get to the top of this hill; and I was with them. I could not let the Regiment down.[22]

'Band' and 'brothers' were thus synthesised as equally integral to the soldier's private sense of resolve. A rare glimpse into this phenomenon on a mass scale is provided by Kenneally's account of being awarded his Victoria Cross. Upon returning to the battalion at Tunis:

> I had a wonderful reception. Guys stopped what they were doing and crowded round to slap me on the back and shake my hand, shouting congratulations; it was a rare moment. We shared the honour and the glory of the Victoria Cross as we had shared the suffering, hardship and bloody murder of the *Bou*. There was no envy – infantrymen know better than that. It was not I who had won the medal: it was an Irish Guardsman. We were all Irish Guardsmen and we had all played a part.[23]

The evident sublimation of the individual soldier's identity to that of his unit thus provided a measure of support for the former combatants in this study. Nevertheless, they also recognised that others were less fortunate in their relationships with the fellowship. The veterans' remarkably frank discussion of the less salubrious facets of human nature on the battlefield demonstrates the fragility of the 'band of brothers' as

[20] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 169.
[21] Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 1.
[22] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier*, p. 199.
[23] Kenneally, *The Honour and the Shame*, p. 111.

a sheet anchor of combat morale. Collectively, these narratives are careful not to portray an overly romanticised representation of relations between members of a frontline unit. As Ward admitted:

> Not all were heroes or paragons of military virtue. We were human enough to prefer comfort and safety to discomfort and danger. We had a natural instinct for self-preservation. Most units – and mine was no exception – had their fair share of misfits, scoundrels and shirkers.[24]

Given the vast numbers of men drafted into Britain's largely conscript army, there were invariably one or two 'licensed croakers' in every unit.[25] Fortunately for Cochrane, the other members of his company found the relentlessly gloomy prognostications of such men a source of hilarity, and the memoirist drew the conclusion that 'they were useful because they got out into the open the forebodings any sensible fellow would have, forebodings much less oppressive when given an airing by somebody else.' Grumblers, however, could only be tolerated under one specific circumstance. They must have proven themselves good soldiers when the unit went into battle. Otherwise, 'If he were a bad one, he would just be a malcontent, and must go.'[26]

Cochrane was cognisant of the damage that soldiers who could not, or would not, adjust to group life could cause to the unit as a whole. Yet, in turn, these individuals failed to benefit from the protective psychological shield offered by the 'band of brothers'. When the self-control of such men snapped, they sometimes simply ran from battle. Significantly, in these memoirs only a fine line is drawn between 'battle fatigue' and desertion. The fact that the one frequently stemmed from the other posed distinct problems for officers such as Potts, required in moments of crisis to determine whether a 'coward' in battle was genuinely suffering from war neurosis, or temporary pusillanimity. 'A genuine case of shell-shock is a pitiful sight', he mused: 'I have seen a man, starkly crazy, frothing at the lips and biting mouthfuls of sand from

[24] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 17.
[25] Cochrane, *Charlie Company*, p. 144.
[26] Ibid., p. 145.

the ground.'[27] Nevertheless, differentiation between 'the lunatic' and 'the deserter' proved difficult for this officer:

> The other cases are what the troops call 'bomb-happiness', which is another name for unconcealed cowardice. Few men like to show their fear before others; but there are exceptions; there are some who will go to any lengths to escape the danger of remaining under shell-fire; who will unashamedly feign illness, pretend to be shell-shocked, or even inflict a wound on themselves; anything to get away to safety. Fortunately these cases are rare, but I suppose that every battalion has one or two of them.[28]

His method of dealing with such recalcitrants was short and sharp:

> It was fatal to show sympathy with such men, for self-pity is the root of their trouble, and sympathy increases their self-pity. The best treatment is stern discipline. By scolding them, by cursing them, or even by shaking them and shouting at them, one may frighten them back into sense.[29]

On the other hand, Kenneally did experience some compassion for a forlorn group of men he encountered at a North African Casualty Clearing Station after a ferocious battle in the desert. Observing that the soldiers looked 'much the same as us, covered in dust, scorched clothing and unshaven', he asked a medic corporal why they were receiving no medical attention. The NCO's reply that the men had run from battle and so would be last to be treated aroused Kenneally's ire:

> I looked at the corporal: his trousers still retained a crease, his shirt was pressed and he was well shaven. It was obvious that the nearest he'd been to a battle was in bed with a reluctant girlfriend. 'What the fuck do you know about it?' I said. I grabbed the tea dixie from him and limped over to them. Bill took sandwiches and others followed suit. Frightened and wild-eyed, one or two had the shakes, obviously suffering from shell-shock, and could hardly drink the tea.
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> There was bound to be the odd malingerer amongst them, but they had all been there at the thick end, and who were those bastards to judge them? Most soldiers develop resilience, but there were some who would never acquire it. Such men were these. We were all disgusted at their treatment.[30]

Although the men portrayed in the accounts of Potts and Kenneally were regarded as naturally unsuited to battle, and so unable to draw strength from their unit, competent

[27] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, p. 37.
[28] Ibid., p. 37.
[29] Ibid., p. 37.
[30] Kenneally, *The Honour and the Shame*, p. 97.

soldiers could also eventually succumb to the impulse to run. Desertion remained a problem for the British Army throughout the Second World War, and the generals believed that two especially serious crises of morale occurred in North Africa 1941-1942, and Italy 1944-1945.[31] In 1941, desertion rates in North Africa peaked at 10.5 per 1,000.[32] Between January 1944 and January 1945, furthermore, over 22,000 men were tried for desertion in Italy – indeed Bowlby noted rumours that 30,000 soldiers were 'on the trot' whilst he was in Italy.[33] Yet whilst the generals repeatedly bayed for the reinstatement of the death penalty for desertion, the memoirists themselves viewed such crimes with more nuanced eyes.[34] Some of their comrades, as Horsfall recounts, were openly resentful:

> Our men did not like deserters. It is not hard to understand why, and their crime with its overtone of cowardice was bitterly resented. There was the feeling of being let down and that they were deserting them, their friends and comrades – like the case of one of our mortar crews where the number one found himself without his mate or his ammunition. He said sadly that he had been personally deserted.[35]

Others were more sympathetic. In particular, understanding was extended towards the soldier who had repeatedly proven himself in battle, only to find that he had exceeded his overdraft in terms of endurance. In the desert in 1942, Ward was forced to place one of his sergeants under close arrest because the man had refused to patrol, claiming that he was overworked. The memoirist wrote that he had some sympathy with the NCO:

> He had won an MM on Crete, so may well have been justified in thinking he'd done his bit. But he wouldn't change his mind, despite pleas and threats... Perhaps he had simply had enough – of the shelling, the Stukas, the frightful noise. If so, his was not the only case of battle fatigue I had seen, or would see.[36]

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[31] David French, 'Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army in the War Against Germany during the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33:4 (1998), p. 532.
[32] Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', p. 223.
[33] French, 'Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army', p. 540; Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 177.
[34] The death penalty in the British Army was abolished in 1930. Only charges of mutiny and treason carried this punishment.
[35] Horsfall, *The Wild Geese are Flighting*, pp. 90-91.
[36] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 156.

Others expressed identical views to a War Office report on morale in Italy in 1944, which concluded that most desertion of duty or unit was 'involuntary' and could be prevented by prompt treatment at rest centres before men succumbed to the impulse to run.[37] Horsfall had already drawn the same conclusion a year or so previously, and recorded that, on occasion, he was willing to overlook these lapses:

> Occasionally there were cases which had our sympathy, where a fusilier simply aberrated after previous stouthearted service, perhaps due to a bad letter from home or temporary loss of nerve, or even through fatigue. But these cases rarely reached courts martial, not in good regiments anyway, where everyone knew each other.[38]

A temporary change of scene such as a week or two spent with the mule columns well behind the lines usually sorted these men out: 'Afterwards they would be only too delighted to be safely back with their friends in the line.'[39] Desertion was only one manner of opting out of the unit, however. Others deliberately chose to inflict wounds upon their body in the hope that they would be sent back from the frontline to the comparative safety of a casualty clearing station, or even discharged home. Interestingly, Horsfall referred to two cases of self-inflicted wounds in his unit as 'perhaps worse' than the deserters.[40] Yet despite the memoirists' condemnation of men who betrayed the fraternity of comrades by seeking such dubious escape routes, several were all too aware of the seductive pull of the mind's treacherous entreaties to break with the fellowship. In early 1945, for example, Nicholas Mosley recorded how he

> began to fantasise about how one might get out of this futile situation by a discreet self-inflicted accident: would this be more or less reprehensible now that I had got an MC? I imagined I might fall from my hayloft onto the concrete floor below with one leg tucked under the other in a yoga position: might this not give me a not-too-badly broken leg which would get me back to hospital?[41]

During a moment of crisis in an attack on the summit of Monte Orlando, a bomb landed only six feet away from Bowlby, who was looking straight at it when it exploded:

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[37] Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), p. 239.
[38] Horsfall, *The Wild Geese are Flighting*, p. 91.
[39] Ibid., p. 91.
[40] Ibid., p. 65.
[41] Mosley, *Time at War*, p.126.

> The reds of the explosion were clamped on my retina. For several minutes I could see nothing else. This plus the blast plus the fact that we couldn't dig in reduced me to jelly. Desert. Desert. Desert. The next time, I promised myself. The next time I will. Before the attack. A court martial's better than this.[42]

Clearly the temptation to succumb to the lure of relinquishing the subordination of fear often stalked the combatant. It was this constant battle with the self that Potts thought triggered his anger with one of his soldiers who ran away at Alamein:

> 'Bomb-happy' men made me lose my temper, or perhaps it would be truer to say that they aroused me to great anger. I have sometimes wondered why they made me so angry. I think that it was probably because I, too, was terribly frightened, and I did not see why they should be allowed to show their fear whilst I had to bottle up mine. My anger may have been a form of hysteria.[43]

According to these memoirs, the 'band of brothers' concept thus proved something of a double-edged blade in the British Army's psychological armoury. For some individuals, set apart by nature or circumstance, it could never function as a source of combat motivation. For other soldiers who found their reserves of endurance wearing perilously thin, the unit could only reinforce their crumbling nerve so far. Yet within these parameters, according to the memoirists, small group loyalties welded men together and repeatedly drove them forward on the battlefield.

The Royal Navy and the Northern Oceans, 1939-1945

Within the Royal Navy, special meaning had long been attached to the rhetoric of a 'band of brothers'. After the Battle of the Nile in 1798, it was employed on several occasions by Admiral Horatio Nelson in reference to the group of captains under his command.[44] Significantly, Nelson's use of the 'band of brothers' label was reserved for his senior officers alone, glossing over the egalitarianism with which Shakespeare charged the original speech, and emphasising rank as the touchstone of this martial fellowship.[45] Reflecting the importance ascribed by the Admiral to relationships

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[42] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 183.
[43] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, pp. 37-38.
[44] Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Types of Naval Officers Drawn from the History of the British Navy: With Some Account of the Conditions of Naval Warfare at the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century, and of Its Subsequent Development During the Sail Period* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1902), p. 379.
[45] 'For he to-day that sheds his blood with me/ Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile': Shakespeare, *Henry V*, p. 491.

between naval officers in battle, and the fact that this cadre of narratives were primarily written by the officers themselves, the memoirs of the Second World War naval veterans tend to focus on the personal dynamics of the 'upper deck' and the captain's responsibilities for ensuring effective discipline and harmonious working relations throughout the ship. At their core, they set forth the process by which the commanders created the type of ships' company that could bolster the individual and collective morale of the crew.

'Ships' companies are invariably genuine, first-rate material; the only thing that can ruin them is their officers', declared Jack Broome.[46] As a former commander of both submarines and destroyers, he was well-placed to reflect that naval warfare during the Second World War was 'a human rather than a technological way of life'.[47] Heavy emphasis is placed in the memoirs of Broome and others on the importance of creating a 'happy ship'. Although this is a rather nebulous concept and is difficult to quantify, the official history of the New Zealand armed forces during the war provides a useful framework for understanding this trope. Medical officers in the New Zealand navy observed key variations in instances of neurosis among the companies of different ships, which a subsequent study of wartime psychiatric disorders among naval personnel attributed partially to whether or not the crews felt themselves part of such a 'happy' ship. They found that this concept was charged with intense meaning, broadly signifying what the official history summarised as a company in which there was 'mutual trust and respect between officers and men, and dependent to a great extent on officers and senior ratings who not only knew their jobs but who also had a sympathetic understanding of the men under them and could get the best out of them.'[48] The same view is emergent from the memoirs of British naval veterans, who testified that the result of careful handling of the ship's company created men who were able to continue their endeavours despite considerable strain, discomfort and danger. Several commanders even implied that when the strange chemistry of a 'happy' ship was in operation, the crew seemed to flourish when conditions at sea worsened. Peter Gretton, for example, reported that relations between his officers,

[46] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 82.
[47] Ibid., p. 24.
[48] T. Stout and M. Duncan, 'War Surgery and Medicine', in *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1954), pp. 646-647.

petty officers, senior ratings and crew aboard HMS *Sabre* were heartening: 'the worse the weather and the filthier the conditions on the mess decks, the cheerier the sailors became. They were never depressed, and were the finest ship's company I have ever met.'[49] Similarly, Donald Macintyre also perceived that in HMS *Walker*, 'Somehow the miseries shared welded ship's companies as a rule into happy teams'.[50] The same trope also sounds strongly among the memoirs of underwater crew. Due to the exceptionally confined nature of submarine warfare, veterans of 'the Trade' insisted that good dynamics between members of the crew were imperative in order to form an effective combat team. Sydney Hart's assertion that 'In all my sea-going years I have never found happier ships than those whose main work lay under water'[51], was based on a claim that submariners were:

> the most cheeriest of all sea-going men; it would have been fatal to enrol the grousing type, since we were so closely packed and so dependent on one another's good humour, that a dissentient element might have made for downright confusion and, indeed, a rot.[52]

The process of welding together individual sailors into a crew who would be sufficiently cohesive and proficient to fight the ship through months of hostile weather and enemy attacks was of paramount concern for those at sea, and correspondingly forms a core theme in their personal narratives. When Donald wrote that 'a ship is not just a matter of steel and iron and wood, she has a personality of her own', he insisted that this 'personality' was granted by the nature of the relationship between captain, officer and ship's company.[53] If there was a sour note in this finely balanced tripartite relationship, the ship itself was liable to function less effectively as a unit. Norman Hampson, for example, discerned very little of these pleasurable close-knit relationships between crew, officers and ship during his service as a CW rating aboard HMS *Carnation*, noting that he and his comrades did not work in conditions that

> made for good humour, mutual tolerance or social harmony. We were not jolly sailorboys, united by the brotherhood of the sea. I remember a particularly evil occasion when some of his messmates taunted Len Bowen in the hope that he

[49] Gretton, *Convoy Escort Commander*, p .47.
[50] Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p. 61.
[51] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 187.
[52] Ibid., p. 183.
[53] Donald, *Stand By For Action*, p. 14.

could be goaded into hitting one of them, which would have allowed them to get him stripped of his leading seaman's rank, pay and pension.[54]

It is worth noting that Hampson later identified his first lieutenant as the weak link on the upper decks, implying that he did not act in the best interests of the crew. 'On the whole', he wrote, 'the crews accepted … danger and discomfort with no more than routine grumbling. What made them almost homicidal was being made to sacrifice their scanty leisure time for fatuous reasons of officiousness or display.'[55]

In naval jargon, 'pusser' was the label applied to such 'fatuous' modes of regulation, a term which carried all the venom of a foul epithet. Indeed, Hampson noted that among the crew of the *Carnation*, 'pusserdom' was greeted with 'hatred and dread', and he darkly indicted his unpopular first lieutenant as 'pusser'.[56] As a corruption of the rank of 'purser', the term signified an excess of bureaucratic detail and adherence to the letter of regulations generally rumoured to be found in the 'battlewagons', or 'big ships', which were commonly assumed to be bastions of rigidly enforced protocol that was both comprehensive and invasive. Here, a crucial distinction is drawn between the 'big' and 'small' ships of the Royal Navy, with a number of memoirists asserting there was a prized flexible, or 'human', quality to life aboard sloops, corvettes, destroyers, anti-submarine trawlers and submarines. In a small ship in wartime, continually at sea, so Hampson proudly asserted, there was neither time nor inclination to carry out this level of 'spit and polish'.[57] Carried to excess, 'pusserdom' could threaten the morale and safety of the operational crew, as the memoirist learned when his despised first lieutenant ordered the hinged scuppers on the bulwark to be welded shut, because he felt that they detracted aesthetically from the smooth lines of the ship, and consequently almost flooded the ship when a gale at sea trapped vast quantities of water on the upper deck. With the corvette's proclivity for rolling viciously, and the disturbance to its centre of gravity, the affair might easily have ended in tragedy.

[54] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, pp. 19-20.
[55] Ibid., p. 15.
[56] Ibid., p. 14.
[57] Ibid., p. 14.

The 'pusser' trope highlights the fragility of relations between crew and officers in the smaller ships, and 'small ship' discipline is thus represented in these memoirs as something of an art-form. The worst excesses of an overly zealous officer's 'pusser' micromanagement of the ship are illustrated in Hampson's narrative, yet all of the naval memoirists – including the two non-officer submariners Charles Anscomb and Sydney Hart – testify that strict discipline remained essential to rivet together a ship's company. For example, when Sam Lombard-Hobson was given his own command, he recalled the 'wise advice' of his former captain: 'relax discipline one iota when things are good, and you have lost control when they are not'.[58] Yet achieving an optimum level of naval regulation which ensured high morale and good working relationships throughout a ship was clearly a tricky and delicate task which was rendered more complex by the ambiguity of what actually constituted 'good' discipline. Perplexing twin statements issued by Anscomb suggest that officers could find themselves placed in a confusing situation with regard to enforcing regulations. On the one hand, the former coxswain expressed a liking for the 'Captain Blighs' of the Royal Navy, observing that 'Nothing at sea is more vitally necessary than discipline and a taut ship.'[59] On the other hand, he also claimed that if a seaman was 'a pirate by nature', he was best suited to service aboard a destroyer or submarine in which discipline was more relaxed.[60] According to this experienced petty officer, therefore, the ideal balance of command and control over a ship's company was strict enough to ensure efficiency, but not so rigid as to fracture morale. Lombard-Hobson wrote of the particular difficulties faced by the captain in striking this balance of discipline:

> A pit-fall which had to be watched by young commanding officers… was that of letting up on discipline. After a ship had been in commission for a year, and its company been through some testing times of war and weather, it was tempting for the captain to show some leniency in the strict observance of standards of dress, personal appearance and punctuality, especially when the ship was operating on its own, and away from the critical eye of higher authority.[61]

[58] Lombard-Hobson, *A Sailor's War*, p. 146.
[59] Anscomb, *Submariner*, p. 17.
[60] Ibid., p. 23.
[61] Lombard-Hobson, *A Sailor's War*, pp. 153-154.

Concerned that he was possibly being too hard on his men by asserting his own firm resolution to maintain strictest discipline on board at all times, he sought out his own highly respected senior lower-deck rating for advice. The reply, he wrote, 'impressed and convinced me': 'You will not have a happy ship's company if you *ever* let up on discipline [Italics memoirist's own].'[62]

These narratives thus suggest that good relations between crew and officers in the 'small ships' of the Royal Navy depended upon a strict but humane kind of discipline which took stock of an individual's character and skills in order to coax maximum efforts from him. Submariner Edward Young noted that by the time his new command had been at sea for ten weeks, the period of living and working in such close proximity had 'given the crew every chance of shaking down together':

> Each man gradually revealed his strength and weakness. We learnt where we could safely put our trust and where further supervision would be needed. At the same time *Storm* was developing a corporate identity of which the men were dimly aware and already a little proud.[63]

Young's account, like those of his fellow maritime memoirists, indicates that morale in the Navy was anchored by a dominant strain of paternalism which filtered down directly from the bridge.[64] For example, William Donald, a former officer in the sloop, HMS *Black Swan*, recorded that his captain was 'very like a father to the rest of us: which, I suppose, is what the Captain of a ship should be.'[65] Hughes, too, expressed fulsome praise for his commander, emphasising the importance of his role in uniting the company into a 'happy ship':

> On looking back it seemed miraculous that the motley looking crew who had stared resentfully at *Scylla* in the shipyard at Greenock could have been welded into such a great body of men… the strongest bond was loyalty to the Captain and supreme confidence in him as a leader. Defaulters were few and we lived

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[62] Ibid., p. 154.
[63] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 162.
[64] These narratives demonstrate that the blend of fatherly authoritarianism and concern for the well-being of the troops which Gary Sheffield identifies among British officers on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 was also prevalent among the Royal Navy's 'small ship' officers between 1939 and 1945. The institutionalisation of a similar 'bureaucracy of paternalism' is primarily represented as the responsibility of the vessel's captain, who is often portrayed in these memoirs as a patriarchal figure. G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 81.
[65] Donald, *Stand By For Action*, p. 15.

> happily, confident in each other, sharing our jokes, and taking part in all the little activities and associations aboard.[66]

The need for punitive discipline rarely features in these memoirs, which tend to corroborate Donald Macintyre's declaration that it was 'hardly ever necessary to punish wrongdoers' in his command, HMS *Hesperus*.[67] On the rare occasion when it was necessary, he employed his own methods of ensuring good behaviour:

> All that was required was to let the culprit know that he would be drafted away from the ship if he could not reform and nearly always this was enough. Occasionally we carried out our threat and the rest of the ship's company were the happier for their loss.[68]

According to these narratives, the senior officer also had a duty to ensure that relations on the upper deck ran smoothly and harmoniously. The relationship between a captain and his first lieutenant is depicted as especially important, as it was through the latter that the interplay of human relationships within the company was supervised. Responsible for ensuring that the captain's orders were carried out promptly and efficiently, the 'Jimmy' played a vital role in maintaining discipline at sea. In this way, a good first lieutenant could either make or break a ship's company. In HMS *Verbena*, Denys Rayner was not immediately allocated a first lieutenant when he took command of the corvette. He thus had to combine this role with his own duties as captain, a task which he found immensely wearing:

> The Captain and the First Lieutenant are complementary to one another. However good the former may be, his ship cannot be a success unless the latter is efficient. If the Captain is responsible for the ship's body, to the First Lieutenant falls the charge of her soul. He is at once the translator of the Captain's authority to the men and their own ambassador at the court of that authority. In many ways it is more difficult to be a good First Lieutenant than a good Commanding Officer, for the Captain only looks one way, while Number One must look both fore and aft.[69]

When Rayner was finally given a new first lieutenant, Jack Hunter, he perceived that the mood of the entire ship lifted and the men achieved a new degree of unity. He believed that his new 'Number One's' charisma and sense of humour functioned as a

[66] Hughes, *Through the Waters*, p. 138.
[67] Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p. 115.
[68] Ibid., p. 115.
[69] Rayner, *Escort*, p. 65.

'catalyst which changed the parts into one corporate whole, so that anything which affected anyone of us was felt by all.'[70] Clashes of personality between a captain and his officers were, however, inevitable, and could have serious implications for the ship, as Alistair Mars documented. A disagreement between himself and his 'Number One', a man he identifies as 'Taylor', about proceeding at speed in heavy weather caused an unpleasant spat. Upon being accused by his first lieutenant of courting the risk of breaking the boat up by running her at high speed, Mars was furious that his authority was challenged in such a manner. He was especially disgruntled by what he considered Taylor's 'confounded cheek… I was particularly upset because this was not the first difference we had had, and even the suggestion of bad feeling is fatal among a small group of men living in such proximity as we were.'[71] He was subsequently forced to request a transfer for this officer:

> I could not get away from the fact that Taylor and myself had certain incompatibilities of temperament. Such differences might pass unnoticed in a big ship, but they are exaggerated and distorted in the emotional confinement of a small submarine. Taylor, I decided, must be replaced. It was no reflection on him as a man or as a sailor. It was simply that our temperaments did not allow us to serve together.[72]

Disharmony on the upper deck could make life equally unpleasant for more junior officers. When Hampson passed his board of selection to receive a commission as sub-lieutenant in 1942, he was transferred to the destroyer, HMS *Easton*. Significantly, his relationship with his new captain was so bad that he refused to identify either ship or captain in his narrative. His transition from lower deck to wardroom was rendered problematic by his perception of his new commander as an inefficient officer and deeply disagreeable man:

> I diagnosed him at the time as 'a tin god with an inferiority complex'. If things did not work out as he would have wished, he took it for granted that this was due to the incompetence of his subordinates.[73]

[70] Ibid., p. 89.
[71] Mars, *Unbroken*, p. 51.
[72] Ibid., p. 82.
[73] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. 36.

Eventually, relations became so strained that Hampson left the wardroom if the captain was present and subsequently requested a transfer as liaison officer to a Free French sloop.

The view from the bridge, however, poignantly reveals the weight of the burden of authority borne by wartime naval commanders. As Gary Sheffield observes, in war, 'the leader's role is Janus-faced: to exercise paternal care for his men; but also to ensure that they risk their lives by fighting.'[74] The conflict between these two roles is particularly prominent in these naval narratives. Like Henry V on the eve of Agincourt, these memoirs convey psychological torment at exerting such responsibility over the lives of all their men. With keen insight, Hampson later identified his troublesome captain as a man deeply riven with insecurity and anxiety about his position as commander of a destroyer:

> [He] was in a job for which nature had not intended him. His inclination to be affable and easy-going was at odds with the kind of authority that he had been trained to think he ought to exercise, and as soon as he was at sea he became an entirely different man. I think he may have suffered from a kind of permanent identity crisis, convinced of the merits of strong and confident leadership without having the qualities that would have allowed him to exercise them.[75]

The old adage about the loneliness of command also resounds keenly throughout a number of other narratives. Hart, for instance, expressed considerable sympathy for his submarine commander, musing that the rank 'must be almost indescribably lonely' as the captain had no superior to apply to when in doubt or difficulty.[76] Broome's narrative suggests that the same predicament applied to all commanders equally: 'There are times when skippers feel a bit shut off and lonely. You can't discuss things critically and openly with your own officers.'[77] This state of affairs was not helped by a naval tradition that the captain could only enter the officers' wardroom by invitation, which further enforced the aloofness and isolation of the rank.

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[74] Gary Sheffield, 'Dead cows and Tigers: Some aspects of the experience of the British soldier in Normandy, 1944', in *The Normandy Campaign 1944: Sixty Years On*, (ed.) John Buckley (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 126.
[75] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. 35.
[76] Hart, *Discharged Dead*, p. 70.
[77] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 208.

The paternalistic discipline which ensured a 'happy and efficient' ship thus came at a heavy personal cost to the captain. There were awkward dilemmas to resolve. For instance, in June 1940, Donald found himself faced with an awkward predicament. Many of his crew came from the West Country and were uneasy about their families' proximity to France during the invasion threat. Numerous requests were put in for compassionate leave, which left him with an agonising decision:

> much as I sympathised with each request from the personal point of view, I had to steel myself to be hard-hearted from the national point of view. A man's absence from his ship, and particularly a key rating, meant a loss of efficiency which we could not afford just then. The ship had to come first and foremost.[78]

There were also moments of self doubt. Young was most perturbed to find a case of desertion on his hands, in the form of an able seaman who was unable to form good relationships with the rest of the crew, and absconded whilst the submarine was berthed at Arrochar:

> I was very depressed all day by the desertion. It disturbed my complacent belief that *Storm* was developing into a reasonably happy ship's company. I felt that it must in some way be my fault, and that I should have realised something was up with the lad.[79]

Significantly, he felt that he had failed in his own ability to weld together his crew, even though the deserter had been a natural social 'misfit'.

