

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN GENDER AND HISTORY

Men After War

Edited by
Stephen McVeigh
and Nicola Cooper

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and Nicola Cooper**

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Men After War

This book is an innovative collection of original research which analyzes the many varieties of post-conflict masculinity. Exploring topics such as physical disability and psychological trauma, and masculinity and sexuality in relation to the “feminizing” contexts of wounding and desertion, this volume draws together leading academics in the fields of gender, history, literature, and disability studies, in an inter- and multi-disciplinary exploration of the conditions and circumstances that men face in the aftermath of war.

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1 Introduction

Men After War

Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper

On 9 August 2012, Angus Stickler of the BBC Newsnight program and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported that the British military charity *Help for Heroes* had been criticized by some of the UK's wounded troops for spending money on capital building projects rather than the care of former servicemen and women.¹ Debate over the charity's activities in the British press brings to the fore questions which have been a perennial concern for both states and their institutions and their former service personnel. In the aftermath of conflict, how are former service personnel perceived by state and society on their return from the conflict zone? Who bears responsibility for the care of men and women injured in the service of the nation? This public debate occurred despite the existence of the Armed Forces Covenant, which sets out the terms of the relationship between the nation and its armed forces, and the obligations the nation owes to military personnel. The covenant has existed as an unwritten social and moral commitment between the state and the Armed Forces that has developed through long-standing convention and customs.² Although it currently has no legal basis, it implies that in return for the sacrifices that service personnel make, the state has an obligation to recognize that contribution and retain a long-term duty of care toward service personnel and their families. Criticisms over the last few years that the Military Covenant was being steadily eroded has prompted a series of welfare-related measures intended to improve the terms and conditions of service personnel, their families and the treatment of veterans. Upon taking office in May 2010, the government outlined a commitment to "work to rebuild the Military Covenant" which would include the writing of a new Tri-Service Covenant. In June 2010 the Prime Minister, David Cameron, also pledged to enshrine the principles of the Military Covenant in law. On 16 May 2011 the government published the first Armed Forces Covenant and a document outlining the measures it intended to put in place over the next few years in order to support that covenant. The government also announced its intention to amend the Armed Forces Bill, which is currently in the House of Commons, in order to enshrine the principles of the covenant in law.³

In spite of these moves to improve the lot of former service personnel, the BBC investigation uncovered complaints that *Help for Heroes* was subsidizing multi-million-pound Ministry of Defence building projects, when such money was needed for practical everyday help for injured service personnel and veterans. Injured troops and their families claimed that despite extra government money and the hundreds of millions of pounds raised by military charities every year, they were still not receiving the help they require. The investigation uncovered examples of wounded veterans having to pay for physiotherapy and for prosthetic limbs, reports of amputees with ill-fitting prostheses being told to pad their stumps with multiple pairs of socks and a black veteran who was initially issued with a white prosthetic hand. Harris Tatakis, a former corporal in the Royal Marines stated

I gave 13 years of my life to serving and I just feel like the moment you're injured that's it, you're seen as a burden. You feel throughout you're having to beg to get what you want, or to get fixed. It's a very degrading process to go through.

What is interesting about the public debate surrounding the investigation's findings is that it highlights not only pragmatic issues, such as the level of care accorded to veterans of conflict in return for their sacrifice, but it also raises questions concerning the status of men after war, their identities, their sense of their own, changed, masculinity and their relationship with the nation and society at large. It is this nexus of issues which the present volume will investigate.

MASCULINITIES AND MILITARISM

Men After War is a collection that seeks to explore masculinities in the aftermath of military combat. The connected issues of gender and masculinities have received significant scholarly attention in recent decades which has revealed a rich terrain of academic inquiry. This critical thinking in masculinities has been fruitfully applied to the particular condition of the soldier.⁴ Writers who have developed analyses of masculinity have suggested that there exists a prevailing masculine identity (hegemonic masculinity) to which males are generally encouraged to aspire.⁵ For many of these writers, this form of masculinity is characterized by precisely the same sort of qualities, traits and values which are prized by military institutions: "by the interrelationship of stoicism, phallocentricity, and the domination of weaker individuals, competitiveness, and heroic achievement."⁶ Further, military organizations endorse and reinforce these particular models of masculinity through rituals, pageantry and commemorations which represent the public endorsement of such values and their institutionalization in national culture.⁷ A burgeoning literature has subsequently emerged which

