

Soldiering On? The Prison-Military Complex and Ex-Military Personnel as Prison Officers: Transition, Rehabilitation and Prison Reform

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Abstract

Arguing that criminology has thus far inadequately theorised militarism as it relates to the prison system, this agenda-setting paper introduces the ‘prison-military complex’ as a means to initiate examination of militarism in relation to institutions and practices of incarceration. In so doing, it identifies a key knowledge gap vis-a-vis the role of ex-military personnel employed as prison staff, and poses key questions about the ways in which military staff and military methods are being directly targeted as a means to reform a prison service reeling from unprecedented levels of violence and self-harm, and recent riots and escapes. Encouraging criminologists to think beyond stereotypical ideas about the military, the paper revolves around a multiscalar articulation of the prison-military complex, discussed as it relates to reform of the prison system as a whole; the rehabilitation of offenders; and individuals’ ex-military transitions to civilian life.

Keywords

Prison-military complex; prison reform; ex-military personnel; militarism; military-civilian transition; military discipline

...there always used to be military contingency plans, because governments must have contingency plans for all kinds of disasters... We have updated those contingency plans, and the military are indeed involved, but I should make it clear that no one is contemplating a military takeover of any prison....

According to this response by Ken Clarke (then UK Secretary of State for Justice) to a question posed in Parliament in 2011¹, the prison service was, despite its failings, far from requiring a ‘military takeover’. A few short years (and several Secretaries of State) later, two of his successors would lay the challenge of reforming a prison system arguably more violent and dangerous than for a generation, firmly at the feet of military and ex-military personnel. In 2016, Liz Truss declared intended military recruits ideal for instilling ‘the virtues of discipline’², and two years later Prisons Minister Rory Stewart launched bespoke prison leadership training schemes, including a military-style ‘staff college’.³ Although espousing different benefits of military involvement in the prison service, these three examples are founded on an implicit assumption that prisons and the military are ordinarily *distinct* from one another.

This paper takes the opposite view, proposing the term ‘prison-military complex’ to describe the widespread, longstanding, deep-rooted, and diverse connections between prisons and the

¹ See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8418719/Ken-Clarkes-prison-privatisations-spark-strike-threat.html> (accessed 18 Sep 2018).

² See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/oct/04/liz-truss-to-launch-recruitment-drive-for-ex-forces-prison-officers> (accessed 18 Sep 2018).

³ See <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/minister-proposes-military-style-college-for-prison-governors/> (accessed 27 Sep 2018).

military, including the prominent role of ex-military figures in prison reform.

As a former army infantry officer, Rory Stewart follows reformers Alexander Paterson (1884-1947) and Edmund du Cane (1830-1903) before him. A Captain in World War I, Paterson was Commissioner of Prisons and Director of Convict Prisons 1922-46. His famous statement that ‘men are sent to prison as a punishment, not for punishment’ infused the Criminal Justice Act 1948, which abolished whipping, penal servitude and hard labour. Responsible for reforming the Borstal system and discipline in adult prisons (Ruck, 1951), he oversaw prison officer training and promotion schemes, and established the Imperial Training School at Wakefield. Du Cane, former Major-General of the Royal Engineers, was Director of Convict Prisons, and Inspector of Military Prisons through the Prison Act of 1865, and the abolition of penal transportation in 1867. He reformed county and borough prisons, transferring them to central government control, via the Prison Act 1877.

It may be the case that most statutory justice systems are militaristic in origin - their characteristics shaped by the influence of such key individuals. But between national contingency planning and personal histories, there is complex web of connections between prisons and the military that are both under-researched, and whose significance, we argue, is underestimated. Despite excellent scholarship of the relationship between the military and *crime* (e.g. Emsley 2013, Treadwell 2016), little systematic consideration has been given to the many points of interpenetration between the military and the *prison*, such that there exists neither a comprehensive exegesis, nor an overarching theorisation of this complex relationship, and accordingly, key aspects remain critically under-researched.

This paper addresses these lacunae first by proposing and explaining the ‘prison-military

complex' which we intend as a means of structuring discussion of the nature of militarism and its relationship to the prison system. Next, to demonstrate the utility of the prison-military complex in defining new lines of empirical enquiry, it uses this framing to focus on one example - the experience of ex-military personnel employed within the prison system.

Militarism, prison and the prison-military complex

Most commonly used to describe a society that 'ranks military institutions and ways above the prevailing attitudes of civilian life and carries the military mentality into the civilian sphere' (Vagts 1937, 11), militarism is also regarded more broadly as 'a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and preparations for war as a normal and desirable social activity' (Mann 2003, 16-17). Shaw argues that the core idea is the 'carrying' of military forms into the civilian sphere, through mentality, attitudes, and critically, social practices. He contends that the core meaning of 'militarism' should be specified not in terms of how military practices are *regarded*, but rather how they *influence* social relations in general – or in other words, the penetration of social relations by military relations (Shaw 2012, 37-8).