Furthermore, responsibility for the safety of the vessel and all on board added another heavy psychological burden. From the moment the engines first started turning until he could ring off upon return to harbour, the commander's ceaseless awareness that he carried the ship took a heavy psychological toll. Submarine commander William King was the only memoirist who perceived that this duty placed the captain in a relatively fortunate position among the company, as he benefitted from 'the spur of ultimate responsibility'.[80] The others, however, refute this view, documenting in grim detail the grinding pressures of the captain's eternal responsibility with no respite. As Donald noted:

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[78] Donald, *Stand By For Action*, p. 40.
[79] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 159.
[80] King, *The Stick and the Stars*, p. 6.

> The slightest error of judgement on your part and the whole lot can be lost. And even when you are off the bridge – since everyone is human and must sleep now and then – the ship is still yours. If the Officer of the Watch makes a mistake, it is your mistake; and, by golly, it was easy to make them on the East coast in war-time.[81]

For the commanding officers of escorts on the deep water Atlantic and Arctic runs, or submarines conducting long spells of sea time, these anxieties were rendered even more acute. For men like Donald who served on the East Coast convoys, the voyage only lasted around three days. On the longer convoys, sleep became a serious problem for captains, yet fear of relinquishing temporary control of the ship to officers of the watch is frequently voiced. Broome recounted that 'What we dreaded was an inexperienced officer-of-the-watch allowing us to sleep on – either through compassion, or fear of our wrath at being disturbed – when he should have roused us.[82] Similarly, Young wrote that:

> I never lost an opportunity of impressing on my officers that I would prefer to be called to the bridge a hundred times in the night, no matter how trivial the occasion, rather than be called too late. There were times in later patrols, especially after a succession of anxious nights, when I found it difficult to live up to my own precepts; to be called out on a false alarm just after I had dropped into a sleep for which my brain had been screaming for forty-eight hours was absolute torture, and it was often as much as I could do to tell the officer-of-the-watch that he had been right to call me.[83]

Such a perpetual state of heightened alertness inevitably took its toll on the commanding officer's physical and mental health. Echoing Moran, Roger Hill believed that a man began the war with a certain number of 'points' which represented as much as he could personally stand, and these became used up by living on one's nerves. For the captain, he felt that this presented especial problems: 'If you are going to be taut and react instantly to every emergency on the bridge of a destroyer, you are going to have a reaction and crack quicker than a man in a quieter job.'[84] Ideally, he argued, leave or a spell of duty in a more restful job ashore could replenish these vital 'points', yet he also posited with some bitterness that the only real rest a destroyer

[81] Donald, *Stand By For Action*, p. 53.
[82] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 77.
[83] Young, *One of Our Submarines*, p. 177.
[84] Hill, *Destroyer Captain*, p. 153.

captain received was when his ship was sunk or damaged.[85] Ironically, the captain's official and self-imposed duties reached a point where they began to work to the detriment of the crew. After four years at sea, Hill began to feel the strain mounting unbearably and reported that he inevitably vented this on his crew and officers: 'as a captain more nearly approached a breakdown, or operational fatigue as it was called, so he became increasingly impossible to serve and live with.'[86] Similarly, in early 1942, Macintyre was feeling the pressure of two years at sea, relating that 'I was near the cracking point.' Approaching harbour in Newfoundland, his signals staff made a small error in exchanging recognition signals with the port, and he shouted at the Yeoman of Signals. Later, he realised that his attitude was 'entirely unreasonable and unjustified and resolved to try to control myself better in future, but at the same time I began to wonder whether I was heading for that psychological condition known as "operational fatigue".'[87] By mid-1943 he felt that he had been worn down past the point of being able to command competently: 'Freshness and a never-wearying alertness were essential to come out on top in this game and I knew I was losing them. It was time for me to go.'[88] According to these memoirs, therefore, when a commander reached this stage, the decision to leave his men is portrayed as the final act of duty to them.

The naval memoirists therefore collectively articulate the critical role played by a vessel's captain and officers in shaping the kind of 'happy' ship's company that they felt was essential to morale and combat efficiency. The dispensation of institutionalised paternalistic discipline from senior officers was viewed as the key ingredient in the process of alchemising sailors into a seafaring 'band of brothers'. Importantly, however, this was also an introverted affair. In order successfully to administer to the well-being of the ship's company, commanders were required to supervise their own characters and reserves of endurance, testifying repeatedly to the sagacity of Moran's observation that 'The art of command is the art of dealing with human nature'.[89]

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[85] Ibid., p. 154.
[86] Ibid., p. 154.
[87] Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p. 61.
[88] Ibid., p. 171.
[89] Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, p. 193.

Within the confines of a heavy bomber, the interplay of human relationships bore a resemblance to the crews of submarines and small surface vessels. Both sets of combatants inhabited an intimate, closed-off, little world in which each man's virtues and vices were known to all. The question of leadership, however, provides a pivotal difference between aircrew and naval personnel. Inside the ships of the Royal Navy, each sailor formed a link in a well-defined chain of command that stretched all the way up to the vessel's captain, providing the ship's company with a safety-net of officially-appointed paternalism. Max Hastings claims that a similar sense of reassurance was also conveyed to aircrew by the hierarchy of rank on a bomber squadron, positing that 'the decisive factor in the morale of bomber aircrew, like that of all fighting men, was leadership.'[90] The memoirs of Bomber Command veterans, however, suggest that this was not the case. Indeed, Frank Musgrove's narrative witheringly condemns Hastings's view as 'Public School nonsense', arguing that a squadron bore more resemblance to 'a peace-time airport than an Army regiment'.[91] He dismissed Hastings's argument that the chain of command which characterised the other services also strengthened aircrew, explaining that from top to bottom in Bomber Command, 'leadership' of any kind was 'largely invisible'.[92] 'At briefing', he wrote caustically, 'we were not sent off into battle with a stirring oration like that of Henry V before Agincourt. At the most, we had a "Good Luck, chaps" from the CO (who probably wasn't going anyway).'[93] Peter Russell also reflected that good discipline in Bomber Command was more than simple

> leadership by one man, it was something very different from the sort of eagerness to follow (or perhaps readiness to go out in front) such as a man like the Duke of Wellington was said to be able to get from his 'scum of the earth'.[94]

What was required, he argued, was 'something more subtle'.

Having roundly condemned Hastings's explanation of military authority as the foundation of morale among aircrew, Musgrove expressed approval for John

[90] Hastings, *Bomber Command*, p. 216.
[91] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 59.
[92] Ibid., p. 61.
[93] Ibid., p. 60.
[94] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 130.

Terraine's history of the Royal Air Force, praising its 'far more intelligent grasp of the subtle realties of flying'.[95] In this study, Terraine recognises that the RAF was unique among the services, as it was not an officer-function to lead the troops into battle. Certainly this historian's argument that external military norms of 'command' were not really applicable to a bomber squadron – inside an aircraft 'all that was required from the crew was exceptionally high morale and sense of duty and an ability to conquer fear' – finds repeated confirmation among the memoirists of Bomber Command.[96]

In Musgrove's view, Bomber Command's system of tours of operations was 'an inspired structural invention which sustained most crews… a crew simply got on with it.'[97] Norman Ashton concurred that the tour system provided statistical elements of consolation. After four trips, he was granted home leave: 'I went home feeling quite a veteran. It was a common saying in Bomber Command that any crew completing four operations had an even chance of finishing their tour.'[98] Nevertheless, the importance of the tour system should not be overstated as the construct could work to the detriment of aircrew. After a bad operation, the prospect of completing the rest of the tour could seem insurmountable, or as Jack Currie explained, could inspire treacherous false confidence:

> Some of the old hands thought that there were two particularly perilous phases in the tour. One was during the first half dozen missions before you knew the ropes, and the other occurred at about the twenty-sortie mark, when a spurious euphoria might lure a crew into contributing by carelessness to their own destruction.[99]

Based on such testimony, it is difficult to explain the source of aircrew morale purely on a basis of the 'strong mathematical regularity' which the tour system enshrined.[100]

Instead, among these RAF narratives, the 'touch of human nature' emerges again as key to the cohesiveness of the bomber 'band of brothers'. Unlike in the Army,

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[95] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 59.
[96] John Terraine, *The Right of the Line: The Royal Air Force in the European War 1939-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), p. 466.
[97] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 63.
[98] Ashton, *Only Birds and Fools*, p. 16.
[99] Currie, *Lancaster Target*, p. 93.
[100] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 63.

however, operational units were wholly comprised of volunteers. Discipline among each seven-man bomber crew thus acquired a markedly different character which Russell argued represented 'discipline by consent':

> I realised that these bomber aircrew would do anything they were called upon to do. It was the opinion of their fellow aircrew that mattered. In order to keep their esteem they would keep pressing on regardless, even when they themselves knew that they were dangerously tired.[101]

From the beginning of their service with Bomber Command, the interplay of human relationships was characterised by a uniquely consensual nature. The RAF endorsed this by allowing men to select their own crew members, which Jim Davis thought 'the finest plan that Bomber Command ever devised.'[102] The element of choice allowed aircrew to believe that they were exerting a modicum of control over their own fate. Raw instinct was the key criterion on which these memoirists based their selection. Davis, for example, paired up with another gunner and wandered around a cricket pitch filled with hundreds of other flyers searching for a crew: 'we passed many pilots but rather like a lady trying on hat after hat in a store, we both decided we would move on until we both felt the same about the pilot we were seeking.'[103] Indeed, a skilled pilot was viewed as integral to increasing the chances of one's survival. Yet Frank Broome's account of teaming up with a pilot reveals that the crewing process was not necessarily straightforward. Upon meeting a Flight Lieutenant looking for a crew, he observed that the pilot had a stern face and had the look of a disciplinarian:

> We didn't know how far that went, it could be too late to back out on that score if we were to have any misgivings. The fellow might be a real bind. He might even be a real 'basket'. Maybe he would expect a lot from his crew. Maybe Peter [another gunner] and I would not be good enough. Perhaps he wanted really 'shit-hot' air gunners. Well, we would like a 'shit-hot' pilot and captain too.[104]

[101] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 130.
[102] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 31.
[103] Ibid., p. 31.
[104] Frank Broome, *Dead Before Dawn: A Heavy Bomber Tail Gunner in World War II* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Aviation, 2008), p. 140.

Broome placed considerable importance in 'the idea of a friendly sort of crew. I thought it was highly desirable, if not essential!'[105] Miles Tripp concurred that achieving a suitable balance of temperaments from the outset was vital, noting that:

> This arbitrary collision of strangers was basically a marriage market and yet the choice of a good flying partner was far more important that a good wife. You couldn't divorce your crew, and you could die if one of them wasn't up to his job at a critical moment.[106]

John Bushby agreed that crewing-up was a 'decisive moment':

> A bomber crew is a small fighting team; each a specialist and each depending on the others. It is vital that men so put together shall be in harmony on the ground as in the air. There is no room for clash of personalities on a run-up to the target. Even some small off-duty bickering or unpleasantness can fatally detract from the concentration and instant communication essential in the air.[107]

Despite the unprecedented degree of choice granted to the flyers in the selection of their crew mates, they were well aware that this choice marked only the beginning of their combat relationship. It was impossible to be sure how one's fellow aircrew would stand up during an operation. Davis clearly considered himself fortunate in his choice of crew, and wrote a positively lyrical account of the relationships he cultivated with the other six members, proudly declaring that 'my crew mates were the cat's whiskers to me'.[108] He insisted that such a bond required careful cultivation and nourishment:

> You had to gain confidence in each other, you would feel that confidence grow only when you witnessed the abilities of your crew mates. You would learn to love them, eat with them, sleep with them, go out with them, you would gradually all blend with each other so that in the end you would feel like brothers. The bond between you would become so tight that it would never break and the brotherly feeling would remain for the rest of your life.[109]

Within this developing brotherhood, there were social conventions. Alongside a period of training, the alchemy between a crew also took place on the ground, with the men

[105] Ibid., p. 140.
[106] Miles Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, rev., rev. ed. (London: Leo Cooper, 1993), p. 9.
[107] Bushby, *Gunner's Moon*, p. 84.
[108] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 51.
[109] Ibid., p. 32.

of each unit eating, sleeping and socialising together so far as the official distinctions of rank permitted.[110] Jack Currie explained that

> Crews usually kept their own company, but it was considered all right for the pilot of one crew to associate with the pilot of another on occasion, or indeed one navigator with another, and so on. But for, say a gunner to be in company with the pilot of another crew more than once or twice would be thought unnatural and disloyal.[111]

In this manner, a crew became yoked together and learned to function as a team both on the ground and in the air. Ideally, as Macintosh noted, aircraft and aircrew would consequently become 'honed into a sharp and deadly weapon'.[112] However, any disruption to the painstakingly crafted and finely balanced operational unity of the crew was ill-received, as the issue of replacements demonstrates. As part of the training process in Bomber Command, aircraft were often required to carry trainee 'second dickies' (second pilots) to help them learn their trade. Equally, if an operational crew was a man short for any reason, a replacement 'spare bod' could be temporarily drafted in from a crew who was not on the duty roster that night. Arthur Gamble wrote that the majority of aircrew 'detested' these substitutions, whether they were losing one of their own team for the sortie, or flying with a trainee second pilot.[113] His justification for this attitude grants an insight into the finely-tuned nature of the combatant relationships in a heavy bomber:

> Each crew was a closely-knit unit which had been welded together through long weeks of intensive training. Their survival through the first three or four operations on the squadron, developed a bond between them and a routine particularly suited to that crew as a whole. Although the training for each crew was exactly the same, the seven individual personalities making up each crew interpreted the information each received in a manner peculiarly suited to themselves. Therefore the sum of these seven different personalities ensured that each seven-man crew would be uniquely different, and would adopt a different routine and attitude from its neighbours.[114]

If, as Macintosh articulated, aircraft and aircrew were tempered into a unique 'weapon', the introduction of an alien personality was akin to expecting a gun to fire

[110] There were separate messes and sleeping quarters for flight officers and flight sergeants.
[111] Jack Currie, *Lancaster Target*, 2nd ed. (London: Goodall Publications, 1981), p. 11.
[112] Don Macintosh, *Bomber Pilot*, (London: Browsebooks, 2006), p. 204.
[113] Gamble, *The Itinerant Airman*, p. 118.
[114] Ibid., p. 119.

when loaded with the wrong calibre of ammunition. With the safety of hindsight, Broome acknowledged a 'silly' popular belief that aircraft carrying 'spare bods' and 'second dickies' were jinxed, a theory that was seemingly granted credence by the number of aircraft that went missing when carrying a different or extra crew member.[115] Gamble attributed this superstitious belief to the flyer's engrained view of 'any deviation from the normal routine as an omen of impending ill fortune.'[116] Superstition aside, it is tempting to wonder whether the loss of these aircraft with replacement or additional crew members might have been caused to some degree by an imbalance of the human chemistry inside the machine.

Despite the lyricism of Davis, most memoirists acknowledged some flaws in the seven-way aircrew relationship. One particular subject of grievance was the disparity in status among the crew. Rear gunners, for instance, were paid less than the others. Although Davis himself was a rear gunner, and insisted that these men never mentioned nor grumbled about this wage differential, it still lurked as a potential hairline fracture in the crew relationship. Tripp, for example, recorded that the financial discrepancy created 'an unacknowledged but undeniable status distinction.'[117] The trade of bomb aimers also attracts some scorn in these memoirs. Macintosh asserted that 'due to them being failed pilots and the fact that they did not appreciably affect the survival value of a crew, [they] were deemed to be fairly low coin in the crewing market.'[118] Musgrove concurred, reporting that he was 'delighted' to have been selected for navigator training: 'I should have been bitterly disappointed to be a bomb-aimer, which I always considered a non-job and held in complete contempt. And still do.'[119]

Additional invisible, but potentially lethal, tensions could result from issues of rank. Most Lancaster crews were a mixed bag of senior NCOs and junior officers. On the ground, this demarcation was made plain by the segregation of the ranks into separate messes. On the other hand, rank distinctions amongst a crew when airborne were considerably more jumbled, as rank did not necessarily signify a pilot and thus

[115] Broome, *Dead Before Dawn*, p. 271.
[116] Gamble, *The Itinerant Airman*, p. 119.
[117] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, p. 9.
[118] Macintosh, *Bomber Pilot*, p. 58.
[119] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 13.

command of the aircraft. From a detached perspective, this appears a situation tailor-made for resentments and misunderstandings, yet the memoirists are quick to insist that the strange fluctuating dichotomy of rigid versus haphazard rank distinctions did not in itself cause problems. Trouble loomed, however, if these distinctions started to change among a crew due to promotion. The memoirs of Gamble and Arthur White illustrate how the seams of crew relationships could be strained to near breaking point when hitherto satisfactory crew dynamics were suddenly shattered by changes in rank. Both men were members of the same crew, yet White and two others were commissioned part-way through their tour and moved into the officers' quarters to join their two crew members who were already commissioned. White perceived that when this transition was made, it 'did seem to isolate Ronnie and Poker [respectively the other crew mate and Gamble] and I think they felt it. After all, we were the same team and had shared the same experiences – both good and bad.'[120] Gamble's memoir confirms White's suspicion that he and 'Ronnie' were unhappy that their efforts appeared to have been overlooked by the RAF authorities:

> we felt a little bit aggrieved at this, wondering what sort of misdemeanour we had committed that we had been left on the sidelines, not to be considered of the same value as the rest of the crew… it left us with an underlying sense of resentment at the unfairness of it all. We therefore agreed to adopt the attitude, "Who wants to be a bloody officer, anyway," whenever the subject was broached by the rest of the lads.[121]

Nevertheless, these memoirs testify that, despite tensions and rifts within the crew's interlocking relationships, every effort was made when aloft to place differences aside in order to maintain essential levels of concentration and communication. Although Gamble felt sore about being passed over for promotion, he insisted that relations with the newly commissioned crew members remained intact: 'this in no way affected our relationship with them… we were genuinely pleased at their promotion. We were still "Skipper, Mo, Art, Monty, Gibby, Ronnie and Poker" to each other, and a highly proficient unit to boot!'[122]

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[120] Arthur White, *Bread and Butter Bomber Boys* (Upton on Severn: Square One Publications, 1995), p. 153.
[121] Gamble, *The Itinerant Airman*, pp. 145-146.
[122] Ibid., p. 146.

A similar tale of enforced unity in the air emerges from accounts of clashing personalities among aircrew. Ultimate responsibility for the aircraft rested with the pilot, who correspondingly assumed an unofficial oversight of crew dynamics. If the formalised leadership of Hastings's argument is virtually undetectable in these narratives, faint traces of a more fraternal mode of leadership are certainly discernible. Lancaster bomb aimer, Tripp, for instance, dwelt at length upon the divergent temperaments, backgrounds and character traits of his crew. Unafraid to acknowledge their frequent differences of opinion, he portrayed their relationships as becoming increasingly strained as they worked their way through their tour. He attributed the mounting disharmony to the cumulative stress of three months' operational service: 'tempers were becoming short, and mutual insults were intended to wound rather than amuse.'[123] As each member of the crew increasingly suffered from fatigue, personal characteristics became increasing irritants: 'George developed the habit of addressing everyone as "Kiddie" and whereas he had once been phlegmatic his moods began to fluctuate between facetiousness and despondency. Ray and I could barely speak to each other without quarrelling'.[124] Significantly, however, it is Tripp's pilot, 'Dig', who is represented as holding the crew together. He is characterised as 'more of a leader than an equal' in the crew pecking order, as he would not hesitate to order backbiting crew members to 'belt up' in the air.[125] Yet rather than remaining aloof from the bickering of his crew 'Dig' added his own contribution, deliberately using the phrase 'you'd whinge if your arse was on fire' purely because he knew it irritated Tripp. Macintosh, a Lancaster pilot, also recounted strained circumstances. Reflecting on his crew, he recorded that 'Sometimes they didn't like me, and occasionally, in discussions which I fostered, said I was overbearing and didn't always muck in like the skippers of other crews.'[126] Yet he would not let this affect operations: 'I never allowed any arguments in the air, which happened occasionally on other crews.'[127] If the seven-man bomber crew may be likened to a 'band of brothers', these memoirs suggest that the pilot, teasing, chastising and responsible by turns, fulfilled the role of eldest sibling.

[123] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, p. 71.
[124] Ibid., p. 71.
[125] Ibid., p. 103; p. 31.
[126] Macintosh, *Bomber Pilot*, p. 204.
[127] Ibid., p. 204.

Among these memoirs, the subject of fear and endurance among aircrew provides a particularly valuable insight into the interplay of human relationships in Bomber Command. On 22 April 1940, the Air Member for Personnel circulated to all Commands a set of regulations which stipulated that aircrew who stated an intent not to fly would be deemed 'Lacking in Moral Fibre' ('LMF') and removed from the RAF.[128] Aircrew who no longer felt able to face the demands of operational flying thus risked designation as 'LMF', being stripped of rank and ignominiously posted away from the squadron, often to spend the rest of the war digging latrines. Russell's description of the flyer's response to the cracking of a man's nerve epitomises the general approach towards the subject in these veteran narratives: 'It was probably an occurrence that any member of aircrew could contemplate happening, but the prospect of it filled him with horror.'[129] Such was the disgrace and humiliation that the RAF attached to the label 'LMF' that the spectre of being officially branded a coward hangs over the majority of these bomber memoirs. Invariably, the authors deny knowing anyone who was so designated. Beneath this blanket denial, however, lurks a collective story in which accounts of cracked nerves and inability to cope are common. Although the official secrecy which shrouded the entire issue might well have rendered their expressed ignorance of 'LMF' technically true, most encountered aircrew who were physically and mentally unfit to keep flying.[130] Bushby, for example, recounted the tale of a young rear gunner whose plane was shot up by a German night fighter upon landing after a raid. The sole survivor, the gunner was found dragging the headless body of the navigator out of the flaming wreckage. Afterwards, he did 'the sensible and courageous thing' and reported to the CO to explain that the sight of an aircraft brought the horror back to him and he felt he was a menace to his new crew. Bushby's empathy with the plight of the young gunner is made very clear to his reader, and in this instance the airman was treated kindly: 'I believe some officious "trick cyclist"

[128] John McCarthy, 'Aircrew and "Lack of Moral Fibre" in the Second World War', *War and Society*, 2:2 (1984), p. 87.
[129] Russell, *Flying in Defiance of the Reich*, p. 135.
[130] The wartime RAF was always extremely concerned that 'cowardice' might spread infectiously through aircrew. For this reason, LMF cases were dealt with harshly but quietly, and official statistics are notoriously difficult to pin down.

temporary medical officer did try to attach the "LMF" label to his case but was over-ruled after a sympathetic senior officer at Group had been told the facts.'[131]

Yet a different anecdote in Bushby's memoir reveals the limits set upon the flyer's sympathy for aircrew who lost control of themselves. Despite his compassion for the young gunner, Bushby was scathing when his own bomb aimer's nerve snapped during an attack on Bremen. On this particular raid in 1942, conditions above the city were daunting, with thick flak and multiple searchlights in action. On the run over the target, the bomb aimer failed to confirm that the bomb load had been dropped, and it was not until the aircraft reached the outer perimeter of the target area that he informed the rest of the crew that he had forgotten to push the master switch to release the explosives. Grimly, Bushby's pilot refused to accept this explanation at face value and insisted upon another, more successful, run. The veteran's account of this episode is relentlessly unsympathetic:

> There was no doubt about it. Our bomb-aimer had been scared, almost to the point of fear. Now there was nothing wrong in that. Any man who was not scared to go on ops was either a freak or a liar. But our bomb-aimer had committed the unpardonable crime of showing it. This was the real courage of aircrew. Not in being unafraid, but in keeping one's fear to oneself, in making a moral effort to protect the rest of the crew from infection.[132]

After the Bremen raid, he never saw the bomb aimer again: 'Whatever had been done, had been done quietly and without fuss. He was near the end of a tour anyway and a posting, maybe administrative, maybe instructional, had been quickly arranged no doubt to his satisfaction as well as ours.'[133] This observation about the quiet reassignment of the airman being to the crew's 'satisfaction', as well as presumably the unfortunate bomb aimer's, demarcates the point at which sympathy for one man had to be weighed against the lives of others.

A number of other memoirists agreed that an open display of fear in the air posed an immediate threat to the entire unit, as it could lead to crew relations unravelling with frightening speed. Lancaster pilot Harry Yates acknowledged that:

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[131] Bushby, *Gunner's Moon*, p. 143.
[132] Ibid., p. 142.
[133] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

> There must be many alive still for whom the passing years have not erased the pain of those cruel words [LMF]. But better even this than that these people should get as far as the Ruhr or the main German cities. Fear there was unavoidable, death always close. No crew could afford one of their number to snap on board and plunge everything into hysteria and chaos.[134]

Macintosh corroborated this, explaining how if terror was allowed to show, it could destroy the poise of a whole crew:

> Fear, like a trickle in the wall of a dyke, quickly became a flood, breaching the barriers of the mind and stomach and communicating itself to the whole crew. Expecting trouble, their already taught [sic] nerves stretched to every bang and flash, drastically lowering their efficiency.[135]

Clear expectations of aircrew behaviour when suffering from fear and combat fatigue are thus stapled into these veterans' representations. It is important to recognise, however, that these memoirists censured 'cowards' only for showing fear, not for experiencing it. There is a strong whiff of the sentiment 'There but for the Grace of God go I' in these narratives, and the authors' approaches towards fear are sanguine in their tacit acceptance that no man was immune. Philip Gray observed that, 'even heroes have a break-down point. Honour and moral fibre are variables. Like pain, the threshold is different in each one of us.'[136] John Wainwright confirmed that this personal 'threshold' was something that each man carried around with him:

> He couldn't change it and, if you forced him, blackmailed him, beyond that threshold of terror you were sending him and his crew to near-certain death. Because he would do something he shouldn't do … or not do something he should do. He'd freeze. He'd lose control. He'd be a useless vacuum, within a crew of which he was a part.[137]

Wainwright, in fact, had his own experience of the LMF taboo. After his aircraft was shot up and crash-landed on the runway, he was hospitalised with severe concussion. Having completed seventy-two operational trips, he decided that the time had come to quit flying before he succumbed to the scenario outlined above. His treatment by the RAF was markedly lacking in sympathy, and for three months he was quizzed by

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[134] Yates, *Luck and a Lancaster*, p. 48.
[135] Macintosh, *Bomber Pilot*, p. 194.
[136] Gray, *Ghosts of Targets Past*, p. 81.
[137] Wainwright, *Tail-End Charlie*, p. 180.

psychiatrists who tried to prompt him to return to flying. He subsequently lost his rank as flight sergeant and was remustered as ground crew, narrowly missing classification as 'LMF' 'by a whisker'.[138] Grandiloquently, he declared that:

> most operational air crew would have agreed, and will still agree, that it is more than likely that those three letters killed more men than German flak, or German fighters. They sent terrified men to their death; they forced men to operate when they were a menace to their own crew.[139]

Like the naval officers, bomber aircrew could recognise the point at which they posed an immediate risk to the safety of their own crew, yet in Bomber Command, the threat of being branded LMF forced men to continue flying long after this point. Among the aircrew of Bomber Command, therefore, the 'touch of human nature' certainly served to allow men to work together with their aircraft as a 'sharply honed weapon'. Yet this close-knit and finely balanced seven-part combat relationship could prove the airman's Achilles heel. The fraternal nature of this relationship posed hazards, as well as advantages, to survival in combat. Ultimately, the final gift a flyer could bestow upon his aerial 'band of brothers' was to realise when his ability to use their company as a coping mechanism had run dry. Caught in a cruel snare by the noose of 'LMF', however, it was entirely possible that a flyer could be forced to jeopardise the lives of his crew mates in order to safeguard his own identity. With some irony, destroyer captain Roger Hill expressed envy of the bombers' system of tours, perceiving that it meant that 'there was no agonising decision to give up and be thought a coward to yourself or others.'[140] The reality, as these aircrew narratives testify, was rather different.