focuses in the first instance on military masculinities: explorations of the ways in which male identities are bound up with concepts of manly virtues, codes of honor and national values. This was led in part by the notion that military masculinity represented an idealized apogee of male identity. As Graham Dawson has observed, the soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions.⁸ Similarly, in characterizing ‘manly virtues’ as “will, power, honor, courage”, Mosse asserted that “the warrior provides a climax to a concept of manliness inherent in much of the construction of modern masculinity”.^{9,10}

But, as Higate and Hopton note, the relation between militarism and masculinity is also a symbiotic one:

Historically, there has been a reciprocal relationship between militarism and masculinity. On the one hand, politicians have utilized ideologies of idealized masculinity that valorize the notion of strong active males collectively risking their personal safety for the greater good of the wider community to gain support for the use of violence by the state [. . .] On the other hand, militarism feeds into ideologies of masculinity through the eroticization of stoicism, risk-taking, and even lethal violence.¹¹

Research in this field has been concerned with the ways in which society has adopted, absorbed and re-circulated soldier paradigms and indeed the extent to which “military masculinities are embedded into discourses of nationalism.”¹² Heroic military narratives have been given a particular inflection in discourses of the nation generated since the emergence of the nation-state. Intimately bound up with the foundation and preservation of a national territory, the deeds of military heroes were invested with the new significance of serving the country and glorifying its name. Soldiers not only represented the nation in arms, but they were also seen as the embodiment of national character and values. The soldier is a national avatar, a foundational figure and is evocative of the history, self-image and identity of the nation. He often functions as a point of origin from whence the myth of a community may spring. The figure of the soldier has thus evolved across time and national community in response to changing national narratives and reconfigured national and global identities.¹³ Among its most important contributions, this volume explores how these conditions persist once war is over, to consider the ways in which the associations and meanings wrapped up in the man as soldier are modified by the transition to the man as veteran.

While much published work on the soldier has concerned itself primarily with the ways in which the citizen can be transformed into a warrior, the (until quite recently) peculiarly homosocial realm of armies and combat and the unique experience of war, less work has been undertaken in the realm

of 'post-soldiering', or what we have in the present volume termed 'men after war'. While there exists an abundant specialist sociological literature on the medical and psychological repercussions of wars on veterans, there has thus far been less work beyond these fields. Some studies have dealt with the capacity of war to challenge and overturn accepted social norms and conventions of manliness. Attention has, for example, been paid to war's very capacity to 'un-man', be this through physical or psychological injury: trauma, shellshock, disability or wounding.¹⁴ Much work has thus addressed the central question of the body of the man at war.¹⁵ A pioneering work in this field is of course Bourke's *Dismembering the Male* (1996), which examines the effects of the Great War, and of military experience in general, on men of different classes and ages and their gender identities. Bourke's chapters illustrate the themes which emerge from the study of men's own accounts of their war experience: mutilating, malingering, bonding, inspecting and re-memembering.

THE TRAUMATIZED VETERAN

What emerges from both the sociological and the less prevalent cultural studies work is an emphasis on the man after war as a traumatized and problematic figure and social actor. Sociological literatures have tended to foreground the difficulties experienced by men re-entering society after combat, to emphasize the list of social ills such as alcoholism, criminality and homelessness common among former servicemen and to identify the frequency of trauma and other mental health problems and their various treatments.¹⁶ By way of illustration, recent studies reveal that more Falklands veterans are believed to have committed suicide than were killed in the fighting in 1982. They also demonstrate that, in Britain in 2012, 20,000 ex-servicemen are in jail or on probation.¹⁷

While the need to care for wounded former service personnel has provided a catalyst for innovations in prosthetics, orthopedics and surgery, society has been less well-equipped to deal with the psychological impact of war and conflict. It is important to note that although the concept of shellshock was observed in the men fighting in WWI, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was only formally recognized in 1980. Thinking has changed recently in relation to the treatment of PTSD: as Jones and Wessely have observed, one key debate surrounding PTSD is whether or not each war engenders its own unique form of trauma.¹⁸