There are undoubtedly innumerable forms of 'penetration' of the prison (ostensibly part of the civilian realm) by military relations, such as the senior leadership by ex-military personnel discussed above, military contingency planning, Veterans-in-Custody (ViC), military prisons, the use of military technology in penal contexts, military ranks and quasi-military insignia describing prison officer grades (King, 2013: 32) and the axiom of 'military discipline' which peppers academic, press and policy discourses, often with very little critical engagement. But the relationship is far more complex than simply the 'carrying' of such military forms 'into' the prison – it is multidirectional, and it extends from the transnational level, where it intersects powerfully with neoliberal capitalism and geopolitics, through

national prison systems and individual institutions, to individual prisoners and prison staff. Prison seems to occupy a liminal status, somewhere *between* what is ‘military’ and what is ‘civilian’.

In light of this, we deploy ‘prison-military complex’ to describe the multifaceted, multi-scalar, entrenched and polyvalent interrelationships between prison and the military. But more than simply acting as a catch-all descriptor for these apparently disparate but – we would argue – interrelated phenomena, the prison-military complex is also a conceptual tool which directs attention to *how* and *with what implications* prison and the military are associated with each other, and requires that prison scholars go beyond ‘common-sense’ notions of the meaning of ‘militarism’ and ‘the military’ as these relate to prison. In so doing, it potentially opens out a range of unexplored avenues for critical empirical enquiry, one of which we later explore in detail.

The prison–military complex

At the macro scale, especially in the contemporary United States, powerful arguments are made about the synergies between militarism, mass surveillance and (racialized) mass incarceration. We view the prison-military complex as articulated with the now-totemic ‘prison-industrial complex’, popularised by Critical Resistance and other abolitionist organizers, a term Angela Davis explained with reference to ‘the structural similarities and profitability of business-government linkages in the realms of military production and public punishment’. It reflects the increased surveillance, policing, and mass incarceration militarizing US society, articulating the complex interrelationship between militarism, the neoliberal globalisation of capital, and the transnational expansion of the prison-industrial complex (Sudbury 2004). It also encompasses processes which involve the prison system in

military operations, for example via the introduction, by the British state, of Acts which ostensibly combat a threat posed by political violence associated with the ‘war on terror’, but which also depart from existing human rights legislation and normalise special powers to detain indefinitely without trial (Sim 2004).

Spanning the transnational and the institutional, the prison-military complex incorporates the relationships between individual prisons such as Abu Ghraib, and former military bases which become prisons, and their enabling conditions. Brown (2005, 983) has argued that ‘the prison-industrial complex and military-industrial complex converge in a sociopolitical economy grounded in rural and lower-class life’, as part of a trend towards what she calls ‘criminal justice militarization’ (ibid, 985), in which social relations are redefined through a convergence of militaristic, police, and penal contexts. These convergences demonstrate the intricacy of the prison-military complex, through multidirectional interpenetration between prison and the military. For example, Brown (2005, 984) noted the exportation of civilian prison consultants to advise on prison construction and management in post-conflict contexts, observing that it was under their ‘tutelage’ that the types of abuses found in domestic incarceration were repeated at Abu Ghraib. And Moodliar (2014, 80) argued that the origins of US mass surveillance now justified by the ‘war on terror’ can be found in the penalised monitoring of Black and Brown youth.

Considering national prison systems and prison institutions as part of a prison-military complex enables a more informed and nuanced critique of widely-accepted tenets, such as Foucault’s often-cited observation that ‘prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (1991: 228). Frequently deployed to draw attention both to similarities between these kinds of institutions, and to a greater propensity for the

imposition of ‘military discipline’ in certain types of prisons (Jewkes and Johnston, 2007: 187), this famous observation is partially based on Foucault’s view of the military as the foundational laboratory of disciplinary power (McSorley, 2014), and the soldier as central to both sovereign and disciplinary apparatuses, being both subject and object of power. The lack of understanding of militarism and the military within criminological scholarship has led to unquestioningly deployment of stereotypical assumptions about its rigidity, harshness, authoritarianism, and punitivity (long recognised as outdated and in need of revision (Scarborough 1993, Jordan 2007)) - meaning that Foucault’s claim has gone relatively unchallenged. Beyond criminology, there are now calls for critical rethinking of his portrayal of the military in works (including *Discipline and Punish* [1991]), through which he developed notions of discipline, governmentality and biopolitics (e.g. Powel, 2017). Foucault’s scrutiny of the evolution of the military ended at the eighteenth century, and - perhaps because he left unfulfilled a stated intention to continue this analysis (Foucault, 1980: 77) – he claimed in lectures in the late 1970s that military apparatus had ‘hardly changed’ since that time (Foucault, 2007: 354). Pointing out the inaccuracy of that statement, Powel notes that militaries ‘were and are far more heterogeneous’ than Foucault suggested (2017: 853). Consideration of the prison-military complex necessitates careful consideration of Powel’s conclusions. If Foucault’s notion of governmentality rests on a triangle of powers including discipline and the military apparatus, but if neither discipline nor the military apparatus are what Foucault claimed they were, then there are much wider implications for the notion of governmentality; not least, we would suggest, for criminological understandings of the prison.