Summary: 'Bands of Brothers' and Military Memoir

The 'touch of human nature' which Marshall thought requisite to enabling combatants to make efficacious use of their weapons in battle is thus confirmed in these veteran memoirs, which chart the importance of close human relationships within

[138] Ibid., p. 178.
[139] Ibid., p. 178.
[140] Hill, *Destroyer Captain*, p. 154.

their units. Ironically, however, the tightly-knitted 'band of brothers' paradigm could also serve to undermine broader military objectives on occasion. As Richard Holmes notes, 'a system which bonded men firmly into tribal groups might work to the disadvantage of the army as a whole'.[141] In the Army, the Salerno mutiny of September 1943 proved this, as did a more minor, albeit no less murky, episode recounted by Bowlby, who asserted that a miniature rebellion had taken place shortly before he joined his unit at Alexandria in 1944. According to the author, when Tunisia fell, the Rifles were outraged to find that a suggestion, generated by the Army's rumour mill, that Montgomery was to take the whole Eighth Army back to Britain for a well-earned rest was in fact false. At that point, Bowlby recorded, the Rifles were under the impression that they were to stay on in Tunisia. Admittedly basing his account on hearsay (but which he assured his audience was entirely truthful and could be corroborated by other sources), he reported that 'it was more than they could stomach. Groups of riflemen went round wrecking the camp. Their officers were unable to stop them.'[142] Such was the depth of group solidarity that by the time Bowlby joined the Rifles, the punishment allegedly meted out to the unit – the repatriation of all its pre-war regulars and effective dismantlement of the unit – had left the mood of the remnants 'bitter'. In this instance, combatants displayed disgruntlement at orders imposed upon their own unit, yet other anecdotes from the naval and flyer memoirs suggest that the bonds of 'brotherhood' extended into a fraternal martial community that lay far beyond the immediate small group. Hill's destroyer, HMS *Ledbury*, formed part of the escort group for convoy PQ17. Upon receiving the order to 'scatter' from the Senior Escort Officer, Hill and the other five escorting destroyers sped off to intercept an anticipated attack from the German battleship, *Tirpitz*, leaving the scattering convoy of merchant ships and naval anti-submarine trawlers, anti-aircraft ships, and minesweepers to fend for themselves. Hill recorded that 'I can never forget how they cheered us as we moved out at full speed to the attack and it has haunted me ever since that we left them to be destroyed.'[143] He displayed still-raw rancour against the Admiralty, who created the situation in which the convoy was annihilated, and the rigidity of naval orders that prevented the close escort group from returning to protect

[141] Holmes, 'The Italian Job', p. 212.
[142] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 8.
[143] Hill, *Destroyer Captain*, p. 51.

the remnants of the convoy once it became apparent that the *Tirpitz* was far away. He reported that 'Everyone was bloodyminded with the bitter memory of PQ17 and the most respectable members of the ship's company had broken their leave' in protest against the catastrophic Admiralty error of judgement.[144] In less mutinous, but still bitter, terms Bushby wrote of a collective resentment against RAF procedure when a young air gunner at OTU Finningley was ceremoniously stripped of rank for slipping off to sort out a serious domestic problem. The Station Commander decided to make an example of the gunner, and mustered a parade of all the airmen on the OTU to witness the punishment. Standing in a hollow square, these men witnessed the gunner marched out under guard, and forced to stand still whilst his sergeant's stripes and flying brevet were ripped from his tunic. Bushby recorded that this scene of 'pure pathos' was a 'major psychological error', as it had a wholly unintended effect among the witnesses:

> What [the Station Commander] had failed to take into account in his arrogant pre-World War One thinking was that every aircrew member on that parade was a volunteer; and that by making us participate in another's degradation he had tacitly implied that in his opinion any one of us was likely to commit the same offence at any time. This we resented to a man.[145]

These more negative workings of the 'band of brothers' construct provide illustrations of Strachan's observation that fraternal martial loyalties could amount to a 'divorce' of combatants from the collective goals of higher military organisations.[146] Nevertheless, as the next chapter indicates, it was the strength of veterans' desire to remember and celebrate their wartime 'band of brothers' that frequently motivated them to write their memoirs in the first place.

[144] Ibid., p. 53.
[145] Bushby, *Gunner's Moon*, p. 92.
[146] Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War', p. 213.

PART II

5. MAKING AN IMPRINT: THE INTENTION AND FUNCTION OF MEMOIR

I was writing the book for [the dead], for those who were there, and for those who wanted to know what it was like – in that order. At the same time I was trying to forget the dead, to get shot of them.[1]

At the tender age of nine years old, a little boy who, within a decade, would serve as a Lancaster rear gunner in the Second World War, painstakingly carved his initials into a tree. Many years later, the adult Jim Davis was enchanted to discover that his childhood handiwork was still clearly visible. Reflecting upon the longevity of his graffiti, he mused that 'in this life I feel we all have to make an imprint and, if possible, have to leave behind us a memory of ourselves, or something we have accomplished in the minds of other people.'[2] As a veteran of the Second World War, leaving behind a lasting 'imprint' of his and others' wartime sacrifice for posterity was a responsibility Davis took very seriously. Indeed, so strongly did he feel in the 1980s about the marked lack of any kind of commemorative memorial to wartime bomber crews of the Royal, Commonwealth and Allied Air Forces that he became the driving force behind the erection of the International Air Monument outside Plymouth. The veteran's publication of a war memoir may also be viewed as another manifestation of his evident desire to stamp his lifetime into the consciousness of the nation. Like the tree and the monument, the book thus operates as an inscription of Davis's presence in history, an explicit statement which announces 'I was here'. More specifically, the memoir also provides an overt testament to the former rear-gunner's individual identity as a combatant, and simultaneously enabling the wartime accomplishments of Davis and his crew to be propelled into the public domain. The function of memoir as a monument to both private wartime selves and former comrades, however, offers only

[1] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 222.
[2] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 85.

one part of the story behind the creation of these narratives in the post-war years. The veterans' desire to employ these books to 'make an imprint' was equally sparked by a constellation of other reasons which were often bound together in a Gordian knot of motives. Yet it is possible to unravel the cords of the veterans' authorial intentions by identifying key threads of common purpose. These men make abundantly clear that the published war memoir was not merely a passive statement of experience. On the contrary, these narratives offered the veteran a valuable conduit of communication with a number of different audiences.

The extract from Alex Bowlby's memoir which introduces this chapter made a valiant effort to classify three different audiences for whom the author wrote *Recollections*. The most intimate of the trinity was a private communion with his own self: 'I was trying to forget the dead, to get shot of them'. The second audience was an external, civilian readership: 'those who wanted to know what it was like'. He hoped that his account would offer a glimpse into the sealed-off experiences of the frontline soldier for those who had no first-hand knowledge of what combat in Italy during the Second World War truly meant. The third – and by Bowlby's reckoning, the most important – audience was his erstwhile 'band of brothers'. Like Davis's memoir, *Recollections* was designed as a public tribute to a community of combatants which encompassed both the dead and the living. In thus proffering a broad triumvirate of motive for the creation of a war memoir, Bowlby provides a useful framework within which more detailed assessment of the private and public intentions of the genre may be conducted.

A Private Audience

Too far across the Styx: Returning to Civvy Street

In the first instance, memoir had a special private value to veterans struggling to reconcile themselves to post-war civilian life. Numerous former servicemen discovered that their wartime experiences marred their ability to adapt to peacetime. Many of the memoirists in this study experienced a severe sense of disconnect upon their return to civvy street, a disjuncture which some found prevailed for many decades, and their narratives testify to the lingering difficulties of readjustment from

combatant back to civilian. An odd dichotomy colours these literary recollections of combat. On the one hand, the war seemed to cast a far-reaching taint over the veteran's efforts to build an existence for himself away from the frontline. Physical and mental scars still caught painfully at unexpected moments. On the other hand, despite (or perhaps even because of) the melange of post-traumatic stress disorders, post-war disillusionment and failures to build lasting relationships which various men carried forward through peace, the war was elevated to an apex of memory which rested upon pride and satisfaction at a job well done. For those who felt that peace had not delivered wartime promises of a 'New Jerusalem' the construction of a war memoir enabled the veteran to process his combat experiences in a manner which afforded personal succour in the post-war present.

Once the war was over, some servicemen were immediately able to slot back into civilian life with comparative ease. Others found it more problematic, however, and a distinct anguish is voiced in multiple accounts of the mid-to-late 1940s. The first step on the path back to 'civvy street' began with demobilisation, which brutally emphasised the soldier's disconnect, wrenching away a well-ordered existence demarcated by rigid hierarchy and familiar patterns. Despite the temporary dislocation experienced in the sights, sounds and smells of battle, each serviceman knew what was expected both of himself and others, and knew his place in the military machine. Being torn out of this familiar system through the process of demobilisation proved a humiliating and painful experience for more than one former warrior. Ray Ward, for example, was demobbed on 11 April 1946. At the store where civilian clothing was handed out to the newly-released soldiers, he was disagreeably surprised to find that 'no distinction was made between officers and other ranks. Officers received little deference and no favouritism was shown. On the contrary, some of the fellows dishing out the clothes were bloody-minded enough to give the officers the shabbiest, most ill-made and ill-fitting garments.'[3] The bewildered disenchantment Ward displays in leaving behind the structure and hierarchy of his military days was also echoed by Charles Potts, who pointedly identified a marked disjuncture between the infantry

[3] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 374.

soldier's world on the front line and the civilian life into which he was expected to slide back effortlessly:

> this man is the hardest used, and the least remunerated of all Englishmen in time of war. And when the war is over, and he is allowed to return to his loved ones, he finds that his suffering is far from finished. Those that have had the good fortune to remain at home, that have been able to save money, to rent houses at reasonable cost, to bring up families, have themselves so raised the rents, commandeered the markets, and 'walled-off' the comforts of life, that the returned soldier finds himself still excluded from all the simple things that had been the objects of his hopes and dreams during those times of deprivation. He cannot afford to buy or rent a home for himself at post war prices: he has missed his chances of working his way up in a job: his military experience is considered more detrimental than advantageous to his future: his health has been undermined by damp and fever: and his nerves are frayed. His prospects in fact, are wholly depressing. Even if he goes into a shop to buy some simple commodity, he is greeted with the words, 'Sorry, but these are reserved for our regular customers.' How the devil, he asks himself, could they expect me to be a regular customer of any shop here, when I was fighting in the sands of Libya?[4]

Even for those who had conducted their war from domestic shores the return to a civilian environment was fraught with challenges. For men who had served in the RAF, the transition from wartime flyer to peacetime civilian seems to have been particularly difficult to navigate. Echoes of distress frequently sound throughout these narratives: 'What on earth shall I find to do when I am not able to fly a Spit any more?' wondered Geoffrey Wellum.[5] Although his voice here is that of the twenty-year old fighter pilot refracted through the middle-aged veteran, other fighter pilots foretold during the war that it would be extremely difficult to readjust back into civilian life. In a letter written to his father in June 1940, Tony Bartley reflected that 'If I live through this war, I doubt I shall ever be able to settle down to a conventional life', while an extract from Hugh Dundas's wartime diary dated 11 November 1940 forecast that 'The dangers of forgetting the possibility of reverting to a normal life are enormous; it seems so incredibly remote.'[6]

Arthur White confirmed that many Bomber Command veterans found it enormously difficult to return to civvy street: 'Some managed to pick up the threads

[4] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, p. 69.
[5] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 185.
[6] Bartley, *Smoke Trails in the Sky*, p. 19; Dundas, *Flying Start*, p. 54.

of their old, pre war job but many others found that aircrew categories and a tour of ops were no qualifications for the jobs on offer in post war Britain and so they had to start again – at the bottom.'[7] Feeling short-changed by the new post-conflict order, he bitterly perceived that 'There were few opportunities in the post war world for pilots; fewer still for navigators and wireless operators and literally none for air bombers and air gunners.'[8] One of the lucky ones was former Lancaster pilot Michael Renault, who was comparatively fortunate to be offered his old job back at J. Lyons & Co after being demobilised in June 1946. Yet he was wracked by unhappiness in his new employment: 'as time wore on I felt most unsettled and I missed the comparative freedom of the Services. My hours were 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. in a hot and busy factory for £15 per week and I hadn't really got the confidence in my own ability to stay.'[9] Promoted to Manager of the French Pastry factory in 1949, Renault remarks that:

> I was still unsure of my ability at twenty-six to run the place efficiently. After all, I had left Lyons at nineteen to join the RAF and all I could do well was fly an aeroplane! What good was this qualification to them?... a lot of the work was beyond me; I simply hadn't got the experience and how could I have at twenty-six? In a way I still feared the sack and yet I'd burned my boats in the RAF by refusing a permanent commission and where could I turn to? Thousands of ex-servicemen must have gone through what I did and resettlement in peace-time was no easy matter.[10]

The process of readjustment was especially tough for Renault. He spent the remainder of his life crippled by war-induced anxiety which tormented both his personal and professional life. Later, upon transferring employment to the motor industry, he was unable to face the increased responsibility of his new position and suffered a succession of nervous breakdowns before his early death in January 1964.

The trouble ex-servicemen like these experienced in slotting back into a civilian world which seemed wholly unfamiliar did indeed cast a shadow over the decades following the war. For example, Graeme Ogden intended his naval memoir as 'an epitaph to those of us who, twenty years ago, set off to the wars and to those of us who returned sickened and dispirited by the futility of a now meaningless crusade.'[11]

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[7] White, *Bread and Butter Bomber Boys*, p. 12.
[8] Ibid., p.12.
[9] Michael Renault, *Terror by Night: A Bomber Pilot's Story* (London: William Kimber, 1982), p. 181.
[10] Ibid., pp. 181-182.
[11] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 12.

Yet the veteran's resentment at the status quo to which he returned was not necessarily restricted to the immediate post-war period. Several memoirists reflected upon a moment in time much further down the line when each took stock of the changed world about them and, in a number of cases, found it woefully disappointing. In 1969 Miles Tripp wrote of his search to contact his former Lancaster crew:

> I wondered whether, with the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust and with race riots and civil disturbances everywhere, they thought our efforts, and the efforts of thousands like us, had been worth while. Or had our youth been as futile as an anonymous postcard addressed to nowhere and dropped unstamped into a disused letter-box.[12]

In 1989, Blenheim pilot Roger Peacock, writing under the pseudonym of 'Richard Passmore', was in no doubt at all about this question, using the dedication to his memoir to rail against contemporary society: 'to the men I am honoured to call my friends and comrades: air-crew on the day-bomber squadrons of the Royal Air Force between 1939 and 1945. I wish the Britain of today were worthy of their sacrifice.'[13] In some instances, a sense of disquiet at the fluctuations of the post-war world even extended into the new millennium. In 2007 a new edition of Edward Grace's memoir of the North African and Italian campaigns reflected the disgruntlement of Ogden, Tripp and Peacock. In the original edition, which was published in 1993, Grace concluded upon a relatively upbeat note:

> I was able to look hopefully to the future, to the end of the war and to peace. The world after the war would surely have a new vision, free from strife. Then with Rupert Brooke I imagined:
>
> Honour has come back, as a King to earth,
>
> And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
>
> And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
>
> And we have come into our heritage.[14]

[12] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, p. 119.
[13] Richard Passmore, *Blenheim Boy* (London: Thomas Harmsworth, 1981).
[14] Grace, *The Perilous Road to Rome via Tunis*, p. 161.

Significantly, this optimism was omitted from the 2007 edition, which instead includes a reflective and more detailed new epilogue. In this, Grace conveys a revised version of his feelings upon learning that the war in the Far East was over in August 1945:

> New ideas based on co-operation, conciliation and goodwill should ensure that never again could war threaten the destruction of the world. Hope was the watchword. … Many years have now passed since that optimistic epoch. Perhaps Hope is still what we need and are depending on.[15]

As a consequence of this enduring disconnect and tone of disillusionment with civvy street and the post-war world, many narratives voice the memoirist's longing to abdicate his civilian identity and return to the sanctuary of an environment in which he had felt more comfortable and valued. For instance, Geoffrey Wellum started writing his memoir in the 1970s to remind himself that he had once been of enormous value to his country, returning to his beloved 92 squadron in his imagination. As one of the youngest fighter pilots in the Battle of Britain, living for too long on strained nerves and adrenaline, Wellum had suffered badly when he was posted away from the squadron in the autumn of 1941, feeling bereft of both his identity and comrades and struggling with battle fatigue. In his memoir, the reader hears the ring of agonising loss in his portrayal of his feelings about being posted for a rest: 'A has-been. No further use to anybody. Merely a survivor, my name no longer on the Order of Battle in the dispersal hut. A worn-out bloody fighter pilot at twenty years of age, merely left to live, or rather to exist, on memories, reduced to watching from the wings.'[16] Wellum affirmed that he began writing *First Light* at a time when, in his own words, his life was 'bouncing along at the bottom', at the end of a difficult period in his marriage and when his business went bust.[17] Explaining that he was at a particularly low ebb, he thought '"Well I have been of some use,' and I sat down and wrote."'[18] Other narratives express an aching wistfulness to return to the military family which centred upon the veteran's 'band of brothers'. Of his return to Britain, Ken Tout recorded that

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[15] Edward Grace, *The Perilous Road to Rome and Beyond: Fighting Through North Africa and Italy*, rev.ed. (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2007), p. 191.
[16] Wellum, *First Light*, p. 293.
[17] Geoffrey Wellum, interviewed by Andrew Pettie, 'Geoffrey Wellum: The terrible beauty of flying a Spitfire at the age of 18', *The Telegraph*, 10 September 2010, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/battle-of-britain/7992268/Geoffrey-Wellum-The-terrible-beauty-of-flying-a-Spitfire-at-the-age-of-18.html (accessed 31 October 2014).
[18] Geoffrey Wellum, interviewed by Christian House, 'The 89-year-old Boy', *The Spectator*, 17 July 2010, http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/6142928/the-89yearold-boy/ (accessed 31 October 2014).

'If the Genie of the Lamp appeared now with all the promises of Arabia, I would barter my soul to be allowed to go back up the Vught road and report to Hank [his senior officer].'[19] Sydney Jary's memoir also expresses the same agonising longing for the emotional comfort which he had once drawn from his old platoon. He first experienced this during the war when he was sent to Antwerp on leave for forty-eight hours:

> I met a barrier. I had walked out of a world that I knew into one where I was desperately unsure of myself. Away from the battlefield, this world had no place for me… I had wandered too far into dark and smoky battlefields across the Styx to find solace or comfort in the bright lights behind the blackout curtains of Antwerp. I longed to return to the Battalion and to 18 Platoon which, without my knowing it, had become my home.[20]

Years later, he encountered the same problem back in the civilian world:

> Antwerp had been a small taste of the real world and, as anyone who has served with good soldiers on grim battlefields will confirm, afterwards real life never seems real again… there was no 18 Platoon to slink back to and without a loving wife it would have proved intolerable.[21]

The construction of a war memoir thus offered an opportunity to reconnect in some measure with the veteran's wartime 'band of brothers', even if they were no longer among the living. In a letter to his publisher, Donald Sutherland expressed pleasure that during the process of writing his manuscript, 'Lots of ghosts of old comrades have come fluttering round.'[22] The same sentiment was voiced by Bill Rolls, who commented that whilst writing his memoir 'I had some very pleasant times remembering people I had known and old pals whom I had lost… I had many real ghosts helping me every time I sat down to the typewriter.'[23] The similarity between these expressions suggests that writing a memoir allowed the veteran to reincarnate treasured bonds of wartime comradeship to provide a sense of solace in the present day. Analysing his own compulsion to create a narrative of his service with the Rifle Brigade, Bowlby confirmed that re-invoking the unit which had meant so much to him granted an escape from the personal troubles he experienced in the 1950s:

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[19] Tout, *Tank!*, p. 209.
[20] Jary, *18 Platoon*, p. 90.
[21] Ibid., p. 91.
[22] UoR, LC/ A/2/653, Donald Sutherland to Leo Cooper, 15 November 1984.
[23] Rolls, *Spitfire Attack*, p. 12.

> As I discovered that peace can be a much more disturbing business than war and that the near-loss of one's own sense of self under pressure more terrifying than fear of death in battle I began retreating to memories of the war, and the happiness and security it had brought me.[24]

Shedding One's Sickness in Books: Memoir as Catharsis

In a study of the impact of war and trauma on the memories of over 1,000 Second World War veterans in Britain, Nigel Hunt recorded that former combatants tended to discuss the immediate post-war years as a particular time of struggle to readjust. Frequently troubled by traumatic memories, many felt that they had received little psychological assistance to aid the process of healing. Additionally, servicemen had been told that these memories would simply fade over time, and their families advised not to discuss the war with their menfolk in order to resume normal home life as soon as possible.[25] Upon being planted back into civvy street, therefore, many found that outlets for discussing their trauma, and so allow the mental scars to close and silver out, were limited. As a result, various veterans discovered that constructing a narrative of their experiences offered an invaluable way to ventilate traumatic memories and emotions which continued to hurt. For example, former destroyer captain Roger Hill found the transition to peacetime almost insurmountable, with frequent bouts of ill health brought on by the strain of the war, and took to 'retreating' into memories of the war as a kind of security blanket. Trapped in a dead end job as a 'seagull', or casual labourer, in a New Zealand dockyard, writing his memoir provided an escape. He notes that, having taken up his pen in 1965, 'I lived in two worlds, one the present of manual labour, eating and sleeping, and in the other I relived the war years and progressed from ship to ship and battle to battle in my mind'.[26] Writing his memoir certainly provided a measure of 'relief'. Quoting D.H. Lawrence, he remarked that 'A creative work may come out of inner stress or muddle or psychic illness; but if it is a good job well done, it heals both the doer and the receiver.' In essence, he reflected, 'One sheds one's sickness in books.'[27]

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[24] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 13.
[25] Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, p. 150.
[26] Hill, *Destroyer Captain*, p. 11.
[27] Ibid., p .6.

Others turned to writing a memoir in the hope that it would provide a means of expunging lingering mental suffering. Former prisoner of war Robert Kee succinctly explained that the experience of war was 'indelible', remarking that a gulf divided those who had been at the sharp end (either as combatant or POW) from those who had not. He perceived, therefore, that 'there is some compulsion to reach across the divide and communicate it – perhaps in the hope of being rid of it.'[28] In particular, grief for lost friends could corrode a veteran's psychological equilibrium. Not all of the 'ghosts' of comrades past were wholly welcome. Indeed, despite the pleasure Sutherland and Rolls found in awakening the shades of their former comrades, the spectres of Tony Spooner's loss assumed a far darker significance. As a Wellington pilot, Spooner had served in Malta during the island's dark days under siege in 1942. When VJ day arrived in 1945, he was once again back on Malta:

> Around me were ghosts and I knew that I could never again completely relax until those ghosts were exorcised. Perhaps in writing this book I will have exorcised some of them and removed for ever from the innermost corners of my mind the stamp of Malta GC.[29]

The lingering presence of the dead was also felt by Ray Ward, who explained that he was partly prompted to write *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara* by 'the need to lay some ghosts to rest'.[30] The full extent of the lingering presence of these ghosts is revealed by his son, Robin, who records that his father was plagued by 'flashbacks' to his war days, returning to the battlefield 'in dreams and nightmares… Italy was where his wartime ghosts were and, for over fifty years, they visited him often and uninvited. Italy was where he saw his men die.'[31] In particular, according to his son, Ward remained haunted by the battle of Monte Cavallara in the Allies' attempt to breach the Gothic Line in 1944, where his A Company seized the summit and took 30 per cent casualties, but he 'scoffed at "the smothering care of compassionate counsellors and support groups"'.[32] Constructing a war memoir, however, allowed him to confront

[28] Kee, *A Crowd is Not Company*, p. 9.
[29] Tony Spooner, *In Full Flight*, rev. ed. (Canterbury: Wingham Press, 1991), p. 257.
[30] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 18.
[31] Ibid., p. 222.
[32] Ibid., p. 285; p. 11.

these 'ghosts'. Writing, as he explained in a letter to Lt Colonel Freddie Graham in 1966, functioned as a 'safety valve!'[33]

The creation of a war memoir thus helped to draw the sting of traumatic loss. The act of fashioning a narrative enforced cohesion and context upon remembered experience, allowing the veteran to extract meaning from his combatant days. As Hunt recognises in his study, the development of a narrative of a traumatic event means the assertion of individual control over that event.[34] Something of this is apparent in Bowlby's construction of *Recollections*. The horror of his experiences in Italy resulted in a psychological breakdown for Bowlby in 1955 when all of his suppressed grief for lost members of his battalion burst out in a torrent of tears as he cried his way across London. Although the veteran had been attempting to write a memoir since 1947, he dismissed the five or six drafts he had accumulated by 1954 as 'not much good'. Referring to his mental collapse in 1955, however, he wrote that 'As my world broke up I turned to the one thing I had left to hang on to – my book. I tried another draft.'[35] Despite being still 'earthed with grief' when he began the latest draft, he observed that crafting his account brought about a shift in his relationship with his 'ghosts'.[36] He was surprised to find that 'As I scribbled [the words] down I thought of the dead. I owed them so much… At the same time I was trying to forget the dead, to get shot of them.'[37] Bowlby remained deeply troubled by his war experiences for the rest of his life, suffering from severe anxiety, sleeplessness nights, depression and neurosis until his death in 2005. As he informed his publisher, 'the dregs of the Sicilian fracas are always liable to become active again.'[38] Yet, like Ward, he found that writing his memoir functioned as a form of exorcism, proving sufficiently therapeutic that Bowlby could eventually find enormous pride and pleasure in both his service and his memoir.