Changes in the ways in which wars are waged over time, whether these changes are technological or strategic, have meant that soldiers and veterans have been variously affected, with every new war creating new dimensions and definitions of physical and psychological trauma. In turn, such changes have provoked advances in medical technology with further consequence for men and society after war. The extensive use of the improvised

explosive device (IED) in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003 provides a useful illustration. While body armor and newly designed vehicles tried to counter the risk of IEDs, the military also changed its approach to treating those injured by the bombs. As a result, American soldiers wounded in Iraq had a better chance of survival than in any previous U.S. war, with more than 90% coming home compared to around 76% in the Vietnam conflict. However, improvements in medical technologies have increased and complicated the dilemmas not only for those injured as a result of war but also for those treating and subsequently caring for them. Gross describes how the principles of contemporary just war, unlike those of medical ethics, often go beyond the welfare of the individual to consider the collective interests of combatants and non-combatants and the general interests of the state. Military necessity, it is argued, plays havoc with patients' rights such as the right to life, the right to medical care, informed consent, confidentiality and the right to die. The principles of triage in battle conditions dictate not need-based treatment but the distribution of resources that will return the greatest number of soldiers to active duty.

Thus, there emerges a conventionality to thinking about men after war: the veteran is the man who survives war, and that survival is usually secured at a price; he has invariably suffered some measure of trauma, be it physical and/or psychological. Society's role is to decide how best to 're-normalize' the traumatized and how to create of the injured or disabled a re-functioning citizen. This is not a new phenomenon: several chapters in this volume attest to societies' historical need to minimize the visible scars of war and to re-form masculine identities disabled or disfigured by war. The prevalence of this scholarly emphasis on military trauma has tended to concretize the image of the veteran as a damaged loner suffering from flashbacks, nightmares, anger and depression, symptoms often leading to violence, alcohol and substance abuse, job loss, family breakdown and even suicide. This association between ex-servicemen and socially unwelcome patterns of behavior recurs in this volume's chapters, demonstrating that the dilemmas regarding the social cost of the veteran have been a perennial and ongoing concern. Many discourses then, both past and contemporary, primarily figure the veteran as a member of a disturbed and socially disadvantaged underclass. The conferral of veteranhood in these discourses can therefore become a stigma, and the ways in which society mitigates the effects of war upon the individual, the way society engages with the veteran and, subsequently, how the veteran responds to these societal contexts are dominant themes in this volume.

DESERVING AND UNDESERVING VETERANS

If the idea that war profoundly affects the individual is now universally accepted, the dimensions of the relationship between society and veteran

remains complex and contested. Society's understanding of the veteran has not been constant. In earlier historical periods, the veteran, far from being a socially problematic figure with an uncertain role or identity, was highly valued as a military professional. Geoffrey Parker observes that veterans "had already mastered the trade of arms and become professional soldiers. Such men often passed, at high wages, from one army to another as opportunity or occasion called".¹⁹ The idea that war was a traumatic intrusion on normal life was not historically orthodox. Rather, war was more commonly understood as simply a given in the universe, a natural element of existence, and as such, all men existed in anticipation of a state of war, as demanded by his feudal lord, king or god. A key watershed in our modern conception of the veteran was WWI and the evolution of the concept of shellshock. Indeed war was, until WWI, commonly considered a rite of passage, an element of a man's education. Literary studies have charted the collision of the idealization of soldiering and war and the chaotic, random reality of modern, total war in the writing of the 1910s and 1920s, especially in relation to the group of American writers, including Ernest Hemingway, e. e. cummings and John Dos Passos, labeled the Lost Generation by Gertrude Stein.²⁰ A number of the chapters in this volume explore such pre-WWI examples of war and veteranhood by considering earlier wars and their aftermaths in light of more contemporary theoretical perspectives of trauma.