Viewing the specific example of a prison institution which perhaps most clearly demonstrates militarism - the ‘boot-camp’ – as part of the prison-military complex points up other

misunderstandings. Critical scholarship frequently describes the militarism of boot-camps in clichéd terms – prisoners are subjected ‘to a Spartan lifestyle, to exhausting physical demands, to planned and repeated humiliation, and to authoritarian (if secretly well-intentioned) drill sergeants.... unrelenting in their discipline’ (Cullen et al., 2005: 57). Most critical studies find boot-camps simplistic, sometime abusive, and generally ineffective (Stinchcomb, 2005). Yet, alongside the ‘common-sense’ idea (Cullen et al., 2005) that they ‘should’ work, boot-camps persist. Lutze and Lau (2018) argue that this is in fact due to their move *away* from such stereotypical ‘military’ tactics of humiliation, aggression and coercion, and towards what they term a ‘military philosophy’ of motivating internal change and reinforcing positive behaviour by recognising accomplishments, rather than punishing failures. In other words, today’s boot-camps are still ‘military’, but not in a way immediately recognisable to those clinging on to out-dated ideas about what the military is. At the same time, Liz Truss’s recruitment of ex-military personnel, and Rory Stewart’s staff college, are also couched within uncritical repetition of timeworn clichés – but this time about military valour and virtue - which are just as unhelpful as the stereotypes of an authoritarian military which infuse criminological scholarship. Whilst militarism in many of its formulations is almost implicitly defined as a social ill, Burland (2018, 149) emphasises its ambiguity, as a social force which can foster ‘social cohesion and positive personal traits such as altruism, humility and self-discipline’, but whose ‘misuse can cause or exacerbate social problems’.

These examples indicate the potential of a full exegesis of the prison-military complex as a web of practical and conceptual connections between prison and the military. In order to fully understand the relationship between prison and the military, it is vital to move *beyond* easy stereotypes, and critically engage with the thorny question of what militarism actually *means*

for prison. By highlighting the extent and entrenchment of prison-military relations, the prison-military complex enables such enquiry. In the remainder of this paper we demonstrate the utility of this analytical framing in identification of key knowledge gaps, and in thinking through the productive ambiguity of militarism, through discussion of the role of ex-military personnel employed as prison staff.

The prison-military complex and ex-military personnel

Researchers conversing with custodial staff and governors can scarcely fail to notice that many have had a military background; yet the significance of these individuals and their contribution to the prison service remains almost entirely overlooked in criminological literatures.

Whilst prior research has focused on comprehending the scale of the UK ex-military *prisoner* population and the challenges they face, it seems perplexing that the other route taken into prison by ex-military personnel, i.e. as prison *staff*, remains unexplored. There are numerous unanswered questions about prison work as a means to ‘bridge’ the military-civilian divide, but these also engage much broader issues about the contributions made to the prison system by ex-military personnel, and the intertwined nature of both their lifecourse transitions and the reform of prisons and prisoners. Considering ex-military personnel as part of the prison-military complex leads us to ask whether they can ‘reform’ the prison system and its prisoners (including the increasing numbers with whom they share a military background), whilst prison work ‘rehabilitates’ *them* for civilian life. This question speaks to the multiscale nature of the prison-military complex, and to articulations of criminality and rehabilitation in societies in which diverse forms of militarisation, often constructed as a pragmatic and necessary response to pressing issues, are increasingly drawing critical

attention (e.g. Ahmed, 2011; Giroux, 2004; Kappeler and Kraska, 2015).

Within the prison-military complex, ex-military personnel embody threefold prison-military relations which are all articulated in various ways with the slippery notion of ‘reform’: the role of the prison in resettlement of military personnel ‘transitioning’ to civilian lives; the rehabilitation of offenders; and reform of the prison system itself. We consider these in turn.

Military-civilian transition

There are an estimated 3.8 million armed forces leavers in England (HMIP, 2014: 4), with more than 20,000 (Ministry of Defence, 2014: 10) leaving the UK Armed Forces (the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force) each year. The post-military period, termed ‘military-civilian transition’, is challenging, and the spectrum of potential outcomes ranges from ‘success’ (i.e. transitioning into functioning civilian citizenship, having a job, paying taxes, etc.) to ‘failure’ (which can include unemployment, homelessness and incarceration).