Yet careful timing was required successfully to employ the construction of a war memoir as a source of private solace. The wide range of dates during which these narratives were penned testifies to the different experiences of veterans in coming to

[33] Ibid., p. 389.
[34] Hunt and Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War', p. 63.
[35] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* , p. 222.
[36] Ibid., p. 223.
[37] Ibid., p. 222.
[38] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, dated only 'Tuesday'.

terms with their trauma. There was no prescribed limit upon the length of time it might take a veteran to decide that the moment was ripe to confront old memories. Denys Rayner was one of the earliest seamen to recount his wartime exploits, publishing *Convoy Escort Commander* in 1956. Like most of the 1950s generation of war memoirists, his is written in a laconic and terse style which conceals more than it reveals. But a valuable window into the psychological importance that the veteran ascribed to writing his book is granted by his friend Captain Stephen Roskill. Blending his own identities as a naval veteran of destroyers, official wartime historian of the Royal Navy, and editor of *Convoy Escort Commander*, Roskill penned a foreword to the book, explaining the processes through which Rayner had arrived at his decision to recount his experiences:

> When men have lived through periods of great strain there often is, I fancy, a strong reluctance to commit their experiences to paper, at any rate until the passage of time has assimilated them into the whole pattern of their lives. The scars still then remain, but the wounds themselves are no longer raw, and by a process of healing relaxation the mind no longer shrinks from memories that for long could only hurt. It was at my suggestion that Commander Rayner began to write about the war at sea as he saw it, and it may have been mere chance that I made the proposal at the time when, at last, he felt able and prepared to record his experiences.[39]

Others took far longer to feel able to communicate their experiences and many did not begin their memoir until they were on the borders of old age. Frank Musgrove acknowledged that it took him nearly fifty years after the end of the war to feel able to talk about his war service, noting that he 'never mentioned this episode in my life even to closest friends.'[40] In his 2005 memoir, he observed that 'It is only quite recently that I have felt able to mention these long-past events and this memoir is a product of this belated sense of release.'[41] This conforms to Robert Butler's concept of the 'life review', a process whereby ageing people embark upon an evaluation of their lives, sifting through memory in order to tell a story that makes sense of their experiences.[42] Putting one's life in order before death is a psychological task which is natural to all

[39] Stephen Roskill, foreword to *Escort*, by D. Rayner, p. v.
[40] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 74.
[41] Ibid., p. 74.
[42] Robert Butler, 'The life review: an interpretation of reminiscence in the aged', *Psychiatry*, 26 (1963), pp. 65-76 .

ageing persons, yet it became charged with special significance for the veterans of the Second World War.

Sometimes such a review was triggered by retirement. Tank man Bill Bellamy, for instance, had kept a box filled with notes, maps and photos of his wartime experiences tucked away in the loft ever since the war: 'For the first forty years or so, I didn't want to think about the war, but some time after I had retired the box came out of the attic and down to my office.'[43] Retirement granted the veteran the time and freedom to reminisce. 'For most,' reflected Arthur White, 'there comes a time in life when there is actually time for nostalgia. Perhaps it comes at the end of working life when the kids have grown up, the mortgage paid off, retirement looming ahead and there is time to think about the old days. This mental search could be sparked off by any one of a thousand things – for me it was sparked off by a Lancaster.'[44] In August 1980, he attended a Battle of Britain Memorial Flight over Dewsbury. Hearing the growl of the last surviving Lancaster's Merlin engines awoke old memories and he began to recall his wartime experiences, transcribing them onto paper.[45] Retirement and nostalgia are firmly interlinked in the veterans' reasons for writing a war memoir. For example, it was not until late in life that Ray Ward became willing to face his wartime memories.[46] Post war association with his formerly beloved Argylls was limited: 'contact was fitful and fleeting, motivated by bouts of nostalgia. The nostalgia became more evident after he retired.'[47]As Jean Freedman notes in her study of memory and culture of wartime London, nostalgia allows an individual to relive times of youthful danger from the vantage point of knowing that one safely survived the experience.[48] Retirement therefore granted some veterans vital leisureliness and security to indulge in nostalgic narratives of a heady, exciting period when they were young, fit, and participating in a crusade against fascism.

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[43] Bellamy, *Troop Leader*, p. xi.
[44] White, *Bread and Butter Bomber Boys*, pp. 12-13.
[45] Ibid., p. 16.
[46] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 222.
[47] Ibid., p. 11.
[48] Jean Freedman, *Whistling in the Dark: Memory and Culture in Wartime London* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1999), p. 184.

Audiences of the Future

The Family

Despite the private value which many veterans obtained through the creation of these narratives, war memoirs were not solely written for an audience of the private self. They were also constructed with an eye to an external audience. Various narratives were cajoled into existence by the second of Bowlby's triumvirate of audiences: 'Those who wanted to know what it was like'. Family were firmly bracketed into this category, and more than one veteran found himself ushered into becoming a memoirist by his relatives. Geoffrey Page was consistently urged to write his memoir by his young bride. With characteristic modesty, he insisted that 'all credit' for the birth, and subsequent popularity, of his book must go to his wife.[49] For Arthur White, such a request came from his son, who urged him to 'Get it all down on paper'.[50] Indeed memoir often functioned as a bridge between a veteran and his children. In a generation which was famously reticent about their war experiences, and tended to share only a few carefully selected anecdotes outside the community of veterans, these narratives served as a portal into the past for the sons and daughters who lived with the impact of the war on their fathers. The importance of these books for both veteran and children is illustrated by the Ward and Ashton memoirs. Posthumously, the manuscripts of Ray Ward and Norman Ashton were lightly edited for publication by their respective sons, Robin and Steve. After Ray Ward's death in 1999, Robin discovered the manuscript of *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara* in an old Afrika Korps ammunition box in the cellar. Tied to it was a letter written by their father in 1995, addressed to Robin and his brother. In his epistle to his sons, Ward acknowledged that the narrative was partly a response to their persistent coaxing to put down on paper 'memories and impressions' of his wartime service with the Argyll and Sutherlanders.[51] The prologue to *Monte Cavallara* was written by Robin, and explains how he felt that the process of lightly editing the manuscript for publication, without drastically altering the style or content of the narrative, established a new

[49] Ibid., p. 279.
[50] White, *Bread and Butter Bomber Boys*, p. 197.
[51] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 13.

connection with his deceased father.[52] This sentiment is also expressed by Steve Ashton, whose father Norman had penned a draft of his memoir in 1945. Like Robin Ward, Steve Ashton also edited his father's memoir for publication, yet he too resisted the temptation 'to make stylistic changes to bring the text into line with current trends. I felt it more important to preserve my father's manner of expression, which itself contributes to the historical record.'[53] Both men perceived that their father's war experiences indirectly shaped their own childhoods and understandings of the war. Steve Ashton, for example, reflected that

> I first heard the stories described in this book when I was a boy. Having tired of Goldilocks, I would listen spellbound to my father's tales of adventures with Reg Bunten, Bill Bailey and Corky Corcoran as they rode through the night sky inside a charger called W-William to wreak vengeance on Nazi Germany. Theirs was a world lit only by searchlights, tracer bullets and the green and red fairy lights of target indicators. A world shared with mischievous gremlins and goblinesque night-fighters. I was enthralled.[54]

Robin Ward also reflected on the indelible stories of his father's war service:

> His life was marked by the war, and my brother Brian and I have been too by his experience of it. We grew up in the 1950s and 1960s… Military-style discipline and eccentricities were not unknown in our house. Every day when he came home he would call out: 'Any news, mail, phone calls', as if still barking out questions to his lieutenants. For many years, he kept a pair of desert boots that were re-soled and re-heeled until the suede perished. When he put them on he would first shake them upside down, a desert army habit to expel scorpions. His glengarry and sporran hung in the hall. He was obsessed by the weather, another soldiering trait; when he went out he'd tap the barometer that hung by the front door. In the garden, he built dry-stone retaining walls, a skill he learned making sangars on the North African battlefields. If we criticised his driving, he'd say: 'What do you expect? I learned in the desert.'[55]

Both men claimed that the respective memoirs gave them fresh insight into their fathers' personas. Steve Ashton noted that

> After the war [Norman] returned to his home town and became a devoted father of five children. We have our own private memories of him during those years.

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[52] Ibid., p. 18.
[53] Ashton, preface to *Only Birds and Fools*, no page numbers given (np.).
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, pp. 10-11

> Now, with the publication of this book, we also have a permanent record of a crucial earlier chapter in his life.[56]

Robin Ward expressed a similar sentiment:

> His typescript was closely-spaced and frequently faint, as if to challenge me to read between the lines. I was not sure I ever really knew him or what I would find. He was an authoritarian figure, always rather remote, with his emotions well camouflaged. But in the memoir, he is an occasionally reckless, vulnerable and sensitive young man. That is how I see and begin to know him now.[57]

'Their Book': The Soldier's Tale

Outside the immediate familial category of 'Those who wanted to know what it was like', multiple memoirists widened their purview to inform all the generations who had not fought on the frontlines. As a professional historian of some renown, Norman Hampson cast a critical eye over his own motives for putting pen to paper. Despite swearing in 1944 that he would earn 'the gratitude of posterity' by becoming one of the few RNVR officers who did not write of his experiences, some decades later he felt that the time was ripe to break this promise. Keeping a weather eye upon the changing tides of military history, by the late 1990s he thought that with the new vogue for worm's eye studies of war

> there might be a case for something that begins as 'history from below decks' and shows what it felt like to be swept up in a communal experience that must seem to the present generation almost as remote as the days of Hornblower.[58]

Some optimistically hoped that publishing a narrative of combat during the Second World War might help the next generations to learn something from their experiences and perhaps prevent a similar global cataclysm. Battle of Britain pilot Bill Rolls, for instance, went into hospital with heart problems in the autumn of 1980. He was surprised and delighted to be the subject of considerable attention from young doctors and nurses who all wanted to know what it was like to be a Spitfire pilot during 1940:

> It was suggested that when I had recovered from the operation I should write a book about those days but to write it in language they could understand. [The

[56] Ashton, preface to *Only Birds and Fools*, np.
[57] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, p. 18.
[58] Hampson, *Not Really What You'd Call a War*, p. vii.

> doctor] said that most books on that period of history were too technical as far as the RAF were concerned and that I should write a book for the younger people to understand as they were interested to know what went on.[59]

A year later, Roll's younger brother and son reiterated the request, informing him that he 'owed it to the younger generation to write down as much history as I could. There must be some lessons to be got from it.'[60] Another flyer, John Wainwright, expressed a similar motivation for writing his memoir, remarking that 'It is also, deliberately, directed at another generation than my own… A generation which (I hope) will have too much sense to permit World War III.'[61] So strongly did Wainwright feel the need to stress the horrors of his war that the final sentence to his memoir implores 'For God's sake don't let it happen again'.[62]

In the spirit of hoping to be of some use to subsequent generations, several veterans constructed their memoirs as a point of reference for future combatants. Peter Dickens explained that upon being appointed as an unusually young man to command a Motor Torpedo-Boat Flotilla, he would have found such narratives immensely useful: 'Being quite unprepared and untrained for the task I was avid to learn from anyone's experiences in World War I, but none had been recorded that I could find.'[63] In a similar vein, Group Captain Douglas Bader assured the future Air Vice Marshal 'Johnnie' Johnson that, despite some fundamental disagreement about the so-called 'Big Wing' strategy, his memoir was written 'in the tradition of our famous predecessors of World War I, Ball, McCudden, Mannock and Bishop.' 'Never let it be forgotten', continued Bader:

> that our generation of fighter pilots learned the basic rules of air fighting from them. When I was a cadet at Cranwell I used to read their books time and time again and I never forgot them. I am sure this book of yours will be with the same enthusiasm by future generations of cadets. I commend it to them.[64]

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[59] Rolls, *Spitfire Attack*, p. 12.
[60] Ibid., p. 12.
[61] Wainwright, *Tail-End Charlie*, p. 7.
[62] Ibid., p. 187.
[63] Peter Dickens, *Night Action: MTB Flotilla at War* (London: P. Davies, 1974), p. xi.
[64] Johnson, foreword, *Wing Leader*, np.

Other veterans also took up their pens in the hope of being of some use to future generations of combatants. Peter Gretton, for instance, explains that his main reason for writing was the 'long apprenticeship' he had served in convoy work:

> I believe therefore that although I have no special claim to skill in sinking submarines, I am well qualified to discuss the art of escorting convoys across the North Atlantic. Moreover, many of the lessons learnt at such cost in the last war are being forgotten, just as precisely the same lessons were forgotten after 1918 and after the Napoleonic wars. I hope this book will jog a few memories, for the facts are still important even in a nuclear age.[65]

As a generation of servicemen to whom the idea of 'shooting a line' and boasting of one's exploits was mostly anathema, some veterans found that telling their story in public could be justified by rendering it useful to future warriors. Dickens explained that

> It is presumptuous for someone as unimportant as I am to write about his own doings, and some attempt at an excuse is called for. To most people small, fast fighting craft were exciting and glamorous but to the Royal Naval Establishment they were anathema and now we have none. There seems a case therefore for trying to pass on some of the thrill, the delights and disappointments, failures and successes, problems and their solutions, experienced by a very young man in the enviable and uncommon job of Senior Officer of a Motor Torpedo-Boat Flotilla.[66]

With the importance of off-shore oil fields to the British economy in the mid 1970s, Dickens believed it conceivable that small, fast craft might again be needed in order to defend the nation's interests. He felt that his role as memoirist was therefore to 'tell the story as accurately as possible so that our successors may pick out any lessons there may be for themselves, and history can usually provide such lessons to those with the wit to distinguish the principle from the transient.'[67] Poignantly, an old warrior's fervent wish to be of some use to future battles can also be detected here.

Some memoirs became guides for future generations of servicemen almost by default. Sydney Jary, whose memoir *18 Platoon* became a staple teaching text in the Sandhurst library, was astonished to find that his book was regarded as a textbook on

[65] Gretton, *Convoy Escort Commander*, p. xiv.
[66] Dickens, *Night Action*, p. xi.
[67] Ibid., p. xi.

low level military command.[68] So far as he was concerned, the book had been primarily written as an acknowledgement of the 'loyalty, courage and decency' of the men he commanded in his platoon: 'Written by a soldier, for soldiers, it has also been managed by soldiers. It has now been read by a great number of soldiers. It is indeed their book.'[69] Perhaps, however, the employment of Jary's excellent memoir as a teaching aid for successive generations of infantry is not quite as surprising as Jary believed. Colonel Michael Cranshaw (Retd) explained that *18 Platoon* represents 'a classic account of small unit infantry action in full-scale war… its insights into commanding men in battle have led to its being accepted as a *vade mecum* for those entering the profession of arms'.[70] Distributed among the British, Australian, New Zealand, United States and Norwegian armies, Jary's narrative was praised for 'the author's approach to command' which was still viewed as highly relevant to modern military matters.[71] Alongside this, quiet reassurance sometimes flows from veteran to freshly-minted soldier, as George Macdonald Fraser's memoir of service in Burma exemplifies. Through *Quartered Safe Out Here* he extended a paternalistic hand to British infantry in the 1990s:

> [I]f any young soldiers of today should chance to read this book, they may understand that while the face of war may alter, some things have not changed since Joshua stood before Jericho and Xenophon marched to the sea. May they come safe to bedtime, and all well.[72]

An Audience of Comrades

Community of Veterans

When Sydney Jary wrote that *18 Platoon* was written 'by a soldier, for soldiers', he also had in mind his own generation of combatants. His primary target readership was the same community of veterans that Bowlby identified as the third and most important audience for his own memoir. On the whole, these books were

[68] Jary, *18 Platoon* , p. 133.
[69] Ibid., p. 134.
[70] Ibid., p. xxi.
[71] Ibid., p. xxi. Jary also lectured regularly to Sandhurst cadets.
[72] George Macdonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, rev. ed. (London: Harper Collins, 2000), p. xxiv.

overwhelmingly created out of love and affinity for the veteran's former 'band of brothers' and a desire to inscribe a permanent record of their fellowship. A veteran's erstwhile comrades often played an integral role in the decision to construct a narrative of the war. A considerable number of the memoirists in this study found themselves being urged to write their tale by friends who were themselves Second World War veterans. Sometimes these men were urged to put pen to paper by former comrades who had written their own narratives and were keen for their pals to share in the experience. For example, Nicholas Monsarrat proved instrumental in the creation of his wartime commanding officer's memoir. Visiting his old friend at his residence on the tiny island of Gozo, Sam Lombard-Hobson commented that

> naval contemporaries of mine were bullying me to put on record my varied experiences before they were lost to memory. 'Why not?', he said; 'you've got a far better story to tell about the sea than ever I had. Have a go!' I roared with laughter, and told him that I would never dare to trespass on the sacred ground of others far more erudite than me. Anyhow, I was far too busy doing other things. A little later I was again confronted: 'For God's sake get on with it – I'll help you,' urged my one-time Number One.[73]

Not long after this conversation, Monsarrat succumbed to cancer and died in August 1979. 'As a gesture of affection and respect for my old friend and shipmate', wrote his former senior officer, 'I now accept his advice, to have a go and get on with the job.'[74] Other memoirists who were hesitant to write were also spurred on by former comrades. Sydney Jary mused that his book 'should have been written thirty years ago, but I was afraid that, over the years, I might have deluded myself about 18 Platoon and particularly about my relationship with it.'[75] At a reunion dinner in the early 1980s, however, a suggestion was aired that their former officer should author a book about their war experiences. Jary's fears that perhaps he had imagined the strength of his wartime relationship with his platoon were assuaged by a meeting with his former NCOs, with whom he had formed a very close bond during the war: 'The old magic was still there. It was real and had not faded over the years. I could now write with a clear conscience.'[76]

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[73] Lombard-Hobson, *A Sailor's War*, p. 10.
[74] Ibid., p. 10.
[75] Jary, *18 Platoon*, p. xx.
[76] Ibid., p. xx.

The war memoirist thus assumed a role as spokesman for his band of brothers. As Lombard-Hobson and Jary illustrate, some were appointed to the task by former comrades with whom intimate bonds had been forged during the war. A self-imposed sense of duty and responsibility to make a record of shared experiences compelled others to begin writing. John Horsfall declared that 'Many of our soldiers are still living, and having the records I owe it to them… to set out for posterity what is perhaps an epic and which otherwise would for ever be lost.'[77] But in both cases, these narratives were intended to speak to and for a wide community of ex-servicemen, or as Charles Potts termed his audience, all those 'who were themselves in the game'.[78] In their public assertion of the combat experience, war memoirs were regarded as a vital form of connection between a community of veterans in Britain precisely because they spoke directly to the old soldier, sailor or airman. By 1998, Hunt and Robbins had noted a resurgence of Old Comrades' Associations in recent decades. They attributed this to an increasing number of veterans' desire to discuss their experiences in a 'safe' situation.[79] Veterans turned to each other to reminisce in the knowledge that shared understandings of combat created specific codes of meaning which allowed empathy to be given and received, thus granting pleasurable and sad memories to be expressed in an emotionally secure environment. Crucially, Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan posit that all written or oral soldiers' tales operate as expressions of shared codes among combatants, which are reinforced in the telling.[80] These memoirs fulfilled a similar function to the Old Comrades' Associations in so far as they created a space in which the reader could securely explore his own recollections in the knowledge that he was not alone.

Some memoirs simply offered ex-serviceman a satisfying resolution of their own experiences, colouring in missing details from a particular battle. For example, Alex Hamilton, a former member of an intelligence section which had served alongside Peter Cochrane's battalion in the attack on Keren, wrote to Cochrane shortly after the publication of *Charlie Company*. He wrote to thank the author for 'allowing me to shed 37 yrs in a few hours and to bring back such memories that have always

[77] Horsfall, *The Wild Geese are Flighting*, p. xiv.
[78] Potts, *Soldier in the Sand*, p. 1.
[79] Hunt and Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War', p. 63.
[80] Winter and Sivan , 'Setting the Framework', p. 36.

been with me.'[81] 'It was so factual and live', he continued, 'that I could not put it down, and it also filled in a few pieces of missing jigsaw of my memory.' Significantly, Hamilton used his response to the memoir to reminisce about various incidents in his own wartime service: 'I was privileged to serve with Lt. Colin Kerr in the desert as intelligence section… I was blown out of an O.P. he and I were sharing at Keren as your attack went in.' He enquired if Cochrane was still in touch with Kerr, requesting that, if so, the former inform the latter that himself, a piper and a corporal all survived.[82] Similarly, after *Recollections* was published in paperback in 1971, Alex Bowlby's publisher received a letter from a General Sir Horatius Murray, who wrote that he had found the memoir 'most interesting.' He went on to say that he had been the General in command of the 6th Armoured Division in which Bowlby's battalion had served. Requesting Bowlby's address so that he could 'congratulate him personally', Murray states that 'I only know that it was of great importance that a book such as his should be published.'[83] Bowlby was also thrilled to report to his publisher that he had encountered an former REME tank recovery 'bloke' who had been captured in the desert, but had also adored *Recollections*. His response, as reported by Bowlby was encouraging: ''Right on the dot!' 'I'm real chuffed by it!' etc etc.' Bowlby was also delighted that this veteran intended to pass his book along to a taxi-driver he knew in York who had served in Burma.[84] These memoirs thus served as an act of communion, reaching out to veterans across the services, igniting memory and allowing men to communicate their reminiscences within an environment of others who knew 'what it was like' to serve on the front line, even if they had never met personally.

In addition to allowing the reader to wallow in reminiscence or to discover further details of a battle in which they participated, memoirs served as a voice for all those who were unable to tell their own wartime stories. The sheer volume of correspondence that Nicholas Monsarrat received in response to his biographical narratives of the convoy sailor's war testifies to the significance which an audience of ex-seamen attached to his tale. In his two-volume *Life is a Four Letter Word,*

[81] UoR, CW/ 314/7, Alex Hamilton to Peter Cochrane, 13 November 1977.
[82] Ibid.
[83] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, General Sir Horatius Murray to Leo Cooper, 26 April 1972.
[84] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, dated only 'Tuesday'.

Monsarrat devoted a chapter to his wartime service, which is pointedly constructed as a stand-alone chapter, in effect a miniature memoir. The archives in Liverpool are overflowing with letters received from former sailors expressing gratitude to him for making public their story of 'what it was like'. There is one, however, which particularly serves to illustrate the value of such personal narratives to fellow survivors. Although written by an ex-merchant sailor, the same sentiments can be traced through many of similar letters from Royal Navy personnel:

> The reading of your first instalment [of *Life is a Four Letter Word*] in the Sunday Times this Sunday brought back many memories.
>
> That war, of course, and that cruel sea; but also how much your book meant to us Merchant Seamen.
>
> There were so many books about the various services and spheres of war, and even a few about the merchant navy, though these were almost without exception futile, and it seemed as though nothing and nobody would ever be able to convey to the world just what those Atlantic convoys went through. Then your book came out, and with it a quite tremendous feeling that it had after all been worthwhile, and that shipmates who were no longer around to be able to read anything, had not died entirely in vain.
>
> I know that my gratitude and appreciation have been shared by thousands who will never actually get to the point of telling you so – it's taken me long enough – in much the same way that they have never managed to get round to telling their friends and families just what an endless night of winter war really did to them.
>
> Like me, they gave them your book to read.[85]

In a similar vein, Group Captain Peter Townsend commented of Jim Bailey's RAF memoir that 'The best airmen are mostly simple people, who have been so overwhelmed by their love for flying that it has driven some of them to drink, others to silence, as great love often does.'[86] The memoirist, he thought, however, had written a book which spoke for all those airmen who could not or would not vocalise his experiences: 'every airman of our age who, reading your book, will feel you have given wings to his innermost thoughts.'[87]

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[85] LRO, 920 MON 1/20, R.V. Roberts to Nicholas Monsarrat, dated 10 August 1970.
[86] Group Captain Peter Townsend, foreword to *The Sky Suspended: A Fighter Pilot's Story*, by Jim Bailey (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 5.
[87] Ibid., p. 6.

Some authors hoped that their memoirs would benefit the community of veterans in practical ways too. For example, Donald Macintyre was invited every year to a reunion of the ship's company of the *Sweetbriar*, a corvette which had formed part of his Escort Group in the Atlantic. In March 1977, shortly after his *U-Boat Killer* had been re-issued, he wrote to his publisher requesting three copies of the new hardback edition, and four of the paperback, to be charged to his account as he wanted to donate them to an auction or raffle to raise funds for the sailors. He was confident that the book would be a success because 'a number' of his former sailors had asked him in the past for copies and he had been forced to tell them it was out of publication.[88] Others were concerned that their memoirs might be beyond the means of former comrades. Robert Woollcombe was particularly concerned that his book was unaffordable for veterans who might want to read it. In March 1955, he fretted that the price of his forthcoming memoir in the Chatto & Windus book list for the coming year might pose financial problems for former soldiers, who would thus be unable to purchase his book at all. With the advertised price having risen from 12/6 to 15/, he was worried that the higher price might further limit sales to other veterans, and offered to cut down the manuscript in order to bring the price down.[89] Unfortunately for Woollcombe, his predictions proved accurate, and shortly after the release of *Lion Rampant* later that year, he received a letter from the General Secretary of the King's Own Scottish Borderers explaining that some enquiries had been received by ex-soldiers of the 6th Battalion asking if 'there is any possibility of a cheaper edition of your book coming onto the market at a later date. The present cost seems to be a bit beyond their pocket at the present moment.' His plaintive enquiry, 'Can I give them any hope please?', must have been most distressing for Woollcombe.[90]

'Something for the Lads': Memoir as Memorial

War memoirs were further intended to offer tribute to the community of veterans through acknowledging the extent of the sacrifice they had made for the nation. John Bushby dedicated his memoir to an 'infinite army of young men for whom life was

[88] UoR, LC/ A/2/432 Donald Macintyre to Alison Harvey, 2 March 1977.
[89] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Robert Woollcombe to Cecil Day-Lewis,16 March 1955; CW 174/11, Norah Smallwood to Robert Woollcombe,17 March 1955.
[90] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Captain W. Lewin to Robert Woollcombe, 9 November 1955.

never quite the same again.'[91] In a more bitter tone, Graeme Ogden explained that 'The book is in truth an epitaph to those of us who, twenty years ago, set off to the wars and to those of us who returned sickened and dispirited by the futility of a now meaningless crusade.'[92]

Several memoirists expressed a firm belief that their former comrades' wartime achievements had been woefully unrewarded. Donald Macintyre, for example, intended his memoir to stand as a tribute to his many wartime naval companions, pointing out that sadly few of them had been rewarded with decorations for their efforts: 'I hope', he wrote, 'this account of the actions which we shared may to some degree compensate them.'[93] Lack of medals also formed a pillar of resentment in the bomber aircrew narratives, due to the long-running battle to obtain a campaign medal for these veterans. At the close of the war, Sir Arthur Harris, the commander-in-chief, had requested that a medal be granted to his air crews in recognition of their courageous wartime service. Instead, an unpopular distinction was made between those who had been operational before D-Day and those who had carried out their tours after this date. In Arthur White's view,

> Bomber crews were snubbed by the Government's refusal to award a Bomber Command Campaign Medal in recognition of their efforts and sacrifices. In fact, crews embarking on their tours of operations after D-Day didn't even qualify for the Aircrew Europe Star but had to be content with the France and Germany Star.[94]

Jim Davis conveyed a particular sense of bitterness that this distinction had been drawn, noting that

> The France and Germany Star was given to all the soldiers and other personnel who crossed the Channel after D-Day and, of course, it was also given to those who actually crossed the Channel when the war was nearly over (a matter of a day or so). Every one came under the France and Germany medal. Surely then it would have been fair if all Air Crew who flew on operations against Germany at any time during the war should have been given the Air Crew Europe Star.[95]

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[91] Busbhy, dedication to *Gunner's Moon*, np.
[92] Ogden, *My Sea Lady*, p. 12.
[93] Macintyre, *U-boat Killer*, p. xii.
[94] White, *Bread and Butter Bomber Boys*, p. 2.
[95] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 69.

With operational flying over Europe continuing to pose considerable risks to bomber crews for many months after D-Day, the division of entitlement to the coveted Aircrew Europe Star remained a contentious issue for Bomber Command.

