

Masculinities, Heroic Self-Fashioning and Popular Culture:
Orde Wingate, David Lloyd Owen and Representations of
War

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis explores the cultural circuit connecting popular culture, personal testimonies, and the memory of the Second World War in Britain, by examining two army officers and the special forces units which they commanded: Orde Wingate of the Chindits and David Lloyd Owen of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). The thesis charts how narratives of masculine heroism shaped, and were shaped by, personal and popular narratives of warfare.

Chapters one and two examine the strategies of self-fashioning adopted by Wingate and Lloyd Owen, analysing the ways in which both officers constructed and projected identities as heroic men. Chapter one maps the discourses of heroism that shaped their masculine subjectivities, highlighting the repertoire of imperial heroic exemplars which inspired them, with Wingate influenced by Oliver Cromwell, Gordon of Khartoum and the biblical Gideon, while Lloyd Owen celebrated Lawrence of Arabia. Chapter two explores the influence of ideas of social class and race on Wingate and Lloyd Owen's self-construction as exemplary leaders, revealing tensions between both officers' fantasies of elite leadership and the prevailing discourses of the 'People's War.' Chapter three moves on to explore wartime representations of the Chindits and the LRDG. Press reports of the Chindits described cheerful, stoic, temperate heroes, while celebrations of the LRDG expressed an alternative national tradition of romantic adventure. Chapter four provides the first detailed study of the response to Wingate's death in 1944 in Britain and Palestine. British commentators largely followed Wingate's own self-representation as a Christian, imperial hero. In contrast, Jewish commentators lauded a hero of Zionism, referencing Gideon, and often criticising the government's Middle East Policy. Chapter five concludes by exploring representations of the LRDG and the Chindits in British comics between the 1950s and 1970s. Focusing on the longer 'picture library' format, the chapter complicates recent scholarship on the Eurocentric

nature of the British remembrance, to highlighted the persistence of a familiar narrative template - heroic Britons battling racialised enemies in exotic settings - through the 1960s and into the 1970s. In contrast to films, imperial settings and themes retained a significant place in British comic books, although the Christian militarism which had influenced Wingate in particular so strongly diminished.

Declaration

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finally learning the difference between ‘Chindit’ and ‘Chinook’, and for pointing out the missing comma on page 198.

Introduction

This doctoral thesis explores the cultural circuit connecting popular culture, personal testimony, and the memory of the Second World War in Britain. The 1939-45 war witnessed the deployment of British special operations in every theatre of the conflict. Acting in response to calamitous reverses, the British military introduced a range of small, cost-effective groups of highly trained soldiers capable of continuing the war.¹ Focusing on two such units and the officers who commanded them – Orde Wingate of the Chindits and David Lloyd Owen of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) – this thesis charts how images of masculine heroism shaped, and were shaped by, personal and popular narratives of warfare.

The project grew out of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant to research the Imperial War Museum's (IWM) underexplored collections relating to Wingate and Lloyd Owen. While military historians have worked extensively on special operations, the cultural dimensions of the Chindits and the LRDG have received far less attention. Using under-researched official documents, media texts and personal testimonies, this study analyses the operation of a 'cultural circuit' as narratives of heroic masculinity circulated

¹ For the genesis of British special forces see Andrew Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II: British and American Irregular Warfare* (London 2013), pp.1- 53; Ashley Jackson, 'The Imperial Antecedents of British Special Forces', *The RUSI Journal* 15 (2009), pp.62-68; Julian Thompson, *War Behind Enemy Lines* (London, 2001), pp.6-26; Phillip Warner, *Secret Forces of World War II* (Barnsley, 2004), pp. 9-30; Eric Morris, *Guerrillas in Uniform: Churchill's Private Armies in the Middle East and the War Against Japan, 1940-1945* (London, 1989), pp. xv-xvii.

through public texts and personal testimonies. Building on recent scholarship on Second World War masculinities, this study analyses both Wingate's and Lloyd Owen's subjective experience of masculinity, exploring their fantasies of elite leadership and the tensions around these fantasies during the 'People's War.'