Some form of transition to civilian life is inevitable for all who complete their Armed Forces service alive. Whether leaving is pre-planned, (at the end of a service contract), or unexpected, (through ill health or dismissal), being in the military will inevitably have influenced the development of identities (Cowen, 2005; Riley and Bateman, 1987; Walker, 2018), and the return is ‘stressful’, and requires ‘personal adjustment’ (British Army, 2018: no page). That said, most ex-military personnel transition relatively seamlessly, requiring no assistance with employment, debt, homelessness, relationship breakdown or poor health (Ashcroft, 2014: 125). Regarding themselves as physically and mentally well, most go on to have second careers (Herman and Yarwood, 2014: 41-2; Walker, 2013). ‘Pathologising’ military-civilian transition thus risks positioning military experience as an affliction from

which individuals need ‘rehabilitation’. But even those ‘successfully’ transitioning face ‘significant cultural, social and spatial changes’, and liminal identities as the ‘legacies’ of military service (Herman and Yarwood, 2014: 41-2, 49). Probably counted amongst the ‘unknown, but perhaps significant’ number experiencing ‘tensions between tenacious military identity and post discharge “resettlement” with the civilian environment’ (Higate, 2001: 443), apparent ‘success’ stories go unquestioned. Indeed, most research focuses on mental health- and physical health problems which accompany ‘failure’ (see Buckman et al., 2012; Brewin et al., 2011; Hatch et al., 2013; Iversen and Greenberg, 2009; Iversen et al., 2007). But as Ruth Jolly (1996) reported, even those ‘successfully’ transitioning will *always* view themselves primarily as ex-military personnel.

Recognising these challenges, the armed forces provide resources for reintegration into civilian life (Higate, 2001). Whilst explicitly addressing ‘employability’, activities implicitly respond to common post-military feelings of betrayal and abandonment (Wainwright et al., 2016: 751). As well lack of pre-set structure and routine in civilian life (Wainwright et al., 2016), familiarity with the ‘management and deployment of violence’ developed via military training results in an ‘intense military socialization’, which poses further challenges (Higate, 2001: 444-445). Many find emotional expression uncomfortable (Atherton, 2009) and encounter difficulties finding jobs, sustaining family relationships, and maintaining housing. Sympathetic media attention has been drawn to research indicating that ex-military personnel constitute ‘a disproportionate number of the single homeless population’ (Higate, 2001: 445) (see also Anderson et al., 1993; Gunner and Knott. 1997; Randall and Brown, 1994), and although opinion may be indifferent about prisoners in general (Cheliotis, 2010), a slightly more compassionate attitude is sometimes expressed towards Veterans-in-Custody (McCartney, 2011; Murray, 2013).

Veterans-in-Custody

Such empathy may be informed by notions of military heroism, bravery and sacrifice (Becker and Eagly, 2004; Franco et al., 2011; McGarry and Walklate, 2011), bolstered (in the UK) by high-profile events such as Remembrance Day, and by charitable organisations which support a sense of collective indebtedness to, and respect for, the armed forces, even while public opinion differs over the political agendas which lead to their active deployment (Foyle, 2004; Rutherford, 2004; Voeten and Brewer, 2006).

In line with these notions of military ‘virtue’, the majority of ex-military personnel do *not* offend. A military career ‘significantly improves life opportunities’ (HMIP, 2014: 3); reduces the likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system (Fossey, 2010); and therefore renders the ex-military ‘less likely to be incarcerated than the general population’ (HMIP, 2014: 3). There is no apparent pre-disposition to criminal behaviour. In the US, veterans were less likely than non-veterans to have a criminal record (perhaps explained by the military’s zero-tolerance approach to drugs), and the proportion of recruits with criminal backgrounds who therefore needed waivers in order to enlist fell over a period of ten years from 17% to a low of 9% by the mid-1990s (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2012: 648). In the UK, ex-military personnel are less likely than the background population to have a criminal conviction, perhaps because the peak age both for offending and for enlisting in the military is the same (in men), and since military personnel tend not to offend whilst in service (or at least do not have most offences dealt with through the civilian justice system), their potential offending will be reduced during time spent in military service (RBL, 2014: 3).

The reasons why some veterans *do* offend are complex. Although for some ‘mental health

problems related to their military service' (such as PTSD) may be a factor, the majority of offending behaviour is thought not to be directly linked to service (RBL, 2014: 1; MacManus et al., 2013, 2015). Post-military offending may instead result from the frustrations of military-civilian transition, when confronted with the realities of a new life. For some, military service is major source of socialization which turns young people away from offending behaviour, with young recruits frequently enlisting to escape family circumstances or the care system (RBL, 2014). Research with ex-military personnel in prison finds trauma and adversity, and a lack of belonging were often present *prior* to enlisting (Kelty et al., 2010; Wolfe et al., 2005). The military proxy family, structured lifestyle, and sustained employment can engender growing dependence and institutionalisation; and many find it hard to adapt to life outside. For these individuals, the military may act only as 'an interlude in their offending trajectory' (Wainwright et al., 2016: 746-7).

Loss of the military way of life, and resulting social isolation increases the likelihood of mental health problems (Hatch *et al.* 2013). Ex-military personnel who left the armed forces before the end of their service contract report higher levels of childhood adversity and are at an increased risk of PTSD, common mental disorders and multiple physical symptoms (Buckman et al., 2012). About half of all imprisoned veterans have a mental disorder (Wainwright et al., 2016: 741).