It was not solely the living community of veterans with which the war memoirists were concerned, however. The dead were never far from their thoughts and various veterans felt a strong urge to tell their story on behalf of comrades who had not survived the war. The memoirs of former frontline combatants have been referred to as 'survivors' songs', a description which perfectly encapsulates the nature and function of these narratives as dual proclamations of mourning and celebration.[96] An epitome of the memoir as 'survivor's song' is provided by Alex Bowlby, who took the opportunity of the republication of *Recollections* in 1989 to add a new epilogue which self-assessed his motivations for penning the memoir in the first instance. He explains that during his service in Italy he had believed that his former corporal, **'**Slim' Brandon, would be the person to write a book about the company: 'I felt it wouldn't matter so much if most of us were killed. As long as Slim was around – and I was sure he always would be – he would see to it that we were not forgotten.' 'Slim', however, did not live to carry out this task, having been accidentally shot by his own Bren gunner long before the company returned to Britain. After his death, Bowlby explains that he perceived the task as falling to him: 'the job I had earmarked for him was now mine.'[97] Reporting that the senior librarian at Sandhurst had informed his publisher that he thought *Recollections* would become a classic text for those studying the Italian campaign, Bowlby was told that this would grant the book 'a long life'. Patently thrilled by this praise, he also expressed relief that his 'debt' was paid: 'The dead would live on in the book.'[98]

Bowlby also reveals a deeper working of the memoir as 'survivor's song'. In the new 1989 edition, he explains that on Easter Sunday 1971, he journeyed to the battlefield at Arezzo where so many of his comrades had perished. He was taken aback to discover the existence of a military cemetery, as on a previous visit he had failed to find any permanent war graves, taking comfort in imagining the apparent lack of

[96] Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War*, p. 43.
[97] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 222.
[98] Ibid., p. 226.

presence of the dead as part of Nature's healing process. His later memoir thus expresses some mental torture:

> Why hadn't I found out where their permanent ones were? Why hadn't I visited them? Because you didn't want to get too close to the dead, I thought. You wanted them buried alive in the book. They're rotting in their graves, chum. You've got to face them there. You've been dodging the column, running away from the pain and guilt of being alive when the best are dead, their lives wasted. Thrown away. For what? A botched civilization. A bitch gone in the teeth.[99]

The searing agony of the veteran-memoirist, who survived to write his tale where so many did not, is vividly outlined here. Bowlby's self-castigation for having, as he believed, 'buried alive' his former comrades in his narrative underscores a severe and damaging case of survivor's guilt. Indeed the function of memoir as tribute here is represented as something of a double-edged blade – for Bowlby, his literary memorial itself is a source of anguish as he believes that it has allowed him to retreat from the reality that his friends are dead and so elide the 'pain and guilt' of the fact that he himself is still alive.

Nevertheless, Bowlby was a rarity among the memoirists of the Second World War. Most were kinder to themselves and did not employ their own narratives as a means of punishing themselves for survival. Instead, they wrote to fix an image of the fallen for eternity, a literary means of ensuring that their names lived for evermore. Don Macintosh, for example, explained simply that his memoir represented 'something for the lads. It's kind of a memorial to them.'[100] George Macdonald Fraser concurred, explaining that one of his reasons for writing his memoir of jungle warfare in the Far East was 'to make some kind of memorial' to his former comrades, many of whom were killed in action. He also explained that his comrades still seemed 'matchless' to him.[101] As this sentiment suggests, the creation and publication of a war memoir also allowed him to sanctify his own memories of his comrades, placing their memory and sacrifice upon a public pedestal of remembrance. This commemoration extended far beyond the veteran's own immediate group of friends and comrades within his unit. Indeed, these narratives serve as tribute to a far broader, often faceless

[99] Ibid., pp. 226-227.
[100] Don Macintosh, interview with author, 17 March 2010.
[101] Macdonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, p. xviii.

and unidentified 'band of brothers' with whom the memoirist expresses a bond of affection. For example, fighter pilot Bobby Oxspring chose to craft his memoir as tribute to the nameless majority of the 'Few' – the 'unsung "average" pilots', whom he describes as performing 'Countless courageous acts' which 'remain unheralded'.[102]

A precious letter received from Alex Bowlby by Arthur Koestler, who knew from first-hand experience just how difficult it was to write about friends killed in the war, also provides a revealing glimpse into the veteran's decision to write and publish his memoir. Comparing Richard Hillary's famous wartime published memoir, *The Last Enemy* (1942), with Bowlby's recently released *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, Koestler wrote to Bowlby that 'Hillary's book deals with the tragedy of a small elite, yours with the plight of the Unknown Soldier; but you have certainly erected a monument to him.'[103] Bowlby was much pleased with this idea that his memoir represented not just a tribute to his own tight knit unit, but also a memorial to the unidentifiable remains of all who died in the Italian campaign. Testifying to this is a note scribbled across the bottom of Koestler's letter in Bowlby's handwriting which proclaims simply 'A Monument to the Unknown Soldier', a phrase that subsequently appeared prominently on the dust jacket of the paperback edition.[104]

In creating these literary monuments to comrades known and unknown, the war memoirist hoped to prove himself worthy of their sacrifice and satisfy his own sense of honour. The best expression of this attitude is found in Hillary's own memoir in his eulogy to the 'long-haired boys': 'If I could do this thing, could tell a little of the lives of these men, I would have justified, at least in some measure, my right to fellowship with my dead'.[105] The possessiveness which rings throughout Hillary's declaration was echoed by Denys Rayner ten years later: 'If I were to include just one thing which did not happen I should be untrue to myself, and untrue to all those less fortunate than I who perished by wind, by wave, and by enemy action.'[106] Through the publication of a war memoir, the veteran thus exercised the right of the survivor to make a lasting 'imprint' of the wartime identity and sacrifice of others. Most of these

[102] Bobby Oxspring, *Spitfire Command* (London: William Kimber, 1984), p. 16.
[103] UoR, LC/ A/2/80/1, Arthur Koestler to Alex Bowlby, 12 April 1971.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Hillary, *The Last Enemy*, p. 178.
[106] Rayner, *Escort*, p. ix.

narratives were not released with anything like the pomp and circumstance that accompanied the ceremonial unveiling of the International Air Monument outside Plymouth. Yet Davis' description of the occasion may also serve to describe the collective mood of the war memoirists: 'I knew now that the monument was unveiled, nobody could prevent the truth from being known. It was now on public view for all to read for eternity.'[107]

[107] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 105.

6. MANUFACTURING MEMOIR: THE REPRODUCTION OF COMBAT EXPERIENCE

[He] comes out fighting when journalists question his memory… 'Are you trying to tell me that you can't understand how I can remember every detail? I can see it.' [1]

Once a veteran had made the decision to construct a record of his frontline wartime experiences, he was faced with the complex task of assembling his memoir. Whilst the former serviceman's own memory constituted the predominant source used to construct his narrative, most also opted to supplement their private recollections with additional sources such as their unit's war diary, scholarly works of history, or their own wartime diaries and letters. The question of how the veteran was able to reconstruct his war experience in prose form occupies a surprisingly prominent place in the published memoirs of Second World War servicemen, throughout which is stamped the concept of the war memoir as testimonial. Most memoirists thus insisted upon explaining to their audience the exact steps they took to ensure accuracy in their accounts. As the quotation above from an interview with Geoffrey Wellum illustrates, the narratives of Second World War veterans are notoriously vulnerable to charges of historical unreliability, a state of affairs which is largely due to their reliance on the soldier's own remembrance of long-ago wartime events. Collectively, therefore, as Wellum's antagonistic response to would-be detractors embodies, this genre of life writing displays a strong bent towards publicly legitimising the veteran's account of remembered combat experience.

Writing Military Memoir

Personal memory is inevitably problematic as a primary source of evidence, due to erosionary influences such as increased temporal distances, age and trauma. In various quarters, therefore, these published memoirs have been castigated as

[1] Wellum, 'The 89-year-old Boy'.

'untrustworthy'.[2] As psychologist Nigel Hunt notes, memory itself is 'flexible', 'permeable', and 'changeable', and may be both consciously and unconsciously manipulated by the individual.[3] Yet the suggestion that their personal memories might constitute an 'obstacle to truth' receives decidedly short shrift from the veterans in this study. On the contrary, far from memories of their wartime experiences dimming as the veteran aged, some memoirists found that they were actually better able to recall specific events as they grew older. For instance, Don Macintosh perceived that in growing older his memory became 'very good for the past', whilst John McManners was gratified to discover that 'Advancing years bring a sharp-focused clarity to the memory, just as the colours in a garden become deeper and more vivid as twilight falls.'[4] Others found that wartime experiences had been imprinted like a snapshot upon their mind's eye, as Geoffrey Picot related:

> Events had so scorched themselves on my mind that I could recall nearly every particular on a day-to-day basis. There was the move from that slit trench in one field to the other trench in a different field, this advance, that check, this tactical move sideways… everything was crystal clear.[5]

Even in 1993, therefore, this veteran claimed that he was still able to know and portray 'exactly what it was like to be a front-line soldier' in the Allied push through North West Europe after D-Day.[6] Similarly, despite the passage of some thirty years since he attacked enemy shipping in his Blenheim bomber, Ronald Gillman remarked that 'the pictures still burn brightly in my mind.'[7] It is striking that both memoirists chose to use imagery bound up with fire to explain how they recalled war. The associations conveyed here of intensity, violence and passion suggest that these men believed their experiences had almost literally been seared into their memory, and thus remained as a kind of mental photograph which could be taken out and studied. Further insight into the phenomenon is provided by Macintosh. When interviewed about the process of writing his war memoir some decades after the conflict had ended, he expressed his

[2] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 23.
[3] Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, p. 2.
[4] Macintosh, interview with author 17 March 2010; McManners, *Fusilier*, p. 9.
[5] Picot, *Accidental Warrior*, pp. 23-24.
[6] Ibid., p. 23.
[7] Ronald Gillman, *The Shiphunters* (London: J. Murray, 1976), p. xiii.

belief that memory had been shaped by sensation. He understood his memories as 'emotional' because the war had made such a big impact upon his younger self.[8]

Collectively, this indicates that the recollections of veterans which underpin the construction of these documents should not be entirely dismissed as 'untrustworthy' sources. Personal memory focuses on and retains the 'more salient features of life experience', particularly, Hunt argues, those which feature importance or uniqueness.[9] As Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan explain in their study of war and remembrance, most experiences leave long-term memory traces which differ in weight, the 'density' of which is shaped and enhanced by the dramatic or emotional nature of the experience. Combat experience, in particular, is especially 'dense' because of the intense degree of drama it involves; deeply affecting experiences further increase the density of the memory and so facilitate its retention.[10] Inevitably, therefore, this emotional nature of remembering shapes the content of the narrative produced by the memoirist. As Bobby Oxspring confirmed, 'the memory of the more spectacular events will never fade.'[11] It was those events which, for numerous reasons, made a lasting impression upon the veteran that he was most likely to incorporate in his book.

There is, however, an important duality in the memoirists' self-confessed approach to assembling their narratives. An insistence that they could accurately recollect significant combat experiences operates alongside rueful acknowledgement of the inevitable limitations of human memory as a source of recall. Displayed alongside assurances that particular war experiences may be imprinted upon the mind of the combatant is a tacit recognition that memory posed some problems as a source for constructing the narrative. Lancaster pilot Jack Currie, for example, regretfully accepted that although he made every effort to remember his war experiences as precisely as possible, his memory 'after more than thirty years may not, I am afraid, be faultless'.[12] Norman Ashton agreed that memory could play 'strange tricks'.[13] In a

[8] Macintosh, interview with author 17 March 2010.
[9] Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, p. 118.
[10] Winter and Sivan, 'Setting the Framework', p. 12.
[11] Oxspring, *Spitfire Command*, p. 16.
[12] Currie, *Lancaster Target*, p. 5.
[13] Ashton, preface to *Only Birds and Fools*, np.

revised edition of his war memoir, *Men at Arnhem*, published twenty-seven years after the book first appeared in 1976, Geoffrey Powell explored these 'strange tricks' of recollection in considerable detail. Intrigued by the divergent feedback he received about his memoir from other surviving veterans who had witnessed the narrated events, Powell recorded his own astonishment that his memory appeared to have been 'utterly mistaken' with regard to some incidents. For example, he was surprised to learn that despite clearly remembering having witnessed the unit's doctor, John Buck, in the Breede Laan with his arms saturated in blood, Buck himself confirmed that he was not in fact the man Powell had seen. Memory, Powell was therefore forced to conclude, had in this instance 'been fallible.'[14] All the same, he remained defiantly convinced that his 'own reactions to the events, all etched in my mind, are accurate', a refrain which can be repeatedly heard throughout the genre of post-war published combatant memoirs. Thus, for veterans like Powell, despite in some cases having to accept that the exact details of their recollections might not be entirely factually correct, there remained a degree of adamance that their own recovered responses to the described events were fundamentally accurate.

Nonetheless, filling in the details of remembered war experience was an essential part of the construction process of the veteran's memoir. Where an experience had been insufficiently unique, important, or dramatic enough to ensure life-long retention as a memory, minor stories and recollections could easily slip the net of memory. The frustration of such elusiveness is amply illustrated by an anecdote which Peter Cochrane unwittingly omitted from his narrative. After his memoir, *Charlie Company*, appeared in 1977 he received a letter from a former comrade which spoke warmly of the book and reminded him of an incident in which a line of baboons on the desert horizon had been mistaken for approaching Italian soldiers. According to the author of the letter, Cochrane had sent a message back to HQ enquiring which Italian Division were the possessors of 'Red a-ses' [sic].[15] Recounting this episode to Norah Smallwood, a director at Chatto & Windus, which published *Charlie Company*,

[14] Geoffrey Powell, preface to *Men at Arnhem*, rev. ed. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2003), np.
[15] UoR, CW/ 314/7, Alex Hamilton to Peter Cochrane, 13 November 1977.

Cochrane wistfully wished that he had remembered the story about the baboons in order to use it in his book.[16]

Where memory reached its limits, therefore, it clearly needed something of a prod from external sources. Although asserting that old age had clarified some memories for *Fusilier*, McManners allowed that 'the pattern is no longer continuous; the recollected details concern highly-selected, isolated incidents'. He acknowledged that, without access to the battalion's war diary to provide 'structure and coherence', he would have been unable to finish his narrative.[17] Indeed, despite frequent protestations of accurate remembrance, nearly all of the memoirists in this study opted to draw upon additional sources to assist in the reconstruction of experience. As the example of McManners highlights, a battalion's war diary could prove a crucial aid to the memoirist in augmenting his own recollections, assisting the imposition of some form of order and sequence upon these memories. Private diaries fulfilled the same function, albeit more efficiently, as they contained greater levels of personal meaning for the veteran. For example, although Picot asserts that his experiences in advancing through north-west Europe had been 'scorched' upon his mind, part of his ability to recall these experiences so clearly in 1993 lay in the fact that, as soon as was possible, he had captured the incident upon paper:

> I know now exactly what it was like because as soon as the guns stopped firing, while the details and the atmosphere of the fighting were still burning in my memory, I wrote it all down: what I had done, said, felt, seen, heard.[18]

Although the practice of keeping a diary was, as the future Air Vice-Marshal Sandy Johnstone noted, 'severely frowned upon' in official circles, many men nevertheless chose to keep these surreptitious unofficial records of their experiences.[19] Other forms of personal narrative are depicted as similarly vital in assisting and enhancing recollection. Like diaries, the letters a serviceman sent home provided a precious cache of information for the veteran seeking to construct an account of wartime experience in the post-war decades. For example, when Tom Neil's father died in 1977, he

[16] UoR, CW/ 314/7, Peter Cochrane to Norah Smallwood,19 November 1977.
[17] McManners, *Fusilier*, p. 9.
[18] Picot, *Accidental Warrior*, p. 23.
[19] Sandy Johnstone, *Enemy in the Sky: My 1940 Diary* (London: William Kimber, 1976), p. 9.

discovered in the family home more than 600 of his own letters which he had sent faithfully at least twice a week throughout his five years at war. These letters formed the foundation of his war memoir, *Gun Button to 'Fire'*, which was first published ten years after his discovery: 'on reading my own words again – sometimes with great difficulty – I was reminded of many events and incidents long since forgotten.'[20]

Personal letters and diaries such as those drawn upon by Picot, Cochrane and Neil thus represented an important tool for the veteran seeking to pen a memoir of his wartime experiences. Their function, however, extended far beyond merely providing details which the memoirist could use as a framework for his narrative. They also acted as a crucial window into the past for the veteran seeking to reconstruct his wartime self. In a significant study which spans the diaries and correspondence of American service personnel from colonial conflicts to the recent wars in Iraq, D.C. Gill views the motive for writing these types of personal narrative as a kind of 'communion' which tethers individuals to their pre-war sense of self and reality.[21] Her argument that creating a war letter or diary 'allows soldiers a tenuous purchase on a world with which they no longer have a sensory connection' may also be applied to a post-war context.[22] If writing letters or diaries whilst on active service allowed the combatant to invoke and explore his pre-war sense of identity, there is no reason why the same argument should not apply to the same veteran looking back many years later in peacetime. These narratives thus capture the fine texture of the serviceman's wartime sense of self in a manner which no other contemporary source could do. In so far as the diaries were written for an internal audience – by the self for the self – they fulfil a slightly different purpose to the letters which a serviceman sent home to his family or friends. Yet despite the inherent limitations of these 'immediate' narratives – mostly bound up in issues of official or self-censorship – these documents proved invaluable to the veteran who wanted to exhume and dissect his younger self. Employment of these sources in this manner is well illustrated by Hugh Dundas, who incorporates into his narrative two letters to his mother and brother which describe in glowing terms the 'Big Wing'

[20] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 6.
[21] D.C.Gill, *How We Are Changed by War: a Study of Letters and Diaries from Colonial Conflicts to Operation Iraqi Freedom* ((New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 13.
[22] Ibid., p. 13.

tactic championed by Douglas Bader. From the vantage point of some forty years later, Dundas remarks that the 'naïvety' of these letters 'brings a blush to my cheek.'[23] Although he winced at the opinions expressed by his youthful self, he used his correspondence to bring his past and present identities into coexistence in order to reconstruct and evaluate the ways in which he regarded his battle experience in 1940.

For the airmen, there was also another important source upon which they could draw: their flying logbooks and operational records, which all aircrew were required to keep diligently. Wishing to write about his service with Fighter Command, Bill Rolls felt that there 'was only one way to do it and that was by using my pilot's logbook as a reference and hope that it would jog memories.' A notable feature of the RAF memoirs is just how many aircrew retained their logbooks after the war and subsequently used them to recover memories of combat operations. For instance, although Oxspring asserted that 'the memory of the more spectacular events will never fade', he also admitted that he 'relied heavily' on copies of his combat reports and logbook entries to fill in the rest of the story.[24] Rolls, too, explained that, despite the brevity of the operational information contained within these sources, his logbook triggered memories which had long lain dormant when he produced *Spitfire Attack* in 1987:

> I had not looked at the logbook for over thirty years and was surprised how readily the events in the logbook came to mind. It was like looking at a video of each entry, I could almost see every detail of those actions and people I had met during those times.[25]

For memoirists writing from the late 1960s onwards, additional sources of reference made the task of remembering and reconstructing experience somewhat simpler. In 1967, the Public Records Act of 1958 was amended to reduce the requisite 'fifty year rule' for the opening of public records to thirty years. From 1968 onwards, therefore, a backlog of material spanning some fifty years was released. To veterans of the Second World War, this meant that virtually all the official records of 1939-45 became publicly accessible for their perusal in the Public Record Office (now the National Archives). There was now available a wealth of previously unobtainable information

[23] Dundas, *Flying Start*, p. 49.
[24] Oxspring, *Spitfire Command*, p. 16.
[25] Rolls, *Spitfire Attack*, p. 12.

about the operational aspects of war which would-be memoirists could make full use of in their quest to 'jog' memory and to ensure greater levels of accuracy in the details of their war services. For memoirists who had already published their memoirs, the opening of the public records also afforded an opportunity to cross-check their own recollections against official records to ensure that they had produced a correct version of events, particularly if their narrative was to be republished. Some of the authors had to re-think matters when the records were opened. Tony Spooner, for instance, was dismayed to find that the original edition of his memoir, *In Full Flight* (1965), was 'slightly at variance in some details' to the sources newly made available in the Public Record Office. He decided, however, to leave the original text as it stood (albeit with one exception where he added in extra information about Wing Commander Adrian Warburton), as he perceived that 'the discrepancies are small and the conveying of the overall atmosphere of the times is still here.'[26] Roy Conyers Nesbit, whose memoir of low level bombing operations was published in 1981, also noticed discrepancies. In his case, however, he argued that the official documents were themselves faulty, as there was no record of five of the sorties he made. Furthermore, on two other operations, the name of another navigator had been inserted in the place where his own should have been, whilst in another entry he was shown to have navigated a sortie on which he did not fly. In fact, he claimed that: 'Several incidents are recorded in the wrong sequence or are attributed to the wrong aircraft, and some episodes which might show the squadron in an unfavourable light have been conveniently left out.'[27] Charitably, he attributed these discrepancies to the third-hand nature of this information, provided to the squadron intelligence officer and passed along to the squadron adjutant, during the most trying of circumstances on a fully operational frontline squadron which was itself being subjected to enemy bombing raids at the time the data was collected and written up.[28] Nevertheless, Conyer's tale strikes a resounding note of caution against assuming that any factual discrepancies in published memoirs must *de facto* be an error on the part of memory and memoirist.

[26] Spooner, *In Full Flight*, p. 15.
[27] Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Woe to the Unwary: A Memoir of Low Level Bombing Operations* (London: William Kimber, 1981), p. 12.
[28] Ibid., p. 12.

Another great challenge in creating a war memoir was presented by the effort of recalling not just the details of combat, but also of the people with whom the veteran had shared his wartime service, whose characters and deeds had formed as much a part of his war experience as his own thoughts and actions. As a member of a fighting unit, whether as part of an infantry battalion, fighter or bomber squadron, or ship's crew, the serviceman's war experience and fate were tightly intertwined with his immediate comrades, officers or those under his command. The decisions, words and actions of these men thus form an important thread in the weaving of any post-war narrative of combat experience, yet it is clear from these memoirs that the recollection of former colleagues forms one of the key sticking points of personal memory. Whilst dates and incidents could be cross-referenced with other sources, it was less easy to remember and check the identities of comrades. In writing *Gun Button to 'Fire'*, Tom Neil, for instance, found that some names 'faded into the mists' altogether. [29] Most of these memoirs thus contain a note very similar to that incorporated in Norman Ashton's *Only Birds and Fools*. Although assuring his audience that every effort was made to ensure accuracy, Ashton proffers an apology if mistakes were unwittingly made: 'I apologise in advance and assure the offended that every story has been written with the best of intentions.'[30]

It was not merely remembering and representing the identities of their fellow servicemen which caused difficulties for the memoirist, but also the issue of faithfully reconstructing dialogue decades after the war had ended. Eager to counter possible charges of inaccuracy, memoirists sometimes addressed the issue of how they recaptured the wartime speech with which they were surrounded. In *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, Alex Bowlby found it especially difficult to capture the conversation of his fellow infantrymen, writing five or six drafts which he described as all unsatisfactory: 'The sentences were strung together and I couldn't remember any dialogue.'[31] Ironically, it was not until he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1955 that he could faithfully reconstruct his comrades' speech: 'The dialogue came back. I saw the words in my head, just as they'd been spoken.'[32] Fortunately for other memoirists,

[29] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 6.
[30] Ashton, preface to *Only Birds and Fools*, np.
[31] Bowlby, *Recollections*, p. 222.
[32] Ibid., p. 222.

the process of capturing discourse proved less tortuous, yet the question of how to accurately represent comrades' speech troubled several veterans. Indeed, the acknowledgement of a certain degree of license, alongside an apology and a justification, often appears in these narratives, as illustrated in Jack Currie's *Lancaster Target*: 'if I have attributed words or deeds to people who did not say or do them, I am sorry. The words, or something very like them, were said, and the deeds were done.'[33] This is a sentiment which Bushby also expressed in *Gunner's Moon*, explaining that 'The dialogue, too is set down exactly as I remember it; and if it is thought indelicate in parts then I can only say it is how we spoke and the words are reproduced for accuracy not effect.'[34] In a variety of cases, just how accurately a serviceman's speech might be recreated without causing offence to the reader was to prove a thorny issue once the memoir entered the publisher's domain. Battles about this, and other matters, could be fiercely contested.

Publishing Military Memoir

Despite the memoirist's careful efforts to ensure the 'truthfulness' of his narrative, his desire to construct as authentic a representation as possible of his war experiences did not necessarily interact smoothly with the publication process. The publisher's agenda regularly diverged from that of the memoirist, carrying important implications for the integrity of the veteran's narrative. Indeed, the process of bringing a war memoir into publication invariably resembled a lengthy game of chess between memoirist and publisher, with a complex set of moves incorporating advances and retreats on both sides. Frequently, the exigencies of creating a commercially appealing book came into open conflict with the desire to provide a historically authentic record of experience. Battle lines of authenticity versus marketability were thus drawn up early on in the publishing process.

An initial stumbling block for many aspirant veteran-authors was the way in which the content and structure of his story had to be remoulded, and often pared down, in order to meet the requirements of the publisher. For the veteran the period of training which he underwent before active duty often represented as integral a part of his

[33] Currie, *Lancaster Target*, p. 5.
[34] Bushby, preface to *Gunner's Moon*, np.

wartime service as battle itself. From a commercial perspective, however, the bulk of the narrative would ideally be devoted to the combat experiences of the serviceman: too much narrative focus on his training was regarded as a hindrance to the 'real' story of killing and avoiding being killed. For instance, one anonymous would-be author in the mid-1990s received a letter from his agent that highlighted such difficulties. Despite giving a glowing endorsement of the veteran's portrayal of battle scenes, the reader's report noted that there were certain flaws in the draft manuscript, provisionally titled *Time Seldom Wasted*. The veteran was informed that the descriptions of his period of training, which in all constituted about half the book, had 'been done before': although interesting from a nostalgic point of view, it was therefore 'hardly gripping stuff'.[35] By implication, the author's textual ratio of training to action would thus require serious revision in order to be accepted by a publisher. An editor's report on Donald Sutherland's manuscript for *Sutherland's War* in 1983 makes remarkably similar stipulations: 'Sutherland's war only really got interesting once he'd landed in Normandy – and since the first approx. 2/3 of the book is devoted to non-combatant carry-on-up-the-army stuff, perhaps a great opportunity has been missed.'[36]

The insertion of technical details related to combat operations proved a challenge in its own right for publishers. The editor of Roger Hall's *Clouds of Fear* inserted a foreword to the book which outlined the difficult task he faced in reducing the manuscript to just over a third of its original length. Here, he explained how he tailored his editorial choices in order to both retain the integrity of Hall's narrative and also meet the tastes of the non-technically-minded reader:

> Some of the author's descriptions of aerial combat – which are among the most vivid I have ever read – had either to be pruned or completely omitted, but I have retained the text of those I consider to be quite outstanding. In any event I feel a certain justification in taking this course, since the accounts I have omitted were largely of a technical or repetitive nature, of more interest to wartime pilots than to the general reading public.[37]

[35] UoR, LC/ B/1/2/41/4, David Bolt to Jonathan Cave, 3 January 1996.
[36] UoR, LC/ A/2/653, Unidentified Editor to Leo Cooper, 28 November 1983.
[37] Hall, *Clouds of Fear*, p. 9.