Over five chapters, the thesis examines Wingate's and Lloyd Owen's heroic self-fashioning (chapters 1 and 2); the public remembrance of Wingate following his death in 1944 (chapter 4); and wartime (chapter 3) and post-war (chapter 5) representations of the LRDG and the Chindits. The thesis addresses three principle questions. First, how did these officers fashion their masculine selves as leaders? The thesis highlights the influence of well-known heroic exemplars on both men's self-fashioning, revealing how famous imperial heroes - principally Gordon of Khartoum and Lawrence of Arabia - shaped the actions and the testimonies of both Wingate and Lloyd Owen. Secondly, how did elite officers and the stories told about them accommodate the collectivist, egalitarian dimensions of the 'People's War'? Their units were variously described as 'special', 'irregular', 'elite', and 'unconventional' at a time when the virtues of the 'ordinary' soldier were loudly celebrated. The thesis demonstrates the persistence of romantic fantasies of heroic masculinity during the 'People's War', fantasies which shaped not only Wingate's and Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning, but also the stories told about them. Thirdly, how did the activities of the LRDG and the Chindits fit into the popular memory of the war in Britain after 1945? The thesis draws attention to post-war 'picture library' comic books as a significant source of memory

formation which has received far less attention than film, but which offers valuable insights into how race and empire, in particular, inflected the remembrance of the conflict.

The following introduction begins by reviewing the scholarship on the cultural history of the Second World War and special forces. The introduction then briefly outlines the careers of Wingate and Lloyd Owen and the activities of the Chindits and the LRDG. I move on to explain the methodologies I have adopted in my research, before concluding with a discussion of the principal primary sources and the chapter structure.

1. Scholarship

Although my research primarily addresses questions about masculinity, heroism and self-fashioning, this thesis will also engage with broader cultural and military histories of the Second World War. Peter Karsten summarised the concerns of traditional military historians as ‘campaigns, leaders, strategy, tactics, weapons and logistics.’² Although not my primary focus, I will draw on the extensive body of work on the campaigns with which Wingate and

² Peter Karsten, ‘The “New” American Military History: A Map of the Territory, Explored and Unexplored’, *American Quarterly* 36 (1984), pp.389-418, p.389.

Lloyd Owen were involved.³ The rise of social history in the 1960s and the ‘new cultural history’ from the 1980s generated new approaches to the study of war.⁴ One key concern has been to broaden the focus of scholarship to explore the impact of armed conflict on all participants, moving away from histories of leaders to examine the experiences of ‘ordinary people’ on the home front as well as on the front line.⁵ Historians have trained their sights on groups whose wartime experiences had previously been neglected, including civilians in reserved occupations, nurses, and conscientious objectors.⁶ Studies of servicemen have recovered the voices of the lower ranks, the disabled, imperial troops and queer soldiers.⁷ Embracing the methodologies of other disciplines, historians have energized the study of war.

³ For the North African campaign see W. G. F. Jackson, *The Battle for North Africa, 1940-1943* (London, 1975); Douglas Porch, *Hitler's Mediterranean Gamble: The North African and the Mediterranean Campaigns in World War II* (London, 2004); Martin Kitchen, *Rommel's Desert War: Waging War in North Africa, 1941-1943* (Cambridge, 2009). For the LRDG in North Africa see John W Gordon, *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940-1943* (London, 1987); John Sadler, *Ghost Patrol: A History of the Long Range Desert Group* (Oxford, 2015); Gavin Mortimer, *The Long Range Desert Group in World War II* (Oxford, 2017). For the British role in the Burma campaign see S. W. Kirby, *The War Against Japan* (London, 1957-1969); Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War, 1941-1945* (London, 2000); Brian Bond and Kyoichi Tachikawa (eds.), *British and Japanese Military Leadership in the Far Eastern War, 1941-1945* (London, 2005). For the Chindits see, among many, Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army: 1922-1944* (London, 2010), pp. 145-212; Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior: From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley, 2014).

⁴ For the ‘new cultural history’, see Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 2008).

⁵ For new trends in military history see Joanna Bourke, ‘New Military History’ in Matthew Hughes and William Philpott (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in Modern Military History* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.269-291.