Serving UK military personnel are more likely than the general population to misuse alcohol and less likely to seek help (RBL, 2014: 4; Jones and Fear, 2011). Veterans demonstrate even higher rates of both alcohol misuse and PTSD than those still serving. Although causal links are uncertain, MacManus et al. (2012) found that PTSD, mental health problems and alcohol dependence were associated with an increased risk of violent behaviour in ex-military

personnel, which may contribute to offending. Combat exposure also influences offending behaviour (NAPO 2009). One fifth of incarcerated veterans reported exposure to combat (Saxon et al., 2001) and some linked military training with subsequent violence: ‘...they are kind of training you to be violent, to be aggressive; to not really think about the consequences of it...’ (Wainwright et al., 2016: 749).

Whilst ex-military personnel may be less likely to offend than the general population, they are the largest occupational group in prison (Wainwright et al., 2016: 741), representing 9.1% of the prisoner population of England and Wales (HMIP, 2014). In the US, veterans had higher socioeconomic status than non-veterans, but also a higher likelihood of a mental health diagnosis or substance abuse problems (Greenberg and Rosenheck, 2012: 657). A higher percentage of UK veterans were sentenced for violent offences – 64% cf. 48% for non-veterans (Wainwright et al., 2016: 741). In the UK in 2014, the highest proportions of ex-military personnel were in high security prisons and Category B prisons (each 13%) – and were more likely to be serving sentences of over ten years (39% cf. 26% for the general prison population) (HMIP, 2014: 5). Treadwell (2016, 335) drew attention to the heightened representation of violent and violent sexual offences amongst ex-military offenders in a Howard League study (2011). These data suggest that when ex-military personnel do offend, their offences are more serious and violent; and they receive longer sentences, served in higher security facilities.

Such headline statistics only give a partial picture and more granular data are unfortunately lacking. There is currently no formal data collection for ex-military personnel in the criminal justice system in England and Wales. The most recent estimations are based on a 2009 data matching exercise undertaken by the MoD’s Defence Analytical Services (DASA) and the

Ministry of Justice (HMIP, 2014: 4). The current number of ex-military prisoners is unknown.

The associated lack of funding and limited service provision for this group have been widely criticised (HMIP, 2010; Murray, 2014, 2016). Nevertheless, in-custody needs have informed design of some supportive local interventions. Veterans-in-Custody (ViC) wings and communities are increasingly common and many prisons have ViC mentors with a military background. At HMP Grendon, specific therapy groups support ViC who ‘find it difficult to express emotion ... having been trained not to’ (Bonnett et al., 2014: 37).

In some contexts the labelling and treatment of ex-military personnel can be problematic. There is some opacity over terminology. The commonly-used ‘veteran’ (which Treadwell [2016, 332] argues connotes combat experience, and feels alien to many contemporary service leavers) is used interchangeably with ‘ex-armed forces personnel’ or ‘ex-Service personnel’ (Burdett et al., 2013). However, such terminology arguably hints that the criminality of veterans is somehow perceived differently from other offending behaviour. This discursive shift may reflect the wider romanticisation of the military, and may support a sense that veterans are somehow distinct from ‘the normative perceptions and externally imposed views about ‘offenders’ and their ‘criminality’” (Murray, 2013: 20). For Murray, the ‘veteran offender’ represents an inherent tension between the ‘stigmatic identity of being an offender and the traditional celebration of the veteran identity’ (2013: 20) – a tension that is felt by and in relation to incarcerated ex-military personnel. Veteran offenders have been viewed as posing disproportionate risks to prison order and security – by virtue of their military experience – and their status has also afforded them more favourable circumstances (Murray, 2013). As Bennett explained, in the aftermath of World War II:

I have frequently heard it argued that the veteran who commits a crime gets a better break than the nonveteran. It is said that police, prosecuting officials, and judges are more lenient with the veteran, are more inclined to let him off easily, than the non-veteran. (Bennett, 1954: 41)

More than half a century later, The Royal British Legion suspected that ‘some individuals may falsely report veteran status in the hope that it might result in special treatment’ (RBL, 2014: 2). Ex-military personnel ‘report better relationships with prison staff, with a higher proportion saying that they felt most staff treated them with respect’ (HMIP, 2014: 7). Where interventions are specifically targeted to ex-military personnel, there is a concern to ensure that they are not allowed to feel ‘less “guilty” than other offenders’ (RBL, 2014: 1-2). The presence of veterans in custody raises complex questions which have already attracted considerable research attention, via studies which identify factors enhancing the success of ViC communities and interventions (Hawkins, 2009; Matthews and Pitts, 1998). Although many consider the role of prison staff in supporting ViC, very few mention the particular dynamics arising from the co-presence of Veterans in custody with ex-military personnel as prison staff. Bonnett *et al.* describe this role in passing as ex-military staff supporting ‘their former comrades-in-arms’ (2014: 37), and Iversen and Greenberg suggest that ViC may prefer assistance from those with military backgrounds (2009), but other than these two brief mentions, this topic remains largely untroubled by research.