The issue of characterisation in the narrative was a further concern for editors. The reader's report on the manuscript of *Time Seldom Wasted* warned that if the human stories in these accounts were too dry, the book might read 'more like a regimental history'. From a commercial perspective, this 'severely limits its appeal', and was thus deemed risky.[38] Therefore, in order successfully to harness the reader's empathy with the protagonists of the memoir, it was deemed vital for aspirant veteran-authors to develop for their audiences the characters: not only of those with whom their combat experience was studded, but also of themselves. For some veterans, like Peter Cochrane, who were by nature modest men, this could prove a difficult process. Cochrane's editor at Chatto & Windus, Norah Smallwood, observed that although his otherwise 'faultless' manuscript displayed great awareness of the sensitivities and anguish experienced by the 'Jocks' under his command, the veteran had shown 'fantastic modesty', omitting much which reflected credit on himself. She observed that there was 'too little of your own action, your stress and at times anguish', and requested that the story be 'filled out', proposing that, 'In case you fear to steal the show you could enlarge here and there on some of the more colourful characters.'[39] Despite the success of his Arnhem memoir, Geoffrey Powell also experienced considerable difficulties in writing from such an intimate point of view. Noting that he found it 'too inhibiting' to describe his personal experiences of the battle, he and his publisher decided that the solution in his case was to mask his identity under the pseudonym of 'Tom Angus'. After this, he was relieved to find that his pen moved 'rather more freely.'[40]

Breathing life into the narrative in order to avoid its reading like 'a regimental history', posed another specific set of challenges for memoirist and publisher. Finding the right balance between entertainment and offence was a delicate matter, especially when enlarging on the more 'colourful' characters encountered by the serviceman. That the coarseness of battlefield banter was not necessarily appropriate for a civilian readership was demonstrated by the concerns of an editor at Leo Cooper's publishing house in 1983, who was worried that Donald Sutherland's memoir equated 'smut' with

[38] UoR, LC/ B/1/2/41/4, David Bolt to Jonathan Cave, 3 January 1996.
[39] UoR, CW/ 314/7, Norah Smallwood to Peter Cochrane, 10 February 1977.
[40] Powell, preface to *Men at Arnhem*, np.

'humour'.[41] The editor feared that 'the bawdiness went too far'. Although he himself was 'amused' by it, he was unsure that others would respond in the same fashion.[42] Indeed, the veterans' efforts to represent dialogue as faithfully as possible in their narratives seem to have been an area of frequent collision with editors, especially in the immediate post-war era. During this period, representations of the soldier's vocabulary appear to have been heavily censored in print, a state of affairs which in all likelihood contributed in no small measure to the dialogue in many 1950s war memoirs appearing improbably stilted. These narratives, for example, were characterised by considerable restraint in describing traumatic circumstances. In his *The Only Way Out* (1955), Rex Wingfield referred to 'the biggest – up since Mons', whilst Robert Woollcombe's *Lion Rampant* (1955) simply announced that a barrage of 'unprintable' had landed upon a platoon.[43] However, between 1959 and 1964, reforms were made to the Obscene Publications Act which arguably did much to change this conservative publishing climate. In his history of the British publishing industry, John Feather identifies the infamous prosecution of Penguin publishing in 1960 house as a turning point in this respect. An unsuccessful suit was brought against Penguin for printing D.H. Lawrence's formerly banned novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), and Feather argues that the 'virtual abandonment of literary censorship in Britain from about 1960 onwards certainly created a more liberal climate in which publishers could operate. Previously unmentionable subjects could be freely discussed in print'.[44] With more tolerant attitudes beginning to arise from the new 'permissive society', the language used by war memoirists thus became markedly stronger by the end of the 1960s. Alex Bowlby's memoir, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* (1969), for example, was one of the first narratives to liberally incorporate the word 'fuck' – a term conspicuous by its absence in the memoirs of the 1950s.

Yet, within this new liberal climate, the war memoir industry remained fairly conservative. Some publishers continued to be wary of providing either legal or social offence through printing graphic 'barrack-room' language. For instance, although

[41] UoR, LC/ A/2/653, Unidentified Editor to Leo Cooper, 28 November 1983.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Wingfield, *The Only Way Out*, p. 157; Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant*, p. 44.
[44] John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) p. 205.

Bowlby's memoir delineates a marked shift in the memoirist's use of such soldiers' terms, he was forced to enter into strenuous negotiations with his publisher, Leo Cooper, in order to be allowed to make his language as 'authentic' as possible. Politely requested to make alterations to the swear words incorporated into early drafts of his manuscript, Bowlby replied with a list of his own somewhat less polite responses to the suggested revisions. For example, a suggestion was made that on page 167 he insert the word 'twat' instead of 'cunt'. Bowlby trenchantly explained to the publishing team that he felt the substitution of the word 'twat' was unsuitable in this context: '[The] [w]ord "cunt" can be used either as an aggressive insult or to express derision [whilst] the word "twat", in my experience, is used only to express derision.'[45] Similar scorn was poured on the suggestion that an epithet might be omitted in reference to the Regimental Sergeant Major on page 11. Bowlby sniped that he could not 'imagine anyone yelling for the blood of an R.S.M without applying descriptive adjective. As actual objective used i.e. "fucking" has to be replaced to avoid repetition I stick to "sodding".'[46]

Even though agreement was eventually reached between author and publisher over these matters, Bowlby's normally stalwart champion, Leo Cooper himself, blanched at the language with which the former gentleman ranker flavoured his manuscript. Sending an advance copy of *Recollections* to Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Fyffe, formerly of the Rifle Brigade, in May 1969, Cooper expressed concern that Fyffe might not approve of the dialogue: 'The only trepidation I have about sending you this book is that the language is too strong'. In the end, Cooper fretted unnecessarily. When *Recollections* finally appeared in the autumn of that year, praise for Bowlby's dialogue flowed from the *Times Literary Supplement*, which remarked that the soldiers' language was 'accurately recorded, and with less of a contrived air than usual.'[47] This was confirmed elsewhere. When the book was reprinted in 1989, Bowlby sent a copy to Professor Michael Howard, who had himself served in the Italian campaign. The historian's letter of thanks to Bowlby endorsed the authenticity of the language:

[45] UoR, LC/ A/2/79 Alex Bowlby's response to revisions for swearing, undated.
[46] Ibid.
[47] 'Mud and Larks', *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 November 1969.

> I know of it very well – many people have told me it is one of the best things written about the Italian campaign – but have never been able to get hold of it. Now I know they were right. You bring back those days with disturbing and convincing vividness. That is exactly the way that it was. The dialogue, in particular, you have got dead right. [48]

Although the likelihood of being prosecuted for printing 'obscene' material rescinded during the post-war decades, a perennial legal spectre still haunted the process of developing characterisation in the war memoir. In naming names, memoirist and publisher had to walk a very fine line between 'truth' and libel. Some of the more conscientious memoirists took responsibility for avoiding libel upon themselves, scrupulously flagging up anecdotes to their publisher that they worried might cause legal difficulties. Robert Woollcombe, for instance, wrote to his editor, Cecil Day-Lewis, in 1954 to request advice on whether some of his descriptions of former fellow officers might land him in trouble. The author's apprehension centred upon passages about men who were still serving officers. He was concerned that portrayals of 'a fanatical officer called "Heid the ba'", or accusations that a character was 'possessed of an obstinacy amounting to an almost daunting pig-headedness', might be libellous. Although insisting on the veracity of his judgements – '"Heid the ba" was the officer's real nickname although I doubt if he knew it' – he also expressed a hope that 'the original… could not have me up, if he wanted to, about the gin on pp.113-114.'[49]

Whilst Woollcombe himself brought these issues to the attention of his editor, others, who either wielded harsher pens or more grudging memories, had to be brought tactfully into line by their publishers. For example, an editor of *Sutherland's War* enquired of the publisher whether it might 'not be sensible to ensure that the book is free from litigious matter – especially since many of the characters', shall we say "foibles", are highlighted?' In an effort to avoid litigation, he thus recommended that it might be 'a good idea' to place a note in the memoir's preliminary sections to assure the reader that, although the characters in the book were 'real', the identities had been disguised.[50] On other occasions, a special coda was added to explain that the author had left out certain characters in the interests of avoiding offence. Tom Neil, for

[48] UoR, LC/ A/2/80/1, Sir Michael Howard to Alex Bowlby, 1 August 1989.
[49] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Robert Woollcombe to Cecil Day-Lewis, 15 November1954.
[50] UoR, LC/ A/2/653, Unidentified Editor to Leo Cooper, 28 November 1983.

instance, notes in *Gun Button to Fire* that of the names which he could remember, he had tactfully omitted some 'for reasons of delicacy'.[51] Others disguised, rather than omitted, identities in the manner of John Bushby, who explained that in two separate cases he had altered a name in order to 'avoid possible embarrassment'.[52]

The title of a published war memoir was also a particular battleground between memoirist and publisher, and some of the fiercest wrangles took place over this issue. For the memoirist, the title was immensely personal as it codified his narrative. It revealed something about how he himself viewed his narrative and how he wanted it to be interpreted by his audience. For example, Bowlby was initially eager to title his memoir *All Soldiers Run Away*, and exchanged much correspondence with his long-suffering publisher on the subject.[53] Derived from a quotation which is commonly attributed to the Duke of Wellington, Bowlby's preference indicated that his was not a 'gung-ho' memoir which narrated exaggerated, heroic tales of derring-do. Rather, his title reflected the memoir's main themes of passive endurance under heavy fire, and the unsavoury consequences of eroded morale, such as desertion. His publisher was, however, less convinced that *All Soldiers Run Away* was appropriate, and an eventual compromise was thrashed out by the inclusion on the title page of the Wellington quotation: 'All soldiers run away. It does not matter so long as their supports stand firm.' The other options which Bowlby put forward as possible titles are equally informative. His original choice of *Rifleman Bowlby Takes the Lid off War* was quickly disregarded by himself, as he felt that it struck 'too wacky a note'.[54] If he was not allowed to use *All Soldiers Run Away*, his second choice was to be *The Pity of War*. He explained that the latter 'has useful connotations with Vietnam, Biafra. It also

[51] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 6.
[52] Bushby, preface to *Gunner's Moon*, np.
[53] Quotation originally attributed to the Duke of Wellington. Bowlby remained highly attached to this quotation as a title for a book, and attempted to use it for a forthcoming book on the battle of Cassino. Again, the title was rejected, and the book published under the more prosaic title of *Countdown to Cassino: The Battle of Mignano Gap* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995).
[54] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 17th Dec 1968.

carries the full meaning of the word pity, and is a half-line from Owen'.[55] This too was vetoed, and *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* finally settled upon.[56]

From the publisher's perspective, the choice of title for the memoir was much less intimate and was underpinned to a far greater extent by a commercial agenda. As Cecil Day-Lewis of Chatto & Windus explained to Robert Woollcombe in 1954, the selection of a caption was 'worth taking trouble about, for a really good title is a strong factor in selling a book.'[57] Woollcombe's initial proposal of *These Were They* was rejected by his publishers, who felt that the title was both 'flat' and 'unexciting'. The sins of this relatively innocuous title were further compounded by the fact that 'of course it does not give any indication of what the book is about.'[58] Despite further requests by Woollcombe, the directors remained resolute: the title *These Were They* was simply 'not a good selling one'.[59] In the resulting quest to find a mutually agreeable title, Cecil Day-Lewis himself put forward the suggestion that 'Maybe something like "TO THE END OF THE ROAD", with a sub-title indicating that this is the story of a Scottish infantry officer in Normandy etc., would do.'[60] Eventually, honour was satisfied all round with a compromise of *Lion Rampant* for the title, and Day-Lewis promising to 'make it clear, at the beginning of the blurb, what the book is about.'[61]

In other cases, a compromise was reached by the insertion of a sub title on the front cover. Peter Cochrane, for example, was requested to draw up a list of possibilities for an 'explanatory sub title' to add to his narrative's main title of *Charlie Company*. He came up with three options:

(a) 'Some Cameron Highlanders at War 1940-44'

(b) 'The story of a rifle company in war'

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[55] Ibid. This refers to Wilfred Owen's famous lines, 'My subject is War, and the pity of War', quoted in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, (ed.) Owen Knowles (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), p. 101.
[56] The significance of this title is that recalls the classic Peninsular War memoir, *The Recollections of Rifleman Harris*. Implicitly, therefore, it invites comparison with this book.
[57] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Cecil Day-Lewis to Robert Woollcombe, 8 December 1954.
[58] Ibid.
[59] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Cecil Day-Lewis to Robert Woollcombe, 10 December 1954.
[60] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Cecil Day-Lewis to Robert Woollcombe, 8 December 1954.
[61] UoR, CW/ 174/11, Cecil Day-Lewis to Robert Woollcombe, 10 December 1954.

(c) 'An account of C Company 2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders 1940-44'

Despite describing it as somewhat 'ponderous', he chose the third one. [62]

The negotiations between memoirist and publisher over new or revised editions of these war memoirs are equally revealing. For some memoirists, the proposed release of new editions offered a welcome opportunity to refine certain elements of the original work. The issue of titles remained persistent. Alex Bowlby, for instance, took advantage of Leo Cooper's plan to reissue *Recollections* in 1989 to enquire again whether this title might not be switched to *All Soldiers Run Away*. He noted that the proposed reissue seemed to 'offer the chance' of finally naming his memoir thus.[63] Again, Bowlby's suggestion was met with a kind, but firm, refusal from his publisher, who informed him that:

> The whole point of re-printing Recollections under its old title is that it was the very title under which it made its name. I have ascertained that, if the title were changed, the paperback company and the Book Club, to whom I have been talking, would not be interested any longer.[64]

The importance of the title in rendering the war memoir commercially appealing is further reinforced by the various alterations made to the title of Tom Neil's Battle of Britain memoir. Originally published in 1987 as *Gun Button to 'Fire'*, a revised edition was issued in 2001 as *Fighter in my Sights*, before the original title was revived in Amberley's 2010 edition. Neil noted that the title in the latter edition had been slightly amended because in its original form it had caused 'some confusion in the minds of some readers – in particular the ladies!' as there had been some uncertainty over the meaning of 'Gun Button to Fire'.[65] An explanation had thus been incorporated which read: *Gun Button to Fire: a Hurricane Pilot's Dramatic Story of the Battle of Britain*. Miles Tripp suffered from a similar problem of misinterpretation. With the proposed reissue of *The Eighth Passenger* in 1993 he noted, incredulously, that two readers of the prior editions (1969 and 1985) had enquired who the 'eighth passenger' was – 'and

[62] UoR, CW/ 314/7, Peter Cochrane to Norah Smallwood, 15 April 1977. This would be amended slightly in the published version to read: 'In Service with C Company 2nd Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders 1940-44'.
[63] UoR, LC/ A/2/80/1, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 3 August 1987.
[64] UoR, LC/ A/2/80/1, Leo Cooper to Alex Bowlby, 11 August 1987.
[65] Neil, *Gun Button to Fire*, p. 7.

I don't think they were pulling my leg.'[66] He therefore insisted that the blurb specifically make clear that the 'eighth passenger' on board the heavy bombers was 'fear'. The negotiations between Tripp and his editors over the reissue of his memoir also reveal something about an important divergence in aims between memoirist and publisher. These discussions centred upon the issue of a blurb for the book. Tripp was sent a copy of the 'Advance Information Sheet', which contained a draft of the blurb, but he objected to some aspects of it. In particular, he did not appreciate the claim that the means by which the aircrew came through the ordeal was 'known only to God': 'not only because I am an agnostic but there are perfectly rational explanations of why most aircrew survived the strain. These include one's self-esteem, determination not to let one's comrades down, a very strong sense of duty, etc.'[67] In striving to achieve as 'truthful' a representation of his combat experiences as possible, it is plain that Tripp did not welcome the commercially-appealing hyperbole suggested by his publishers.

It might, however, be argued that the aims of memoirist and publisher converged again with regard to the incorporation of a foreword to a memoir. It is an established feature of this genre that there tends to be some form of preliminary note inserted into the book, which in its own right lends an air of gravitas to the narrative. Like Tom Neil, some veterans opted to write their own foreword to provide context and explanation. Yet a popular trend was to employ other sources of authority to speak for their books. Arthur Gamble, for example, was one of many authors who called upon former comrades to provide a few words to 'validate' the experiences portrayed in his memoir. In Gamble's case, the foreword to *The Itinerant Airman* (2003) was written by his friend and former navigator, Arthur White, who had himself brought out a war memoir in 1995.[68] Former senior officers were frequently prevailed upon to provide an introductory note to a memoir, especially if they were both personal friends and household names. Douglas Bader wrote the foreword to his friend 'Johnnie' Johnson's memoir, *Wing Leader*, in 1956, announcing with expansive generosity that it constituted a 'splendid book'.[69] Prominent military historians were further prevailed upon to 'authenticate' the narrative. For example, in January 1988, Leo Cooper wrote

[66] UoR, LC/ A/2/681, Miles Tripp to Georgina Harris, 5 May 1993.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Arthur White, foreword to *The Itinerant Airman*, by Arthur Gamble, np.
[69] Douglas Bader, foreword to *Wing Leader*, by 'Johnnie' Johnson, np.

to John Keegan, asking for his assistance in writing an introduction to the new edition of *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* and 'placing the book firmly where it belongs – i.e. as a classic.'[70] As a reward for this 'brilliant introduction', Cooper promised to pay 'handsomely' in wine or cash.[71] Keegan delivered the required 'brilliant introduction', remarking that Bowlby possessed an 'acute ability to catch and transmit the quality of life in the regiment he belonged to.'[72] Others, in contrast, could not be tempted into such recommendations on the grounds that they had never fought themselves. In the mid-1990s, historian and MP Alan Clark was invited to write a foreword to the reissue of Philip Stibbe's POW memoir, *Return via Rangoon*. He refused on the grounds that he was 'doubtful as to the propriety of non-combatants writing introductions to books by men who have actually been in action, and experienced the total step-change in emotion, adrenalin, pain – and the rest – that go with that.'[73]

Throughout the complex process of assembling and publishing their war memoirs, therefore, these former servicemen took a number of measures to ensure the integrity of their narratives. Yet in positioning their memoirs as authentic testimonials of battle experience, a number of veterans found themselves embroiled in disputes with historians, senior officers, and even ex-comrades, who contested their versions of events. As the case studies in the following chapter demonstrate, these narratives could thus generate heated scholarly, legal and cultural exchanges.

[70] UoR, LC/ A/2/80/1, Leo Cooper to John Keegan, 5 January 1988.
[71] Ibid.
[72] John Keegan, foreword to *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, by Alex Bowlby (1989) p. 5.
[73] UoR, LC/ A/2/650, Alan Clarke, MP, to Leo Cooper, undated.

7. 'VECTORS OF MEMORY': COMMANDING HISTORY AND REMEMBRANCE

[T]he published war memoir therefore became a valuable weapon in the 'unending battle' for the ways in which [servicemen] should be remembered.[1]

The decision to publish a memoir immediately transformed the British Second World War veteran into a self-appointed, sometimes belligerent, spokesman within the public domain. For many former servicemen this genre of life-writing proffered an irresistible opportunity not only to contribute to long-running debates over wartime strategy but, perhaps more importantly, also to air personal grievances about contemporary scholarly and cultural representations of 'their' war. This final chapter unravels three case studies in which the published post-war memoirs of veterans from the Army, RAF, and Royal Navy became placed at the centre of critical disputes about how the Second World War should be represented and remembered. The public function of memoir has been somewhat neglected by historians. This chapter contends, therefore, that the accounts of Alex Bowlby, Miles Tripp and Jack Broome separately, and collectively, make a timely contribution towards furthering scholarly understandings of how the veteran intended his narrative to operate in public as an authoritative and definitive record of 'his' war.

As the works of Broome, Bowlby and Tripp reveal, post-war veterans exhibited a shared desire to exert a degree of control over contemporary and future public understandings of the conflict. In order, however, to interrogate this wider intention and function of war memoir, a brief word on the theoretical approach to these narratives is required. The process of remembering is, as Jay Winter asserts, itself an inherently performative act which involves varying degrees of active reconstruction of lived experience.[2] It is essential, too, to recognise that these post-war memoirs were not written in a cultural vacuum, but were instead created within what Maurice

[1] Houghton, 'The "Missing Chapter"', p. 170.
[2] Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 3.

Halbwachs defines as a 'social framework' of dominant shared public and historical memories of the Second World War.[3] Yet as these narratives exemplify, individual veteran memory should not be viewed as a sponge which passively absorbed external representations of war and then squeezed them out again. Although initially created as a work of private recollection, by virtue of its publication the war memoir fundamentally represented a decision to act in public, to engage in some way with shared social memories or historical representations of conflict. War memoir thus operated as a site from which to contest wider scholarly and cultural modes of remembrance.

Many veteran-memoirists wrote with the objective of fleshing out scholarly or official histories, which they insisted conveyed only a misleading skeletal outline of battle in the dispassionate form of dates, manoeuvres and casualties. Their antipathy towards unsatisfactory sources of knowledge production about war experience also extended to cultural representations generated by popular films and fictional literature. Collectively, the self-confessed desire of these former servicemen to broadcast 'the full story' of combat on the front line places their memoirs unequivocally into a category defined as 'vectors of memory'. Identified by Henri Rousso as 'any source that proposes a deliberate reconstruction of an event for a social purpose', these 'carriers of memory' may be further designated as official (ceremonies, monuments, regular or irregular celebrations organised by national or local governments); scholarly (including school textbooks and academic works); and cultural (in which individual interpretations of the past are expressed in a variety of popular media, such as film, television, or literature).[4] Rousso's theory provides an important critical framework within which to approach the published war memoir as a historical source. As 'carriers' of memory, these documents facilitated the transmission of understandings of the Second World War to a public audience. The war memoir thus offered the veteran a conduit of memory through which he could publicly challenge, or revise, displeasing representations of experience. Like many others, this was an opportunity of which

[3] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.
[4] Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 219-220.

Bowlby, Tripp and Broome took full advantage in order to defend the actions of their unit, the strategy of their senior officers, or simply their own tactical decisions. The authority of the 'man on the spot' thus stands at the core of these case studies.

A Mutinous Debate: 'Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby' versus the Army

The first case study illustrates how the question of who was qualified to speak on wartime events dominated a stormy little dispute over historical representation, in which veteran memoir was placed at the epicentre. In the autumn of 1969, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* appeared in print. Penned by a Radley-educated private soldier in the 2nd Rifle Brigade during the Italian campaign in 1944, this account was remarkable because it constituted one of the first voices from the ranks. The 1950s and early 1960s had seen reams of paper expended upon the memoirs of senior commanders, yet little had thus far been heard from ordinary soldiers. Indeed, Sphere paperback publishers had rejected *Recollections* in October 1969 purely on the grounds that it did not hold 'the weight and authority of a General's memoirs.'[5] Clearly, Alex Bowlby's memoir was destined to be distinctive from the very outset.

In many ways, *Recollections* carried a whiff of the Great War canon of subaltern trench literature in that its author lovingly conveyed the ingrained camaraderie of ordinary soldiers whilst excoriating the strategic decisions made by the wartime Army's higher echelons. It was the latter attitude, in the book's introduction, that triggered a ferocious row. At Alexandria in the spring of 1944, Bowlby had joined the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Rifle Brigade, a unit which had recently distinguished itself in the desert campaigns of North Africa, fighting as the motorised infantry wing of an armoured division. Critically, however, Bowlby claimed he had arrived at a particularly sore point in the battalion's wartime history. Upon being transferred to Italy, the terrain was deemed unsuitable for motor-battalions and its vehicles were removed, with the troops being reduced to fighting on foot as infantry. This, Bowlby mused, was regarded by the riflemen as rubbing salt into an open wound with a vengeance, especially since orders had just been received after the fall of Tunisia that

[5] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Letter from Sir Antony Cheetham to Leo Cooper, 24 October 1969.

the battalion would be broken up, with all of the regulars who had served with the unit since 1937 being repatriated to Britain. The memoirist perceived a distinctly 'bitter' mood among his new battalion, to which he attributed the unit's later failure to achieve the same battle rating in Italy as it had enjoyed in North Africa. Nonetheless, to the young ex-public schoolboy, the battalion became a source of comfort and familiarity. Throughout his memoir thus shines a marked devotion to his former Company, which Bowlby asserted provided the 'only real sense of security I ever had.'[6] Yet it was this self-sworn fealty to the Regiment's 2nd Battalion which ultimately landed Bowlby and his publisher, Leo Cooper, in considerable trouble.

On 31 October 1969, shortly after the release of *Recollections*, Cooper received a letter from a Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Boden (retired) MC, who had served as second-in-command of the 2nd Battalion whilst it was in North Africa. Boden wrote to complain about an extract from Bowlby's memoir which he perceived as a 'grave and damaging inaccuracy'.[7] He strenuously objected to the fourth paragraph of the author's 'Foreword', which described the battalion's reaction to the news, after the fall of Tunisia, that the unit would be staying in the area, rather than embarking for Britain, as had been rumoured. The offending passage read thus:

> When the Rifles heard the news it was more than they could stomach. Groups of riflemen went round wrecking the camp. Their officers were unable to stop them. Next day the word went round that machine-gunners from the 56th Division were being sent up to restore order. The riflemen ringed the camp with anti-tank guns. After three days the men cooled off. They'd had their show. All that remained was to see what G.H.Q. would do by way of retaliation. For a while they did nothing. It isn't difficult to imagine their problem: how to discipline the Battalion without burning their fingers in the process. They solved it only too well. The 1937 regulars were due for repatriation. They sent them home, leaving the rest of the Battalion in North Africa.[8]

Boden protested that there was 'no truth whatsoever' in this insinuation of mutiny; according to his own recollections, the troops had in fact behaved 'with admirable restraint in very trying circumstances'.[9] He warned Cooper that former officers and

[6] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 169.
[7] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Colonel Patrick Boden to Leo Cooper, 31 October 1969.
[8] Bowlby, *Recollections*, p. 8.
[9] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Colonel Patrick Boden to Leo Cooper, 31 October 1969.

troops who had been with the Battalion at this time would undoubtedly feel 'some justifiable indignation at the false charges made' in this paragraph.[10] With the spectre of a potential libel action menacing his newly-established publishing business, Cooper hastened to contact Bowlby, who maintained that the incident had indeed occurred. In fact, conscious that his account might prove controversial, Bowlby informed his publisher that he had already deliberately softened his representation of events by 'stressing the humour element' of the situation rather than pointing accusing fingers at specific members of the regiment.[11] Nevertheless, it appeared that this distinction had not successfully translated into print, and the battle lines between memoirist, publisher, and senior officer were rapidly drawn up.

The issue was muddied by the fact that Bowlby himself had not actually been present at the 'mutiny', only joining the battalion shortly after it was supposed to have taken place. His description of this alleged incident, therefore, was wholly based on second-hand accounts and hearsay. The sequence of events which led to Bowlby believing that he had the full facts of the matter at his disposal is somewhat clouded, and illustrates just how difficult it is to plot a course through competing individual memories to compose a coherent and 'accurate' narrative of war. According to the author, the account of the disturbance at Tunis had been passed along to him in 1949 by an unnamed officer of the regiment who, at the time of the incident, had been a Regimental Sergeant Major (R.S.M.) in the 2nd Rifle Battalion. When Bowlby met this man after the war, he was serving as a Quartermaster in 21 SAS, a Territorial regiment that Bowlby had also joined in 1948. Affirming that this officer's version of events only confirmed in detail other stories Bowlby had heard circulating during the war, the memoirist was puzzled when, upon meeting this officer again some years later, and informing him of his intention to write a book, his source categorically denied having told him anything about the 'mutiny' at Tunis.[12] However, as Bowlby darkly reassured his publisher, he possessed a 'long memory' and could remember the name of the soldier who had taken charge of setting up the anti-tank guns. When the identity of this man, a Colour Sergeant Major J. Swann, was put to the former R.S.M., the memoirist

[10] Ibid.
[11] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 16 February 1969.
[12] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 4 November 1969, (1 of 2).

reports that the latter was forced to acknowledge that 'something silly' had indeed occurred.[13] Bowlby, therefore, firmly refused to be swayed from his own portrayal of the 'mutiny', unshakeable in the belief that his source had provided him with the full facts. He explained that he was convinced of the veracity of the latter's information, as it tallied with the version of events he himself had obtained after he joined the 2nd Battalion. According to Bowlby, therefore, the R.S.M. had been able to provide him with both the identity of the ringleader and the duration of the incident.[14] The memoirist also chose to place his faith in the R.S.M.'s version of events because he trusted his source on a personal basis, noting that he was a 'very level-headed chap'.[15] Bowlby was thus confident that his information was accurate, and refused to back down.