Some literatures have addressed the importance of the legal definition of the veteran in terms not only of the individual's identity and status but also in terms of the access that individual is then accorded to social aid and benefits. The individual fights for society and fights on society's behest and behalf, and this creates reciprocal responsibilities, as the Armed Forces Covenant acknowledges. Nonetheless, as Dandeker et al. have stated, definitions of veteran vary depending on whether the user is a government agency, engaged in determining who does and does not qualify for receipt of support and services due to their military standing, or wider publics who may have different views on what ex-service members need to have accomplished in order to be considered as deserving of veteran status.²¹

Innovations in medical science mean that survival rates among the most severely wounded have increased, but this benefit comes at a significant price: the subsequent high level of care and therapy needed by these men is enormously expensive, resulting in large social costs. While, on the one hand, it has been contended that a culture of "Good bye and good luck" and "farewell and neglect" has characterized British civil-military relations, an argument which was reiterated in recent debates over the charity *Help for Heroes*; on the other hand, the veteran tends to be regarded as a highly prized figure in public culture.²² Thus, while institutionally he may be abandoned, in cultural discourse, he acquires status. This is a contrasting paradigm which becomes visible owing to the emergence of a public culture of remembrance following, particularly, WWI.²³

This culture, and indeed cult, of remembrance has both added layers of meaning to the figure of the veteran, and depending on his national historical context, has made of him a saint or savior (and sometimes, a villain or victim). However, the fallen have tended to take precedence over the survivors in terms of this public remembering and valuing military contributions. This has become evident in the disjunction apparent between the public ceremony explicit in the Wootton Bassett phenomenon and the more recent complaints regarding inadequate treatment for injured service personnel.²⁴ The commemoration of the dead has taken precedence, in public culture, over the care of the injured.

The veteran narrative is not straightforward, and the position of the veteran in society is prone to significant variation. This variation is fundamentally connected to the location of a given war within a national narrative. The wars of the twentieth century have produced generations of veterans, connected in their experience of combat. It is in the aftermath of war that the nature of their social status as veterans diverges because wars are interpreted. Judgments are made on what constitutes victory and defeat and heroism and atrocity, and the veteran is apt to become the symbol of his war in this process. The veteran, then, can be a figure to be celebrated, but he can also be reviled, depending upon the context of his war, and a number of chapters in this collection examine the ways in which societies grapple with defeat, loss and occupation through the figure of the veteran. The soldier and veteran have both been deployed by nations as tools of political and cultural hegemony, utilized in order to justify and perpetuate a status quo, and as a unitary figure, a centripetal point around which the forces of a diverse and potentially divided nation coalesce. However, the veteran can also serve to undermine apparently stable discourses concerning national institutions and national character. The veteran possesses the ability to unsettle, or refuse reassurance, and has the potential to undermine the ideals proposed by national mythmaking. Thus, the veteran can figure as an uncomfortable or disturbing reminder.

ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITIES AFTER WAR

While the above demonstrates that the veteran dominates our view of what constitutes men after war, there are multiple alternative masculine identities which merit further consideration, as the chapters in this volume delineate. The difficulty in classifying the veteran has become all the more apparent in recent conflicts in which it has become more and more difficult to distinguish between combat and non-combat roles in the military. As Morgan has noted, combat and non-combat "is a dynamic and fluid distinction, and individuals may move between these military positions according to circumstances."²⁵ Equally, through advances in weapon technology, the soldier is now often distanced from the site of destruction

which makes him now less of a warrior and more of a technician. Further blurring the distinction between military and the civilian is the fact that people may inflict considerable damage without being in physical danger themselves or may be exposed to great risk without directly encountering the enemy. Military debates and research in international relations have highlighted these dilemmas in positing models which distinguish 'warfighters' from 'peacekeepers' and others who act in counter-insurgency roles. Research has shown, nonetheless, how difficult it is to uncouple the idea of the soldier from that of the conqueror; legacies of imperialism tend to linger in the humanitarianist view and practice of First World peacekeeping.²⁶ Ian Roberts' chapter, in particular, shows that feelings of emasculation should not be viewed as pertaining solely to combatants or ex-combatants who suffer injury: his analysis of peacekeeping films reveals that these sorts of evolutions in military roles carry with them intense psychological shifts in the minds of military personnel and have put pressure on previously stable notions of what it meant to be a soldier. Living under occupation means engaging with the experience of war, and at times being subjected to the same risks inherent in combat, but it is not considered sufficient to constitute 'veteranhood'. Thinking about who might legitimately claim veteran status, to be a man after war, to what extent might a member of the French resistance, operating a clandestine press or sheltering allied servicemen, also be considered a veteran of WWII? Is the firefighter who attended the attack upon the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 a veteran of the War on Terror? How should the war experience of a man in a reserved occupation be approached? How have societies dealt with deserters or conscientious objectors?