Ex-Military Personnel as Prison Personnel

Veterans-in-Custody may indeed benefit from interaction with fellow armed services leavers dealing more ‘successfully’ with military-civilian transition, but ex-military prison officers

must support *all* incarcerated individuals towards rehabilitation, in parallel with their *own* transition from the military. Many perhaps selected the prison service as a suitably familiar environment for this transition, replicating as it does many characteristics familiar to them from military service, since, as Higate argued, ex-military personnel frequently ‘look to (often uniformed) occupations they instinctively assume will provide ontological or emotional security within a recognizably gendered cultural milieu’ (2001: 456). Alongside the Police, the Fire Service and private security contractors, the prison service provides such occupations, but almost nothing is known about the scale at which this occurs, or the position of the prison service vis-à-vis armed forces leavers over time.

The lack of data pertaining to the proportion of prison staff who have a military background, means that the handful of published statements about the relative significance of ex-military personnel in UK prisons are made without reference to documentary sources, and hence are inevitably speculative. In 1914, A.J. Todd was ‘struck by the large proportion of ex-soldiers’ employed as prison staff, noting that at one Borstal, they constituted ‘practically all [the governor’s] subordinates’ (Todd, 1914, 484). Claims that, in the 1960s ex-military personnel were ‘preferred’ recruits (King, 2013) and that in by the 1980s they made up ‘the vast majority’ of prison officers (Crawley and Crawley, 2008: 14), are unsubstantiated. It is probably quite likely that recruitment of ex-military personnel to the prison service would have tracked post-conflict demobilisation and military downsizing, (for example after the World Wars, the Falklands War, and withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland) - when large numbers of ‘demobbed’ personnel required alternative employment. As Todd observed (on the eve of World War I) there is a tension between prison ‘reformers who clamor for less military routine...’ and ‘...the ex-soldiers who must be provided with suitable jobs’ (1914, 484) - but again, data are lacking. It is also possible that periodic shifts in prisons policy, i.e.

from more rehabilitative philosophies to ‘crackdowns’ on security, following disturbances and escapes, may also have led to the valorisation of militarism and active recruitment of ex-military personnel – and such shifts may *themselves* have coincided with periods of demobilisation and increased availability of such recruits. However, without firmer evidence of recruitment patterns over time, these associations have not yet been explored. Best-guesses are partially corroborated by research into post-military second careers, in which the prison service is mentioned alongside other civilian uniformed services as a potential work destination (Jolly, 1996; Spilsbury, 1994). But data is again sketchy; for example: ‘*anecdotal evidence suggests that ... successful younger ex-service personnel, particularly those who have not yet completed pensionable duty, may be concentrated in civilian-based uniformed professions such as the prison and fire service...*’ (Higate, 2001: 11-12, our emphasis).

We learn a little more from criminological studies of prison staff training, in which parallels are drawn between the prison service and (assumptions about) the characteristics of the military – in particular its ‘uniformed’, ‘hierarchical’ or ‘pyramid-like’ structure (Liebling et al., 2011: 3). Coltman claimed that the training regime is an area of overlap: ‘[b]y the time it came to learning to march on a parade ground and daily fitness lessons in the gym, it became apparent that the Prison Service also emulates the military culture’ (2004: 143). This ‘militaristic’ experience could itself be explained by the commonly-held notion that prison staff – and particularly those at higher levels who are involved in the top-down transfer of training regimes (see Thomas, 1972) – are drawn from the military. Yet descriptions of new prison service recruits being ‘shocked at the verbal and physical abuse that was given out’ during ‘military-style’ training (Bolger and Bennett, 2008: 392, drawing on Crawley, 2004) perhaps suggests either that very few had had previous military experience and/or that the prison service had become ‘perversely militaristic’ (Sim, 2008: 200) in its training, aping an

imagined form of militaristic initiation that is perhaps no longer present in the military itself.

Even from rigorous and respected criminological studies of prison officers' public and private lives (e.g. Crawley and Crawley, 2008; Bennett et al., 2008; Liebling et al., 2010), information about the performance of ex-military personnel when employed in the prison service is difficult to glean. The little we learn about motivation for the role supports the impressions reported in scholarship about post-military careers. Tait claimed that, those 'with military experience... sought similar camaraderie, discipline and job security' in the prison system (2011: 448). Crawley and Crawley (2008) noted that from the 1980s the prison service valued ex-military personnel's discipline, punctuality, obedience and smart appearance (see also Matthews and Pitts, 1998). But perhaps the most perceptive insight comes from beyond criminology, in Higate's work on post-military careers, in which without mentioning the prison service by name, he described it accurately. He argued that the 'obvious next-step' after military service is driven by *more* than accustomed workplace regime and preference for uniform. Ex-military personnel, he contended, tend to move into professions 'characterized by high degrees of continuity with the armed forces not only in terms of the transferability of skill capital, but crucially as masculinized institutions' (Higate, 2001: 455).