The timing of this altercation was particularly awkward for all concerned. The first print run of *Recollections* was selling quickly in the autumn of 1969 and a re-print appeared imminent, with negotiations already under way with Corgi to issue the book in paperback. It was essential, therefore, for all parties to resolve the dispute as rapidly as possible in order to make a decision on whether or not future editions of the memoir would have to be altered. Battle was joined in a rapid exchange of correspondence between Boden, Bowlby and Cooper in late October and early November. Both sides began to marshal lists of supporters who might bear out their conflicting recollections of the 'mutiny'. Boden remarked that there were 'fortunately large numbers of survivors' from the period whom he believed would be willing to lend their voices to his version of events and contradict the 'manifest falsehood' that Riflemen had assembled anti-tank guns around the camp. Commenting that some witnesses might also be drawn from other units, such as the 1st Kings Royal Rifle Corps and the 7th Battalion Rifle Brigade who were brigaded with the 2nd Rifle Brigade, he observed that 'anyone' who had been near Tunis at the time and had read Bowlby's foreword would know that there was little truth in it.[16] Bowlby swiftly followed Boden's lead, informing his publisher that there were 'plenty' of other witnesses who would remember what happened at Tunis and recommended that a 'gathering of the clans'

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 4 November 1969, (2 of 2).
[16] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Colonel Patrick Boden to Leo Cooper, 31 October 1969.

may be necessary to settle the dispute.[17] In mustering his defences, he remained quite adamant that his was the correct version, and remarked that he was 'quite prepared to take time on I.T.V.' to send out a message to former members of the 2nd Battalion who were aware of the events at issue.[18]

Senior commanders were also reluctantly drawn into this wrangle, and at least one found himself caught in an unenviable position. Lieutenant General Sir Richard Fyffe, then Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Intelligence) at the MoD, had served as a Major with the 10th Battalion Rifle Brigade in North Africa during the campaigns of spring 1943. Due to longstanding post-war connections with the unit, Fyffe had already been involved with *Recollections* since May 1969, when Cooper submitted the proof of the memoir to him for a 'personal and private view'.[19] Fyffe returned a cordial reply to the publisher, commenting that he welcomed the book because it was evident that Bowlby had the interests of the regiment 'deeply at heart'. He was sufficiently pleased with *Recollections* that a proposal was made to consider Bowlby for authorship of a history of the 95th Rifles for Cooper's rapidly expanding 'Famous Regiment Series', and Fyffe also offered to suggest to the next Regimental Committee Meeting that a small 'History Committee' be appointed to help Bowlby in such ways as they could, and direct him to sources. [20] It is plain that Bowlby and his memoir had acquired the backing of Fyffe and the Regimental Committee, but despite the amiability with which these proceedings were conducted, there had been warning signs of potential trouble ahead. At the height of the brouhaha with Boden in November 1969, Bowlby suggested that even back in the summer there had been several ripples of dissatisfaction with his account of the fracas at Tunis. Upon first reading the proof of *Recollections*, the memoirist believed that Fyffe had 'queried my veracity'.[21] Bowlby, it seems, had long suspected that the reaction of the 2nd Battalion's officers at Tunis might cause problems. With some perspicacity, he predicted that their response to his book – '"that chap's dug up what we wanted kept quiet"' – would not be instantly

[17] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 4 November 1969.
[18] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, undated.
[19] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Leo Cooper to Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Fyffe, 29 May 1969.
[20] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Fyffe to Leo Cooper, 3 June 1969. Some months later, Bowlby turned down the offer of writing the history of the 95th for the 'Famous Regiment Series', as he was struggling with ill health and described himself as too dispirited to take on the task.
[21] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 16 November 1969.

favourable.[22] Nevertheless, he felt that the matter could easily be put to rest once these officers discerned his line of reasoning and realised that it was 'likely to become equally plain to anyone who reads the book from a detached angle, i.e. someone not in the regiment.' To this end, he sent a draft explanation of his account to General Fyffe:

> He is confident that his information regarding the Tunis fracas is accurate. And he would be glad to let any of the regimental committee who were present at Tunis read the passage and comment on it (if none of the committee were present then any senior officer who was). A.B. has taken soundings from a cross-section of all ranks regarding the causes that led up to the trouble and the general opinion is that the battalion should never have been left behind in the way it was. Had the battalion been kept together i.e. had it left North Africa with all its regulars there is no doubt it would have continued to be a great one. As the committee must know the battalion's rating in Italy differed considerably from its rating in North Africa. A.B. considers that the events surrounding Tunis were directly responsible for this and it is for this reason alone that he has touched on them.[23]

As a sop towards preserving the integrity of the regiment, he also offered to disguise the identity of the 2nd Battalion, camouflaging it as a fictional 3rd Battalion.[24] This appeared to soothe any early doubts the Regimental Committee might have harboured towards the intentions of his account. Indeed, as Cooper later informed Colonel Boden, at this time 'No voice was raised in protest.'[25] Inevitably, this all made matters very awkward when the Boden dispute blew up several months later. From the perspective of Bowlby and Cooper, the manuscript had in effect been fully approved by Fyffe and the Regimental Committee. From the opposite view, however, the insinuation of mutiny was ugly, and the row threatened the reputation of both the regiment and Colonel Boden, an outstanding officer who had been awarded a Military Cross whilst commanding a company of the 2nd Battalion in early 1942.

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[22] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 2 June 1969.
[23] Ibid.
[24] This attempt to mask the identity of the 2nd Battalion did not survive for long, however. Although Bowlby suspected that a review in the *Sunday Times* was the culprit, it is more probable that the narrative's explicit commentary on locations and actions brought about its own downfall in this respect.
[25] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Leo Cooper to Colonel Patrick Boden, 5 November 1969.

In the end, the storm blew over and was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Bowlby and Cooper sought legal advice from the solicitors firm of Rubinstein, Nash & Co, and a compromise was worked out.[26] This involved the insertion of a publisher's note into unsold copies of the first edition of *Recollections*, together with a rewording of the dust- jacket blurb. Bowlby would also re-draft the problematic paragraphs, and the amended version would appear in the re-print and any forthcoming editions. In his revised account, any allusion to 'mutiny' was to be removed and he was to confine himself to describing the mood of the battalion as 'restless', a term which Boden himself had used in reference to his men.[27] This, explained Cooper's solicitor Michael Rubinstein, posed an 'admirable' solution to the legal difficulties, and the matter was quietly dropped.[28]

The clash over *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* thus hinged upon competing narratives of veteran memory, and the manner in which rank was dragged into the question of which former soldiers held the most authority to speak lent the affair an unpleasant edge. Indeed, Bowlby suspected former senior officers of the Rifles of launching 'Operation Whitewash' in order to erase a potentially embarrassing incident from future remembrance.[29] He clearly viewed Boden's scepticism over the veracity of the R.S.M.'s testimony as impugning the honour of the lower ranks. Ironically, both sides in this clash attempted to use the memoir as a vehicle through which to salvage the reputation of the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Rifle Brigade. From the perspective of Boden, Bowlby's suggestion of a mutiny would cement in the historical record an episode which he denied had ever occurred, and if indeed it had, would reflect badly on the entire regiment. From the perspective of Bowlby, he was keen to include the incident out of a wish to illuminate the contempt with which his beloved Rifles felt they had been treated after the successful conclusion of the North African campaign, and to explain why the unit's battle rating had dropped during the subsequent Italian campaign. As a site of contest, therefore, *Recollections* functioned

[26] Michael Rubinstein privately warned Cooper that on no account was concession to be allowed to be interpreted as an admission that the material complained of was erroneous, as this would leave wide open future opportunities for Colonel Boden and/or other senior officers to sue publishers of war memoir for libel. UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Michael Rubinstein to Leo Cooper, 14 November 1969 .
[27] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Colonel Patrick Boden to Leo Cooper, 31 October 1969.
[28] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Michael Rubinstein to Leo Cooper, 14 November 1969.
[29] UoR, LC/ A/2/79, Alex Bowlby to Leo Cooper, 4 November 1969, (2 of 2).

as a 'vector of memory' for two veterans who desired to defend, in different ways, the reputation of their battalion.

Breaking Ranks? 'The Eighth Passenger' versus Popular Remembrance of Bomber Command

The second case study illustrates veteran deployment of memoir in order to defend the wartime record of Bomber Command and attempt to redraw unsatisfactory public memories of the strategic bombing campaign, which many former aircrew felt effectively labelled them as war criminals. In 1969, Heinemann published one of the first memoirs of ordinary British bomber aircrew under the rather mysterious title of *The Eighth Passenger*. The allusion to fear (the so-called 'eighth member' of a Lancaster crew) that author Miles Tripp's title carried was maintained throughout the book, in contrast to the more heroic previous bomber narratives, such as that of Guy Gibson. Indeed, Tripp's memoir acquired, as his literary agent noted, something of a 'cult status' due to the ways in which he portrayed the horrors experienced by the seven-man crews of the heavy bombers in the later years of the war.[30]

As one of the first bomber memoirs to testify to participation in the infamous Allied attack on Dresden on 13 February 1945, Tripp's book also became embroiled in the increasingly acrimonious post-war debates on the ethics of this raid. In fact, excerpts from his narrative appear in various scholarly accounts of the Dresden raid, including Alexander McKee's *Dresden 1945: The Devil's Tinderbox* (1982) and Frederick Taylor's *Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945* (2004). These works, alongside David Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden* (1963), have played an important role in shaping cultural representations of the raid in Britain. Linked to this, in the decades since it originally appeared in print *The Eighth Passenger* has been reborn in three different editions, each of which reflect the memoirist's changing dialogue with scholarly and popular understandings of the Dresden attack. Whilst Tripp's account of his personal experiences remains the same in each of these editions, his own analysis and interpretation of the role he played in the destruction of Dresden thus have a

[30] UoR, LC/ A/2/681, Michael Sissons to Leo Cooper, 28 July 1992.

shifting quality. Much like a chameleon, *The Eighth Passenger* repeatedly adapted itself to its cultural surroundings, a feat which holds considerable import for this foray into the interaction between veteran-memoirists and their perception of broader public tropes of remembrance of the war.

The central feature of Tripp's memoir is, arguably, the author's vivid description of his actions over the target of Dresden on the fateful night of 13 February 1945. The author's account of this operation in the 1969 Heinemann edition of *The Eighth Passenger* told an unusual tale in which he, as bomb aimer, took a private, and highly unofficial, decision not to drop his bombs in order to avoid contributing to the firestorm enveloping the city centre below. Tripp asserted that the crews had been informed at a briefing of the presence of 'a million' refugees in Dresden, and it was this knowledge, combined with his memory of watching newsreel footage of Belgian refugees being attacked earlier in the war, that informed his decision over the target.[31] According to Tripp, once his Lancaster had reached the already blazing target, over the radio there was no sound of the Master Bomber instructing the crews where to place their bombs. With the authority invested in the bomb aimer to direct the aircraft whilst in the vicinity of the target, he instructed his pilot to steer a course for the south of the city. He narrated pressing the bomb release just beyond the fringe of the fires, in the hope that they would fall 'harmlessly in fields'.[32] Lest his audience attributed this decision to a conscientious act of rebellion, however, Tripp insisted that he was not guilty of mutiny. If the Master Bomber had given instructions, he would have obeyed. He did not, therefore, wish to be regarded as a 'heroic figure who deliberately disobeyed orders'.[33]

Unfortunately for Tripp, this desire was not to be granted. His tale was later seized upon by the aforementioned historians whose own analysis of the Dresden raid implied that there was much for Bomber Command to be ashamed of. For instance, a graphic account published in 1982 by Alexander McKee, which spared few details of the suffering of the German civilians, made use of extracts from Tripp's memoir to illustrate the former's own condemnation of the raid. McKee, in particular, incurred

[31] Miles Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger* (London: Heinemann, 1969), pp. 80-83.
[32] Ibid, p. 87.
[33] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger* (1993), p. 169.

the veteran's wrath through the following aside: 'Miles Tripp wrote that there was no sound of the master-bomber on R/T controlling the attack. Perhaps Miles was deaf in both ears as Nelson was in one eye.'[34] The memoirist, was distinctly unflattered by the allusion, remarking tartly that 'I don't care for it and it is not true. Had there been a master-bomber on the air it is most likely that I should have obeyed instructions.'[35] How, he enquired, did McKee suppose that he would have explained his actions to the rest of the crew had there been orders transmitted over the radio? Was he, Tripp wondered, expected to have indulged in a moral debate whilst in the target area?[36] Although his decision to release the bombs away from the city centre was legitimately open to query, the veteran nonetheless wanted to make it clear that his actions should not be interpreted as a criticism of Bomber Command.[37]

The use to which Tripp's account had been put by some historians was deplored by a later Bomber Command memoirist, Frank Musgrove. As a former navigator who had also flown on the Dresden raid, Musgrove's own memoir, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers* (2005), formed part of a newly-emerging stream of bomber narratives which had begun to appear from the early 1990s.[38] As the commemorative cycle of fiftieth anniversaries of the Second World War shifted into gear, public debates over the role of the Allied strategic air offensive intensified to new levels of ferocity. Responding to what many former aircrew perceived as unfounded, vicious, and seemingly downright ungrateful criticism of their wartime efforts, the published memoirs of Bomber Command crew started openly to contest popular condemnation of the war, springing particularly to the defence of their late Commander-in-Chief, Sir Arthur Harris, and his pursuit of the area bombing campaign during the latter war years. Musgrove, like many of his now elderly former comrades, perceived that

[34] Alexander McKee, *Dresden 1945: The Devil's Tinderbox* (London: Souvenir Press, 1982), p. 102.
[35] Miles Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger*, rev. ed. (London: Macmillan Papermac, 1985), p. 189.
[36] Ibid, p. 189.
[37] In other historiography, however, this was exactly how his narrative was appropriated. Frederick Taylor's supposedly revisionary account of the Dresden raid also incorporated Tripp's description of placing his bombs away from the centre of the target. Although Taylor's work did not relish the horror of the attack's aftermath to the extent of McKee, Tripp's account was left to stand alone without benefit of context, analysis, or counter-narratives to tell the story of the hundreds of crews who did bomb on target. This skewed implication therefore served to falsely imply that many crews of Bomber Command were struck by intense qualms about conducting the Dresden raid. Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday 13 February 1945* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 323.
[38] Houghton, 'The "Missing Chapter"', pp. 155-157.

Bomber Command occupied a place of opprobrium in British popular and scholarly remembrance of the Second World War which was deeply hurtful to surviving aircrew. In his own memoir, Musgrove recorded that he was thus 'saddened' to encounter Tripp's tale in Frederick Taylor's recent historical work, which seemed to indicate that the bomber crews had serious qualms about the raid on Dresden.[39] Despite saluting the earlier memoirist's 'great courage', Musgrove explained that he did not find Tripp's tale of consciously dropping his bombs away from the conflagration 'credible'. He concluded that the bomb aimer may well have come to believe in his narrative himself, but that it had probably been produced as a direct result of widespread public condemnation of the raid in the late 1960s.[40] The misgivings of Musgrove that his counterpart had experienced a 'crisis of memory', which Susan Suleiman defines as 'a moment of choice, and sometimes of predicament or conflict, about remembrance of the past', thus conveyed a dark suspicion that Tripp's memoir merely reflected, rather than sought to correct, public memory.[41] Significantly, however, Musgrove did not censure Tripp for shattering codes of loyalty to Bomber Command by breaking rank so publicly. Rather, he regretted that the earlier memoirist had been forced by social pressure into giving this version of the raid:

> It is a gloss on events by a man carrying the burden… of guilt, for a situation that was certainly not of his making. There is no shame in putting his bombs dead centre in the marked target area. The shame is the nation's, that a very brave man should have to say that he didn't.[42]

Although a 'crisis of memory' in Tripp's first edition is impossible to either prove or disprove – certainly this part of his narrative remained unaltered throughout all of *The Eighth Passenger's* subsequent incarnations – it is worth briefly reflecting on the context in which Tripp's memoir was originally published. By the late 1960s, increasingly aggressive public discourses on the Allied fire-storming of Dresden were circulating. With overall responsibility for the attack having been quietly elided by the British government in the immediate post-war period, the raid had also become an

[39] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 108.
[40] Ibid p. 108.
[41] Susan Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[42] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 108.

important tool in Cold War politics.[43] Blame for the devastating attack was therefore popularly heaped onto Arthur Harris and, by extension, Bomber Command. As Musgrove noted, 'Dresden has been invested with huge symbolic significance; and a number of well-publicised books have highlighted its awfulness.'[44] Several key scholarly and popular works came into publication in the 1960s, which emphasised the raid's dreadful aftermath and served to further sensationalise the attack on Dresden in cultural remembrance. In 1963, David Irving had stirred up veteran resentment by publishing a particularly inflammatory account of the attack. *The Destruction of Dresden* had a critical, and long-lived, impact on popular memories of the raid, as it inflated the casualty statistics by 100,000.[45] This sensationalised figure became a key trope in Cold War propaganda, and subsequently became entrenched in British popular culture, being trotted out by the media at every available opportunity.[46] The horrors of the Dresden raid were reinforced by the publication in 1968 of Kurt Vonnegut's cult novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*. This appeared at the same time as wider public debate raged over the United States' use of napalm to bomb Vietnam. It was in this context that *The Eighth Passenger* was first published.

The various revisions which Tripp's narrative underwent in subsequent editions in 1985 and 1993 highlight something important about the veteran's desire to employ his published memoir to reshape popular memories of the air war. A key feature of the second, 1985 Papermac edition was the insertion of his account of participating in a recent German television documentary about the bombers' war in an epilogue. In September 1983, he was invited by a German producer to contribute to a five-part documentary called *Der Krieg der Bomber*, the last episode of which would focus on the attack on Dresden. Sir Arthur Harris and Sir Leonard Cheshire VC had also been invited to take part, so Tripp would be in distinguished company. After a rather stiff opening exchange with the producers, in which Tripp stipulated that if he was 'expected to express remorse, [he] would not do so', and neither would he criticise

[43] Richard Overy, 'The Post-War Debate', in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, (eds.) Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (London: Pimlico, 2006), p. 132.
[44] Musgrove, *Dresden and the Heavy Bombers*, p. 2.
[45] David Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden* (London: William Kimber & Co, 1963), p. 7.
[46] Most current studies now agree that the accepted total of casualties in Dresden was approximately 35,000.

the men of Bomber Command who had flown on the Dresden raid, the programme began to take shape.[47] Tripp reported an episode that occurred during filming which assumes considerable significance when the 1985 edition is compared with its 1993 successor. On the first day of filming on location in Britain, the memoirist recollected, the producer took Tripp and other former aircrew out to a hotel lounge to discuss the next day's schedule. The memoirist narrated that the meeting was about to end 'in good humour', when an embarrassing incident occurred. Their conversation had been overheard by other guests in the lounge and one addressed himself to Tripp and his comrades, announcing loudly that he had been in London when the V2 bombs had been dropped: 'gentlemen', he declared, 'if you had dropped twice as many bombs on Germany as you did, I, for one, would have been very glad.'[48] After a nasty silence, Tripp continued, 'a babble of voices broke out – and they were our voices, British voices. The Germans said nothing.' Apologizing for 'the rudeness of a compatriot', the memoirist was relieved that the producer remained sanguine about the interruption. Nevertheless, the episode did not appear in the third edition of *The Eighth Passenger* in 1993. This seemed to reflect a changing *zeitgeist* among former Bomber Command veterans, who were at this time beginning to adopt a ferociously protective stance towards their perceived status in popular remembrance.

In fact, the 1993 edition of *The Eighth Passenger* explicitly revealed a hardening of its author's attitude towards the public remembrance of Bomber Command. With a new and updated epilogue to replace the 1985 version, Tripp's depiction of the scene in the hotel lounge was replaced by a fervent defence of his Commander-in-Chief. Describing instead 'the old warrior's' speech in the German documentary, Tripp mused that Harris's words were:

> uttered with stubborn conviction. Others, their freedom made safe by the sacrifices of a former generation, might occupy the moral high ground and indulge in fashionable criticism, but his foundations remained as firm as the abandoned concrete runways in the eastern counties of England down which bomb-laden aircraft had once roared on their way to take-off for Germany.[49]

[47] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger* (1985), p. 186.
[48] Ibid., p. 187.
[49] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger* (1993), p. 186.

Tripp's editorial change chimed with the emerging effort of veterans at this time to defend the record of Bomber Command. By the early 1990s, old debates on the wartime actions of Bomber Command had been reignited, acquiring a startling new ferocity. The furore that raged over the erection and vandalising of a commemorative statue to Harris in 1992, in addition to incendiary television documentaries such as *The Valour and the Horror* (1992), seemed to indicate to many of Bomber Command's surviving aircrew that the wartime bomber was being publicly presented for remembrance in extreme terms of either victim or villain.[50] At the same time as this apparent public misrepresentation of their efforts, many were further incensed that there appeared to be very little sign of any open commemoration of their 55,000 fallen comrades.[51] Together with an enduring absence of any national form of recognition of the contribution these men had made to Victory in Europe – the lack of any official commemorative medal for aircrew remained a bitter bone of contention – it appeared that British culture and remembrance were determined to vilify the men of Bomber Command.[52] It is notable that Tripp specifically stated in his 1993 edition that, although the bulk of the narrative remained in its original form, it was now built around mustering a defence of all of Bomber Command's men. The addition, for example, of an appendix illustrating the courage of aircrew strengthened his argument that the men of Bomber Command had not been fully appreciated by officialdom, scholars and the public. Adding that there was much he would like to include about the area bombing campaign, he demonstrated that the mood of *The Eighth Passenger* had become steelier.

Of the wartime strategic air offensive itself, Tripp now commented that it 'has been adversely criticized and its effects detrimentally exploited by those intent on minimizing the attempts of Bomber Command to finish a war in which combatants and civilians on both sides were suffering.'[53] Yet he remarked cryptically that these

[50] A representation which a cohort of British and Canadian veterans fruitlessly attempted to challenge through the courts during the early 1990s.
[51] It was not until 2012 that an official Bomber Command memorial was erected in London's Green Park.
[52] The issue of Bomber Command in British popular remembrance remained a very sore subject for the former flyer, and was in fact reflected throughout a new wave of aircrew memoirs which appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. Houghton, 'The "Missing Chapter"', pp. 161-170.
[53] Tripp, *The Eighth Passenger* (1993), p. xi.

were 'matters for another time, a different book.'[54] Further to this, in a letter he wrote to his literary agent in January 1992, Tripp explained that he was planning a new work – the aforementioned 'different book' alluded to in the 1993 edition of *The Eighth Passenger* – which would explore more fully the 'use and misuse' of aircrew and airpower during the Second World War.[55] Although this new book never made it into publication, the reasons Tripp gave for tackling this fresh project shed more light on the revisions he made to his third edition. In this new work he planned to include a chapter on Dresden entitled 'in mitigation of the raid'. The purpose, he explained, of this lay in the 'extremely adverse publicity' of the bombers' war – 'an opposite view', he deemed, 'has seldom been expressed.' Moreover, he announced, 'the Dresden raid is now being exploited by neo-Nazis and has been the subject of hatchet jobs by David Irving and Alexander McKee.'[56] Tripp's personal reaction to the former at this time is also noteworthy, as it indicates his increasing concern about adverse popular remembrance of the Dresden raid. In 1963, he had been interviewed for Irving's *The Destruction of Dresden*, yet by early 1992, Tripp informed his agent that he was 'worried by the plaudits' Irving had recently received in Germany as a 'revisionist' historian.[57] This followed shortly after Irving had made a series of infamous, and highly publicised, remarks asserting that Dresden had been a worse atrocity than Auschwitz. This background context thus militates to suggest that the final revisions to the 1993 edition of *The Eighth Passenger* were a direct response to increasing official, scholarly and public condemnation of Bomber Command and its men at a time when there were increasingly few left to guard their honour. Indeed, Tripp affirmed that the third edition of *The Eighth Passenger* was intended to proffer 'a reasoned plea in mitigation such as might be delivered by a counsel for the defence.'[58]

The tortuous history of *The Eighth Passenger* outlined a common predicament which all veteran-memoirists faced. In the post-war decades, survivors were confronted with a multitude of shifting cultural and historical frames in which to articulate their memories and representations of combat. Musgrove's dark suspicion

[54] Ibid., p. xi.
[55] UoR, LC/ A/2/681, Miles Tripp to Michael Sissons, 26 January 1992.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

that in 1969 a former bomb aimer had publicly re-written his own memories, underscores the veteran's perennial temptation to compose what historian Alistair Thomson identifies as a 'safe memory', which fitted with public myths.[59] Even if this was indeed the case, however, the later editions of Tripp's memoir must be viewed as a concerted attempt to correct the earlier version, an act which must have required a certain amount of courage. In its final edition, Tripp's personal narrative also critically exemplifies how memoir operated as a public forum from which the former serviceman could launch an open offensive against tropes of cultural remembrance he deemed unacceptable. Ultimately, the Tripp affair as a whole illustrates the inherently symbiotic nature of veteran relationship with public and private memories of war.

Amid Turbulent Waters: 'Convoy is to Scatter' versus the Court of Historical Opinion

The final case study in this chapter scrutinises memoir as a 'vector of memory' from a different perspective. It explores the veteran's use of published life-writing to mount a strong defence of his own actions as a combatant. Jack Broome's narrative of wartime service in the Royal Navy arose out of most unusual circumstances as it was published in 1972, on the back of his role as successful litigant in a particularly public and vicious libel case that raged in January 1970. One of the defendants was the publishing house Cassell. The other was David Irving. Although Irving's historical writings have now been largely discredited, in the late 1960s he was still regarded as a reasonably creditable up-and-coming young historian.

The imbroglio centred upon the former naval officer's actions in scattering PQ17, the ill-starred Allied Arctic convoy which was destroyed in 1942 but was exhumed and 'dragged back from the fringe of living memory' to be examined in a court of law three decades later.[60] PQ17 remains etched into the annals of seafaring

[59] Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 10.