The traditional associations between masculinity and men after war break down in some of these less visible forms of veteranhood. Resistance fighters and emergency service personnel may not receive the recognition of their veteranhood as a traditional soldier would, but their heroism and courage is not in dispute. Men who reject militarism, the conscientious objector and the deserter, however, have often been portrayed as effeminate, naive, untrustworthy or even politically dangerous.²⁷ The stereotype of the deserter is that he is weak, cowardly, unmanly and often undeserving of life. This is vividly apparent, for example, in the British military in WWI and the number of formal military executions desertion generated or in the Russian treatment of similar in WWII.²⁸ In this way, the deserter is feminized and denied the masculine attributes that are central to the hegemonic masculine ideal in the twentieth century. Yet, even this is only a partial picture. Pacifist movements have presented the deserter as a positive, courageous ideal, lauding his ability to think independently and make moral decisions as a manly virtue, not as a failure of masculinity.²⁹

In a similar manner, during WWI, 'conchies' were viewed by the public and press at best as unpatriotic shirkers and at worst as subjective revolutionaries. Although the experiences of conscientious objectors in WWI meant that they were treated more humanely in WWII, their views were

still often misunderstood and scorned, and their families (and careers) suffered. Bibbings shows that from the outbreak of WWI to early 1916, sharp dichotomies of “appropriate and inappropriate masculinity” prevailed, in which the volunteer “was the most exemplary of men”, while conscientious objectors “were frequently portrayed and treated as the worst of men—assuming it was accepted that they had any claim to manliness, or even to humanity.”^{30,31} After the war, she reports, that “the temporary disenfranchisement of COs was seen as both a punishment and a deterrent by MPs; objectors had given up their right to citizenship.”³² Burk similarly discusses the fraught relationship between citizenship status and military service, noting that many conscientious objectors feel like “exiles in their own land.”³³ Indeed, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights did not recognize the right to conscientious objection until 1987.

Those men who found themselves in Reserved Occupations, skilled workers in essential industries and thus exempt from enlistment in the armed forces, faced similar prejudices. The kinds of bias they faced ranges from a marginalization from the war narrative; they simply did not figure as participants, to the same language of weakness, cowardice and femininity experienced by the deserters and conscientious objectors. Studies show that the wartime ratio of civilian employees to combatants was roughly 3:1, yet the male workers remain stigmatized within popular contemporary representations. Such civilian workers were often vilified as ‘shirkers’ and exposed to the discourse of effeminacy. Yet, the same studies suggest that the hegemonic discourse of military masculinity, most often embodied in the ‘soldier hero’, potentially clashes with traditional ‘hard man’ notions of masculinity prevalent in working-class mining and shipbuilding communities. What emerges is that there seems to exist a hierarchy of value attached to wartime service with combatants commonly situated at the top, the construction of wartime (workplace) masculinities remains open to contestation. In this volume, Wendy Gagen’s ‘company men’, prevented from fighting because of their profession, sought to construct alternatively heroic masculine identities for themselves when faced with their exclusion from the prevalent and highly valued soldier/veteran identity.

The sometime silence of the veteran, and moreover his silencing, have come to the fore in research which tackles memory cultures. The notion of ‘second-hand veterancy’, influenced by critical turns in Holocaust theory and ideas concerning the transmission of trauma or ‘prosthetic memory’, have sometimes been applied to veterans’ campaigns for justice, rights or status. Campaigns for reparation, acknowledgement and equal status are often undertaken publicly by those two generations distant from the veteran acting as the mouthpiece for a silenced and forgotten generation. The power of the veteran to embody difficult national issues can lead, in the wake of silence of the repression of the memory of conflict, to his being relegated to the margins of society. The status of the veteran also has the power to disturb and dismantle widely accepted versions of national