There are intriguing hints of a potential mismatch between the appeal of the prison as a workplace and the actual requirements of the job. But, given the dearth of information, we must rely heavily on a small number of studies to piece together a picture of the performance of ex-military personnel as prison employees. In the 1960s, Morris and Morris described ex-military personnel as 'martinets who have merely exchanged a khaki uniform for a blue one' (1963: 77). More recently, Crawley and Crawley ventured that 'based on conversations with

prison officers and managers' (although unfortunately no examples are given), their opinion was that although 'soldiers... have traditionally viewed the Prison Service as an obvious "next step"', they are 'often too inflexible and discipline-oriented to rise to the challenges of the 'modern' prison officer role' (2008: 14). In their mid-1960s UK study of prison officers' attitudes, Morris and Morris described those with a military background as 'authoritarian'. Although they claimed ex-servicemen had, in the nineteenth century 'provided ideal material out of which to make a warder' (1963: 76), by the mid-20th century they had their doubts. They thought the experience of 'handling men' in the armed forces was 'a considerable advantage in a prison where so much of the activity consists of locking and unlocking, counting and recounting, and telling prisoners what to do next', but questioned whether the ex-military, being 'of a wholly different order', were equipped to 'carry out the aims of rehabilitation and reform' or to 'deal with complex human relationships in which the crude exercise of coercion is not enough' (Morris and Morris, 1963: 76). Thomas (1972) challenged that view and, twenty years later, in a study in Western Australia, Soutar and Williams concluded that 'prison officers with military or para military backgrounds were not, *ceteris paribus*, significantly more custodially-oriented than officers without such experiences' (Soutar and Williams, 1985: 22). These rare insights suggest that the current policy drive to increase 'discipline' via ex-military personnel *may* be successful, but they also suggest that there may be other, less desirable consequences.

In the intervening period very little, if any, research attention has been paid specifically to the role of ex-military prison staff. There are passing mentions of their presence, sometimes with generalisations about their conduct, but empirical data – either quantitative or qualitative – are completely absent. A thorough search of the UK Data Service reveals that no dataset featuring interviews with prison officers has covered either previous armed forces experience

or military-civilian transition. It seems perplexing to us that, given the apparently long- and well-trodden path from the military to prison work, insights are few and far between and based upon impressions and anecdotes rather than purposefully-generated evidence.

This matters in two important ways. First, because by overlooking ex-military prison staff in general we fail to comprehend their potential past and present influence on the prison service. As Crewe et al. noted, in order to understand the prison, we need ‘a refined analysis of staff cultures, practices and ideologies, and the outcomes that they produce’ (2008: 1). Crewe and colleagues are right to argue that prison staff matter in and of themselves, and that studies of prison staff can tell us much about the nature of power, punishment and care within the prison system. Accordingly, there are important questions to answer about the difference a military background makes. Whilst policy rhetoric draws attention to the virtues of armed forces leavers, they straddle a ‘hero-delinquent’ divide: on the one hand fêted for their courage and integrity but, on the other, considered at risk of descending into criminal behaviour that can lead to incarceration. And for example, although the effects of PTSD are widely recognised as an issue for Veterans in Custody (Taylor, 2010; Treadwell, 2010; Wainwright et al., 2016), their significance for military-leavers transitioning to post-military careers such as the prison service, is as yet unresearched.

Secondly, these ‘blind spots’ mean that, at a particular historical moment when a concerted effort is being made to recruit more ex-military personnel to the prison service (as well as borrowing military-style leadership training for prison governors and articulation of a persuasive policy discourse about the need for ‘military discipline’ in prisons), we are ill-placed to judge how appropriate or effective such measures are likely to be. We close this paper with some reflections on this situation.

Conclusion: The prison-military complex and the reform agenda

The current clamour for reform of prisons in England and Wales risks masking the longstanding calls for reconsideration of key aspects of the prison service, including the recruitment of staff. In 2008 Sim pointed out that an obvious area in need of reform was the recruitment and training of prison officers (Sim, 2008). A few years earlier, Andrew Coyle had claimed that prison service recruitment procedures were fundamentally problematic because the prison service did not have ‘a clear notion of the kind of people that it wishes to recruit as first-line prison staff’ (2005: 93). In the aftermath of widespread redundancies under austerity, followed by a rush to recruit⁴, this uncertainty seems to have been replaced by at least a vestige of clarity.

As a means of restoring stability to troubled and violent prisons through improved security and to effect long-term reform, the November 2016 White Paper *Prison Safety and Reform* proposed that, amongst the additional 2500 new frontline prison officers to be recruited by the end of 2018 would be men and women with ‘a sense of duty and discipline’ attracted ‘from the ranks of our armed forces’ (Ministry of Justice, 2016: 6). Claiming (without substantiation, and probably erroneously) that ‘service personnel do not currently consider the prison service as a career path’, the White Paper understood ex-military personnel to ‘have developed skills in leadership and people management as well as the strength of character to strike the balance ... between discipline and support’ for prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2016: 56). Working with the Ministry of Defence *Career Transition Partnership* – the UK’s official provider of armed forces resettlement – the White Paper outlined plans for a

⁴ See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/23/burgon-sets-out-labours-five-demands-to-tackle-prisons-crisis> (accessed 27 Sep 2018).