[60] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 15.

catastrophe. When disaster descended upon the convoy on 4 July 1942, only eleven out of thirty-four British and American merchant ships survived to limp into Russian ports. Attacks from German U-boats and bombers scattered the rest, along with their precious cargo of war materials, across the bottom of the icy Barents Sea. Although various other wartime convoys suffered similarly heavy losses in terms of tonnage and lives, PQ17 was granted special infamy by the circumstances under which the convoy was destroyed. As Senior Officer of the Close Escort for the merchantmen (1st Escort Group), Commander Broome and his destroyer HMS *Keppel* were charged with ensuring that the convoy reached its destination safely. However, on 4 July 1942, the Admiralty sent out orders for the convoy to scatter, believing that an attack by heavy German surface forces, including the dreaded battleship *Tirpitz*, was imminent. Meanwhile, convinced by a prior series of signals received from the Admiralty that the supposedly looming *Tirpitz* constituted an immediate threat to the scattering convoy, Broome decided to attach his destroyers to a covering force of cruisers (CS1) under the command of Rear Admiral Louis Hamilton, in anticipation of engaging the expected enemy. Left to their own devices, the fragmented convoy and remaining escort vessels became easy targets for the pursuing U-boats and aircraft, with disastrous results. The tragedy of PQ17 was deepened by the fact that the entire affair stemmed from a tangle of miscommunication between the Admiralty and surface forces, and poor reconnaissance, as the Admiralty's information that the pride of the German navy was at sea was based on negative rather than positive intelligence. The *Tirpitz*, in fact, remained snugly berthed at Altenfiord, Norway, throughout the hunting and destruction of PQ17, and the expected battle with the enemy's heavy surface forces never materialised.

In 1968 Irving produced an inflammatory account of these events entitled *The Destruction of Convoy PQ17*, attributing the loss of the convoy to Broome's poor and hubristic tactical decisions. Having surreptitiously obtained a copy of the manuscript, Broome was outraged by this slur and began legal proceedings against Irving and his publisher, Cassell, for defamation. Following his well-publicised victory in the law courts, the veteran published *Convoy is to Scatter*, which clearly sought to place on

public record his 'true' version of events. Overall, the memoir offers a comparatively innocuous account of the war at sea which is similar to the other naval narratives explored in this study. Nevertheless, the second half is dedicated to a painstakingly crafted defence and justification of the author's tactical decisions relating to convoy PQ17. This synthesises a linear narrative of the convoy's voyage with accompanying explanations of the evidence Broome and his legal team presented in court, addressing step-by-step the charges against him that Irving had brought. Whilst its origins in the law courts are unique, this memoir embodies a common theme of a power struggle between veteran and 'history', providing a valuable example of how a veteran used published personal narrative an essential tool to 'correct' a scholarly account of 'his' war.

In many respects, *Convoy is to Scatter* is an intensely self-conscious text, perhaps unsurprisingly, as it was designed with the specific intention of publicly challenging Irving's interpretation of the fate of PQ17. A seam of self-justification therefore runs throughout the memoir. In particular, Broome believed that more credence should be given to the views of those present at the event in question, rather than those of distant commentators. He declared that

> One object in writing this book is to keep ramming home this basic fact which no improvement in 'communications' can alter: the situation confronting the man on the spot will *never* be exactly the same as that visualized anywhere else.[61]

Indeed, this assertion formed a recurrent theme. Shoehorned into the narrative at every possible opportunity, it was used repeatedly to demolish criticism of his actions. Broome continually placed his reader in the position of the jurors in his court case, drawing repeated analogies between the two. For instance, he pointedly enjoins his readers to 'remind ourselves yet again, as the jury was constantly being reminded' that

> the text of a signal is for ever keyed to information available to the sender up to the moment that signal was sent. It might predict, instruct, cancel, amend, but it can't foresee – nor, unlike history, can it be sullied by hindsight.[62]

[61] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 52.
[62] Ibid., p. 93.

His use of these signals as a literary device through which to tell the 'true' story of PQ17 lends considerable weight to Broome's argument. Using the signals from which 'Bundle 11' of the courtroom evidence was compiled, Broome sought to lay to rest three key criticisms of his conduct by Irving. The first of these centred upon the easterly course upon which Broome had re-routed the convoy. On 3 July, the Admiralty sent out a signal instructing the convoy to pass at least fifty miles to the north of Bear Island. Having received an earlier report from the Admiralty that the summer limit of the Arctic ice edge was further north than previously anticipated, Hamilton proposed that Broome take advantage of the increased sea room and route the convoy further to the north, which would take it further out of range of the German bombers stationed along the Norwegian coast. Instead, Broome opted to pursue a more easterly route; a decision which Irving's account condemned as disobedience of Hamilton's instructions, asserting that the destroyer captain had deliberately 'chosen not to carry out' his instructions.[63] Although the historian stopped just shy of using the term 'mutiny', his appraisal indicted Broome as a maverick commander. Under naval discipline, ignoring an order was a serious charge and Broome's memoir thus took especial pains to justify his actions. Much of this defence rested on the difficulties of navigation in such close proximity to the Arctic Circle, which led to some positional discrepancies. In addition, Broome was reluctant to amend course too far northward, as every eight miles that the convoy travelled in this direction would add another two hours onto the voyage time: 'our target', he acerbically commented, 'was Archangel, not the North Pole'.[64] In his view, any lengthening of the voyage significantly increased the risk to the convoy. Broome further explained that, with regard to the potential threat of enemy aircraft, he had exercised his own judgement:

> with long endurance shadowers present to home attacking aircraft it seemed to me to make very little difference from the point of view of air attack whether an 8-knot convoy was 300 or 500 miles from enemy aerodromes.[65]

He also maintained that escort commanders had 'learnt the hard way' when to take the advice of senior 'spectators', and that all these thoughts had been in his mind when

[63] Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter CAC), The Papers of Jackie Broome, BRME 5/1, Statement of Claim Against David Irving, 11 May 1970.
[64] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 130.
[65] Ibid., p. 130.

routing the convoy past Bear Island on 3 July.[66] Immediately, therefore, his memoir set in motion the former officer's defence that reliance upon his own judgement was central to ensuring the safety of the convoy.

Irving's second criticism revolved around a sequence of three Admiralty signals received within the space of half an hour by PQ17 and its covering cruiser force. These were the messages that, in Broome's words, 'between them changed PQ17 from a convoy with its chin well up, into a shambles.'[67] The critical signals read thus:

> 9.11 pm. MOST IMMEDIATE: Cruiser Force withdraw to westward at high speed.
>
> 9.23 pm. IMMEDIATE: Owing to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports.
>
> 9.36 pm. MOST IMMEDIATE: Convoy is to scatter.

Irving contended that the third signal was 'essentially a correction' of the second and did not imply an immediate German surface force threat. [68] However, read in conjunction with previous information transmitted to CS1 and PQ17 about the Admiralty's concern that German heavy surface forces might have put to sea to intercept the convoy, the effect of each these signals implied to Broome that his shore-based superiors expected the masts of the *Tirpitz* to appear on the horizon at any second. Furthermore, Broome noted that whilst entirely logical for history books to group the three signals together in order to examine their aggregate effect, this approach bore little relation to how the officer at 'the sharp end' interpreted their meaning: 'while cumulative effects are in the making', he emphasised, 'you don't know what is coming next.'[69] *Convoy is to Scatter* especially maintained that due to contemporary naval discipline and policy, the historian's latter reading of the signals was not feasible:

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[66] Ibid., p. 130.
[67] Ibid., p. 173.
[68] CAC, BRME 5/1, Statement of Claim Against David Irving, 11 May 1970.
[69] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 179.

> The order to SCATTER is the prerogative of the senior man on the spot when, and only when, an overwhelming force attacks his convoy, which would be more difficult to massacre spread out than if it remained concentrated. It is the last straw, the 'sauve qui peut' [every man for himself] and it is, of course, irrevocable.[70]

Broome described the effect of receiving this 'scatter' order as like 'an electric shock'.[71] He explained that the signals conveyed a 'crescendo of priority' that implied that the Admiralty knew for certain that the merchant ships would be safer alone than remaining with the convoy. Despite recalling that the shock of the order rendered him 'hot and angry', he nevertheless maintained that he saw no reason to question the signals.[72] According to his memoir, he was quite simply left with no other option than to trust that the Admiralty had sufficient reason to give this order. Broome therefore asserted that Irving's conclusion that he had misinterpreted the signals was extraordinarily unfair, given that the prevailing circumstances did not allow for a different reading.

The third, and most damning, criticism of Broome's conduct in Irving's account centred upon the former's conduct once the convoy had initiated the process of scattering. Irving was extremely critical of Broome's decision to take his six destroyers to join Hamilton's cruiser force, leaving the rest of the escort and the merchantmen to fend for themselves. His censure was founded upon the signal Broome sent to the rest of his escort group and the convoy: 'Convoy to scatter and proceed to Russian Ports. Escorts, negative Destroyers, proceed independently to Archangel.' According to Irving, instructing the remaining escort vessels to proceed independently meant that the merchant ships were thus 'stripped of their last protection', and so abandoned to their fate.[73] Broome strongly objected to the historian's representation of this so-called 'terrible mistake', and his memoir provides a very different portrayal

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[70] Ibid., p. 182. Instructions to 'disperse' and to 'scatter' were two very different procedures. To 'disperse' meant that the merchant ships would break formation and proceed onward, but would remain close together for a time. To 'scatter' meant that the convoy would instantaneously break out into a pre-arranged pattern – in the case of PQ17 this was fanwise – and put as much distance between each other as rapidly as possible in order to present less of a target to the enemy surface forces. The 'scatter' order was very much a last resort.
[71] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 182.
[72] Ibid., p. 182
[73] CAC, BRME 5/1, Statement of Claim Against David Irving, 11 May 1970.

of events.[74] He argued that the situation which confronted the 1st Escort Group had never been envisaged, and so it was unclear precisely what the escort was supposed to do. 'They couldn't', he reasoned, 'be left mooning around the Barents Sea with no convoy to escort.'[75] He thus insisted that in the context of naval doctrine in 1942, the order to 'proceed independently' in this sense meant to 'proceed independently of *Keppel*' as opposed to independently of the remnants of the convoy. Thereafter, the rest of the merchant ships would come under the command of the most senior escort ship remaining.[76] Meanwhile, the six destroyers were instructed to join *Keppel* and link up with Hamilton's cruisers in order to engage the supposedly approaching surface forces. It was at this juncture that the close proximity of the covering cruiser force to the escort group became, explained Broome, something of a problem. Rapidly picking up speed and turning to the south-west, Hamilton's cruisers gave the distinct impression that they were racing to intercept the enemy. According to Broome, his next (and most criticised) signal was triggered entirely by this sudden movement of the cruisers. Described by the Commander as 'more an instinctive act on my part than a cold-blooded decision', he sent a signal to Hamilton: 'Propose Close Escort Destroyers join you', which was curtly accepted. The rationale behind this signal, Broome expounded, was that there seemed little point in wasting precious time by watching the cruisers head off to meet the enemy, and then have to catch up with them to help out. This, he believed, would also have the effect of neutralising the threat to the scattering convoy.

Five hours after the convoy was ordered to scatter, the Admiralty sent a further signal announcing that it was now not certain that the German heavy ships were at sea. Although the merchant ships were by then thoroughly distributed across the Barents Sea, Broome expected that Hamilton would order *Keppel* and the other destroyers back to round up as many remnants of the convoy as they could find, hinting to the Admiral that this was where the destroyers' duty lay.[77] Hamilton, however, maintained radio silence for almost eighteen hours, during which time Broome argued that the dispersing convoy became irretrievable: 'Had we been sent back an hour – or even two

[74] Ibid.
[75] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 191.
[76] Ibid., p. 191.
[77] Ibid., p. 213

– after scattering, with sheep-dog aggression and cunning we stood a chance of revoking the irrevocable order to scatter.'[78] Nevertheless, when Hamilton broke his lengthy silence, Broome requested to go back and salvage what he could of the remnants of the convoy, even though he estimated that he was now some 400 miles from the scattering position, and each merchant ship must have travelled about 150 miles from it following a variety of individual courses.[79] Nevertheless, he insists that he was willing to attempt to recover the convoy: 'to all of us at the time', he wrote, 'it seemed the obvious next move.'[80] Irving, however, further impugned Broome's actions here, claiming that the latter only wanted to return to collect the other escort vessels – there was, Irving declared, 'no mention of the merchant ships'.[81] Yet Broome's memoir conveys a deep sense of anguish at being forced to leave the rest of PQ17 behind, and he records his distress at hearing over the radio 'the pathetic cries for help which continued to come limping in from dying merchant ships.'[82]

Irving continued his attack on Broome, contending that he alone bore responsibility for the fate of the convoy:

> the point of no return was at Commander J.E. Broome's withdrawal of his escort destroyers on his own initiative, and not in Hamilton's refusal to send them back to what would have been almost certain destruction.[83]

The Commander strongly countered that he never, 'as some Historians, even the Prime Minister [Churchill],' stated, 'withdrew' from PQ17.[84] The description of his actions as 'withdrawing' from the merchant ships, thus implying that he abandoned them, particularly stung the memoirist. This representation, he argued, was 'misleading': under threat of heavy surface attack, the destroyers switched from a defensive to an offensive role. The convoy itself had ceased to exist the instant the 'scatter' order was received.[85]

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[78] Ibid., p. 214.
[79] Ibid., p. 215.
[80] Ibid., p. 215.
[81] CAC, BRME 5/1, Statement of Claim Against David Irving, 11 May 1970.
[82] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 215.
[83] CAC, BRME 5/1, Statement of Claim Against David Irving, 11 May 1970.
[84] Broome, *Convoy is to Scatter*, p. 214.
[85] Ibid., p. 214.

Clearly abiding by the principle that the best defence is a good offence, Broome put forward his own trenchant views of where culpability for the destruction of PQ17 lay. In contrast to Irving's account, his memoir refuted that either of the officers 'on the spot' ought to bear the overall blame for the disaster. The absolute faith that naval officers were required to place in their senior, shore-based commanders was, he proposed, a far more integral component of the destruction of PQ17 than the actions of those at sea. Indeed, on 25 June 1942, he had received a signal which asserted that since commanders afloat were unlikely to possess much depth of information about the enemy's movements, it would therefore be necessary for the Admiralty to exercise shore-based control over those of the convoy.[86] The reins of command of PQ17 were thus in the firm grip of Admiralty hands, and officers at sea were forced to assume that their distant superiors were better appraised of a situation than they could be. For the senior officers to whom the immediate safety of the convoy was entrusted, this was a most uneasy situation, and Broome's narrative insists that this was where responsibility for the tragedy should rightfully be allocated: 'PQ17 was just another splendid convoy, ploughing along with no claim whatever to history or fiction until those signals arrived from the Admiralty.'[87] He believed, however, that the latter had never been held fully accountable: 'A lot of whitewash and criticism has followed in the wake of this disaster, with the whitewash mainly confined to the end of the story carrying the Top Brass.'[88] Reiterating that his conviction that it was the 'Convoy is to scatter' signal which triggered the doom of PQ17, the memoirist avowed that the 'responsibility for what actually did happen must therefore rest on the shoulders of the man who gave that order and his advisers.'[89]

The case of 'Broome versus History' which this narrative encapsulated thus depicts a veteran's intention to use memoir to challenge and inform historical accounts and contemporary public understandings of a wartime controversy which threatened to misrepresent the events in question and damage his own reputation. Broome plainly

[86] Ibid., pp. 110-111.
[87] Ibid., p. 229.
[88] Ibid., p. 229.
[89] Ibid., p. 230.

felt he had been cast unfairly as a scapegoat for the demise of the convoy, and it is enlightening that, despite winning his legal battle over scholarly representation of PQ17, the veteran further opted to broadcast his defence in the form of a war memoir, which he clearly viewed as a powerful public platform. By putting his side of the story in the public domain, Broome visibly hoped that *Convoy is to Scatter* would rescue his good name and permanently close the case of PQ17 in the court of historical opinion.

Summary: Memoir as a 'Vector of Memory'

As the narratives in these case studies demonstrate, memoir was deployed as a public site of contest from which to challenge unsatisfactory representations of a war which many veterans regarded through a lens of possessiveness. In all three case studies here, the authors crafted their memoirs with the specific intention of salvaging the reputations of individuals, units and strategies that they felt history, and collective memory, had maligned. Driving their roles as 'vectors of memory', these memoirs functioned as the ultimate 'survivor's song': by virtue of his own combat role and survival, the memoirist could lay claim to a singular authority to speak for a conflict which he perceived as 'his'. Through a process of self-selection, therefore, veteran-memoirists such as Broome, Bowlby and Tripp assumed a role as gatekeepers of military memory in the public domain. As their narratives separately and collectively affirm, as far as the veteran was concerned, the publication of his personal testimony represented a final word on the subject of the Second World War.

CONCLUSION

[W]e all need help understanding the most vital and valuable documents available about the human experience of war and the military.[1]

As this thesis has demonstrated, understanding the veteran's process of 'remembering with advantages' is key to unlocking the full value of the post-war published military memoir as a historical source. In *Henry V*, Shakespeare memorably proclaimed that old men might forget much about their lives, but the details of combat would be long remembered by former soldiers. Although expressed somewhat theatrically, his claim that 'all shall be forgot,/ But he'll remember with advantages/ What feats he did that day' has a remarkable resonance in the narratives of British Second World War veterans.[2] For these men, 'remembering with advantages' was rooted in the fact that they had survived into middle and old age when so many of their wartime comrades had not. To their survival was thus attached the benefit of hindsight, an opportunity to reflect upon their combat experiences and to ascribe meaning to them. A war memoir offered a vital tool through which to reassemble and reassess these experiences and, as such, poses considerable 'advantage' not only to the veteran himself, but also to the historian of warfare. As this thesis has established, for the latter, published war memoirs operate as unique repositories of evidence about the ways in which men lived, remembered, understood, and communicated their experiences of combat between 1939 and 1945.

As Rear-Admiral Rupert Sherbrooke recognised in Graeme Ogden's narrative, *My Sea Lady*, by depicting the combatant's 'personal reactions' to war, these books provide unique accounts of the medley of 'human factors' which comprised the experience of battle.[3] Here, he echoed the sentiments of S.L.A. Marshall, who wrote in 1947 that during the Second World War 'we learned anew that man is supreme, that it is the soldier who fights who wins battles, that fighting means using a weapon, and that it is the heart of man which controls its use.'[4] He argued that the post-war world

[1] Vernon, *Arms and the Self*, p. x.
[2] Shakespeare, *Henry V*, p. 491.
[3] Sherbrooke, foreword to *My Sea Lady*, p. 9.
[4] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 23.

was already on the point of forgetting the importance of the man as combatant. In 1997, John Keegan also lamented that, habitually, the 'military historian's man in uniform bore no resemblance to the man in the street. He was a being without family or friends, without future or past, without values… The traditional military historian's *homo pugnans* seemed a being different and separate'.[5] The memoirs of British Second World War frontline personnel suggest that their authors felt the same way and desired to cement the human identity of combatants into the historical record. For example, although acknowledging that the grander narratives of military historians are perhaps inevitably 'dehumanised' due to the sheer scale of their purview, George Macdonald Fraser commented that 'With all military histories it is necessary to remember that war is not a matter of maps with red and blue arrows and oblongs, but of weary, thirsty men with sore feet and aching shoulders wondering where they are'.[6] Similarly, Ray Ward expressed doubts about the value of official histories of campaigns and battles which were often written by 'expert' former high-ranking officers. Noting that he had written his own memoir with the specific intention of providing a counter-narrative to these types of accounts, Ward remained sceptical about the ability of the latter to convey the reality of experience on the frontline accurately:

> Official histories, written by senior commanders who may have had a troubled conscience about some incidents, and encounters so disturbing that they were sanitised, or overlaid by a false or mistaken interpretation more acceptable to self-esteem, rarely tell the full story. What strikes me is their frequency of bald references… No mention of the fear and panic, the pain and suffering, the blood and guts – realities that tend to be taboo in such accounts, as they are in the officers' mess, and at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day. Only those who were on the spot – junior officers, non-commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers – know the full horror between the lines of such laconic, evasive statements: the horror that haunts every infantryman who survived it.[7]

By rights, Macdonald Fraser mused, 'each official work should have a companion volume in which the lowliest actor gives his version… it would at least give posterity a sense of perspective.'[8] The memoirs of Second World War veterans arguably serve as these 'companion volumes', focusing upon what Marshall defines as 'the simplest

[5] Keegan, 'Towards a Theory of Combat Motivation', p. 5.
[6] Macdonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, pp. xi – xii.
[7] Ward, *The Mirror of Monte Cavallara*, pp. 17-18.
[8] Macdonald Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here*, p. xi.

and most complex topic in the military art – man himself as a figure on the field of combat.'[9] In so doing, they put flesh on the skeleton of battle.

These memoirs are thus to be prized because, as Samuel Hynes observed, 'If we would understand humankind's most violent episodes, we must understand them humanly, in the lives of individuals.'[10] The post-war narratives written by these men tell us not only 'what war was like', but also how battle appeared from the perspective of former combatants. In so doing, they offer a new depth of insight into the experience of battle as it endures in a veteran's mind throughout his lifetime. In line with the first research aim of this study, this thesis, through a discussion of the 'personal reactions' of the authors to the landscapes in which they operated, the machines with which they fought, and the men against, and with, whom they did battle, argues that this grants us an understanding of the ways in which ex-aircrew, sailors, tank crew, and infantrymen retrospectively interpreted their own responses to combat, and the literary representations through which they chose to communicate these perceptions. The language and images selected by these men to describe their war experiences therefore reveal something important, not just about the actual experience of battle itself, but also what it meant in retrospect to those who fought it. In its assessment of the recorded 'personal reactions' of former combatants to battle during the Second World War, this thesis furthers understandings of how that war lived on in the recollections of its veterans.

This thesis has therefore adopted an expanded approach to war memoir, in which these documents are interrogated as 'what can be made of remembered war.'[11] Addressing the second research aim of this project, and pursuing questions of 'why and how' veterans made the decision to turn their 'remembered war' into a narrative, it is possible further to open up understandings of the lasting import of battle to combatants. It is perhaps self-evident to conclude that the experience of fighting in the Second World War had been so significant to these men that they quite simply did not want their war to be forgotten, but it is such a fundamental truth that it bears reiterating. As we have seen, former rear air gunner, Jim Davis, voiced the sentiments of many

[9] Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, p. 26.
[10] Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. xvi.
[11] Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration', p. 205.

veteran-memoirists when he proclaimed that 'we all have to make an imprint and, if possible, have to leave behind us a memory of ourselves, or something we have accomplished in the minds of other people.'[12] Through the inscription of combat in published narrative form, these veterans were able to make a wider-reaching, permanent, 'imprint' of their experiences, and their memoirs were consequently designed to operate in several specific ways in the public domain. They were driven by an imperative to create a historical record that would serve as a literary memorial to the fallen, but also to inform 'those who wanted to know what it was like'.[13] These books were thus intended simultaneously to educate, to entertain, and to warn against repeating the folly of war. They were further crafted in order to transform their authors into guardians of memory, operating as sites from which the memoirists could claim a degree of control over scholarly, official and cultural remembrance of the Second World War.

In an appraisal of these sources, it is also imperative to recognise the private, as well as the public, intention and function of memoir. Writing allowed memoirists to process their war experiences and they could either relive enjoyable moments of comradeship, or seek catharsis and a measure of solace from grief or psychological trauma. Furthermore, as well as a record of experience, autobiographical writing proffered a mirror in which an individual could gaze at his own image. The narrative act allowed the author to plot his wartime experiences in a linear fashion, granting him an opportunity to identify and assess the impact of war upon his own identity. Inevitably, this confers upon the war memoir some facets of the *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education which is set in the formative years of the main character, and charts the development of the protagonist's adult self. Traditionally, the *Bildungsroman's* central character attains maturity by becoming enlightened about his position in the world around him, and important elements of this voyage of self-discovery characterise the memoirs of the Second World War veterans. The implications of this are demonstrated by fighter pilot Hugh Dundas, who deployed the unique privileges of retrospection granted by memoir-writing to reflect on the ways in which his youthful self had imagined the approaching experience of first combat. His very first operation

[12] Davis, *Winged Victory*, p. 85.
[13] Bowlby, *Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, p. 222.

was to protect the remnants of the British Expeditionary Force on the beaches of Dunkirk in late May/early June 1940. In his narrative, *Flying Start* (1988), a poignant scene is depicted in the officers' mess shortly before takeoff:

> I was alone in the wash room. I talked out loud to my reflection in a mirror on the wall. 'Well, Hughie,' I said to myself, 'you couldn't insure your life now, for love nor money.' I said it several times over, because I thought it sounded rather dramatic.[14]

Although he described this one-way conversation with himself as both 'trite' and 'trivial', the author mused that his present-day older self found this snapshot of memory 'enlightening', perceiving it as indicative that he had been 'aware of the fact that two months before my twentieth birthday, sudden death was an imminent possibility.' Of particular interest to Dundas, however, was the realisation that his youthful expectations of the approaching battle had been conditioned by specific cultural references, such as juvenile literature and films: 'it shows me facing this knowledge with a cliché, *Boy's Own Paper* style. Even in that grave moment I still saw Errol Flynn looking over my shoulder in the mirror.'[15] As the memoirist ruefully acknowledged, his first taste of combat bore very little resemblance to the heroic martial experience about which he had fantasised, and he found himself 'close to panic in the bewilderment and hot fear of that first dog fight.'[16] 'That', he recorded, 'is the inglorious story of my first brush with the enemy':

> It is all quite fresh in my mind, when I like to turn on the tap of memory… And I can conjure up in my mind and in the pit of my stomach the nasty sickening feel and taste of my first real experience of fear. This unheroic introduction to war was very different from the way I had imagined it would be – and, indeed, was rather different in some points of detail from the way I described it next day in a letter to my mother, discovered among her papers some forty years later.[17]

Yet despite this unremarkable performance, Dundas interpreted the experience of combat as an essential rite of passage:

> I was transformed, Walter Mitty-like: now a debonair young fighter pilot, rising twenty, proud and delighted that he had fired his gun in a real dog-fight,

[14] Dundas, *Flying Start*, p. 23.
[15] Ibid., p. 23.
[16] Ibid., p. 2.
[17] Ibid., p. 3.

> even though he had not hit anything, sat in the cockpit which had so recently been occupied by a frightened child and taxied in to the dispersal point, where excited ground crew waited to hear the news of battle.[18]

Other memoirists shared this view that battle had represented a portal into manhood and discussion of this transformation is studded throughout the testimonies of Second World War veterans. The narrative act thus allowed these men to chart the development of their own constructions of martial masculinity and identity, and to assess the role of war in shaping that sense of self. As Dundas's example indicates, therefore, these narratives offer considerable scope to further explore their authors' 'personal reactions' to war as a liminal rite.

Finally, war memoirs are a most precious asset to the study of warfare because, separately and collectively, they relate the cyclical 'human' story of men at war, charting the serviceman's transition from civilian to combatant to veteran and his return to civilian. As has been argued in this thesis, recognition of this allows us to evaluate published military memoirs as an important source of evidence about what Hynes terms the 'two stories of war': 'the things men do in war' and the 'things war does to them'.[19] Through his construction of a narrative account that imposed order, shape and coherency upon experience, the veteran reveals the legacy of combat upon his body, mind and identity. Beyond the historical value of such testimonies, it is also clear that they have a cultural resonance. In recent years, public awareness of the plight of veterans from recent wars has steadily expanded, thanks to a diverse variety of institutions, including veteran-led conferences hosted by 'Veteran to Veteran', the ceaseless efforts of charities such as the Royal British Legion and 'Help for Heroes', and the unprecedented creation of a 'Scottish Veterans Commissioner' in 2014. It is therefore surely more important than ever for us to understand and cherish 'the most vital and valuable documents available about the human experience of war and the military.'

[18] Ibid., p. 3.
[19] Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. 3.

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