‘Former Armed Forces Personnel to Prison Officer Programme’ (FAFPPOP) to support this recruitment. With the Prison Service facing frontline staff shortages, high levels of violence, self-harm and suicide, there was little doubt that much rode upon the promised ‘biggest overhaul of ... prisons in a generation’ (Ministry of Justice, 2016: 4).

A century after Todd (1914) observed it, this recruitment drive probably aligns just as well to Ministry of Defence imperatives to find employment for those leaving a downsizing military (Edmunds et al., 2016) as it does to the MoJ’s need to recruit new officers to replace those leaving the prison service. But such a frank reification and valorisation of military virtues, in which the notion of ‘discipline’ comes practically and conceptually to the fore, raises key issues about the nature of the prison officer role in support of the humanitarian, rehabilitative and custodial goals of the prison service. Lack of attention to the prison-military complex means that the small number of dated studies available are equivocal about the contribution of ex-military staff, their possible authoritarian leanings, and the meaning of prison ‘reform’ which rests on ‘military’ methods. They offer little reassurance that targeting armed forces leavers for recruitment will repel ‘carceral clawback’ (Carlen, 2002) – that is, the ‘tendency of the prison system to confound genuine attempts at reform by reverting back to its most basic purpose of containment and the perceived requirements of control and security’ (Bhui and Fossi, 2008: 53). Such insights would clearly be critical in terms of the strategic recruitment, training, deployment, management and development of ex-military personnel and, by extension, the wider penal reform agenda.

The policy direction articulated in current policy discourse is relatively simple: both the prison service and its custodial population are in need of reform and rehabilitation and, militarism, in the form of ex-military prison officers and military-style leadership, will help

deliver it. Missing from this apparently uncomplicated equation is the kind of understanding, fostered by using the prison-military complex as an analytical framing, of the military and, in particular, ex-military personnel and their own processes of ‘reform’ enacted via military-civilian transition. For those ‘successfully’ transitioning from military to civilian lives, (rather than joining the ranks of Veterans-in-Custody), *work* is central to the formation of post-military identities. Researchers arguing for ‘more nuanced and holistic understandings of the post-military lives’ of ex-military personnel who pursue a second career argue that entering an employment sector already heavily populated with other armed forces leavers is a factor in enforcing ‘hybrid’ military-civilian identities (Herman and Yarwood, 2014: 42; Walker, 2013) which arguably check military-civilian transition. In other words, although ex-military prison officers may appear to ‘succeed’ in transitioning from military to civilian life, entering the prison workforce could leave them ‘stuck’ between military and civilian identities.

Considering ex-military personnel as part of the prison-military complex leads us to ask how they are expected to ‘soldier on’ by injecting ‘military discipline’ into the prison service, whilst at the same time themselves transitioning *out* of military life. Does their presence ‘militarise’ the prison; or is the prison already sufficiently militarised (perhaps through their predecessors’ longstanding contribution) that it holds both them and itself in a hybrid military-civilian stasis? What are the implications for the multiple forms of reform, rehabilitation and transition – of prison system, prisoner and ex-military staff – all of which are in motion simultaneously, with unknown but potentially powerful feedback loops between them?

Lack of research means that there is no consolidated knowledge-base about the experiences of ex-military personnel within the prison service. Fundamentally, we know very little about

them, and future research would ideally reveal: their motivations; their experience of training; how they adapt to prison work; how they are deployed; the ways in which they feel their military background is perceived by managers, colleagues, and prisoners; their longevity in the service (given currently-critical issues of staff retention); their potential to ‘model’ preferred behaviours; the career paths they take, and the nature of their leadership within this setting. Research is required that renews, for example, Bryans’ (2008) focus on the role of prison governors, especially if, in light of Rory Stewart’s recent plans, military experience is to be increasingly influential in leading prison reform. And more broadly, there are much wider questions to be addressed about the level at which the presence of ex-military personnel becomes a ‘critical mass’ within the workforce of individual prisons; the variety of possible effects on organisational culture and the setting of the ‘tone’ both for individual establishments, and for the prison service as a whole. And in the context of a renewed call for ‘discipline’ in our prisons, this would seem an apposite moment to address such questions.

In conclusion, we argue that criminology has thus far failed to pay sustained attention to what we have termed here the prison-military complex – a term which both describes the multifaceted, multi-scalar, entrenched and polyvalent interrelationships between prison and the military; and acts as a conceptual tool requiring prison scholars to overcome ‘common-sense’ notions of the meaning of ‘militarism’ and ‘the military’ as these relate to prison, and to direct critical attention to *how* and *with what implications* prison and the military are associated with each other.

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