⁶ For reserved occupations see Linsey Robb, *Men at Work: The Working Man in British Culture, 1939-1945* (Basingstoke, 2015); Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb (eds.), *Men In Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2017). For nurses see Jane Brooks, *Negotiating Nursing: British Army Sisters and Soldiers in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2018); Christine Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford, 2014). For conscientious objectors see Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), pp.171-177; Linsey Robb, ‘The “Conchie Corps”: Conflict, Compromise and Conscientious Objection in the British Army, 1940-1945’, *Twentieth Century British History* 29 (2018), pp.411-434.

⁷ For ordinary soldiers see Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019); Allan Allport, *Browned off and Bloody Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War*,

These works, which have the recovery of marginal voices and the empowerment of groups within contemporary society as a key aim, have paid less attention to the experiences of elite individuals and the ways in which they fashioned their identities.⁸ Perhaps reluctant to return to the white, (presumably) heterosexual, upper-class officers who were the focus of traditional histories of the Second World War, historians have been less forthcoming in applying the analytical tools of social and cultural history to elite soldiers and commanders. This thesis addresses this imbalance, drawing on these approaches to explore the construction and representation of elite, military masculinities, focusing in detail on Lloyd Owen, Wingate, and the men of the units they led. By positioning military elites within the cultural history of the Second World War, my research maps out key shifts and continuities in constructions of twentieth-century British masculinity.

Although the primary focus of my research is soldiers and military masculinities, this thesis also engages with a wider literature that has charted the impact of the Second World War on British society. Pioneering works by social historians probed narratives of wartime unity, examining tensions beneath the surface of the apparent national consensus.⁹ My

1939-1945 (London, 2015). For disabled servicemen see Julie Anderson, *Soul of a Nation: War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain* (Manchester, 2011). For imperial troops see Ashley Jackson, *Distant Drums: The Role of the Colonies in Imperial Warfare* (London, 2010); Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London, 2006). For queer soldiers see Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-sex Desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945* (Manchester, 2013); Paul Jackson, *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military During World War II* (London, 2014).

⁸ A similar point is made by Heather Ellis in her examination of masculinities in science, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831-1918* (London, 2017), p.1.

⁹ Notable publications include Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (London, 1968); Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945* (London, 1968); Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945-1951* (London, 1985).

research builds on these debates, exploring soldiers' personal testimonies and popular narratives of their activities to highlight tensions surrounding wartime notions of the Second World War as a 'People's War.'

The work of gender historians of the Second World War has further shaped the approach of this thesis. Feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s explored the wartime experiences of women, and the shifts in gender relations that occurred as a result of the conflict.¹⁰ A 'cultural turn' in histories of the Second World War has further shifted the focus of scholarship away from campaigns and strategies to the experiences and representations of men and women.¹¹ Following the broader transition from social histories of women's lives to the study of gender after the 1980s, scholars began to examine masculinities in warfare.¹² Fine works appeared on the First World War.¹³ Yet the study of men's gendered experiences of the Second World War was, until relatively recently, less developed; in 2002 Martin Francis noted the absence of the conflict in the historiography of modern British

¹⁰ See Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain 1945-1968* (London, 1980); Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of Child and Mother* (London, 1983); Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield (eds.) *Out of the Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars* (London, 1987); Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London, 1989); Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester, 1998).

¹¹ For example, Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-1991* (London, 1998); Mark Connelly, *We Can Take it! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004); Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force* (Oxford, 2008); Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013).

¹² Important early works include Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Britain, Male Bodies and the Great War* (London, 1994); Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994).

¹³ For example, Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009); Ana Carden Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford, 2009). For a summary of recent work in the study of masculinities and the First World War see Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection', *Revue Francais de Civilisation Britannique* xx-1 (2015), pp.1-8.

masculinity.¹⁴ Sonya Rose's 2003 *Which People's War?* marked an important intervention, in particular her formulation of 'temperate heroes'. Rose argued that British masculinities were frequently constructed in opposition to the image of the brutal Nazi soldier, fusing traditional martial traits such as bravery with interwar tropes of domesticity, cheerfulness and self-deprecation. The valorisation of 'ordinary' heroism formed part of the egalitarian rhetoric central to notions of the 'People's War', but the combination of heroism and kindness was an unstable mix. If pushed too far in one direction it could resemble the hyper-masculinity of the jackbooted Nazi, too far in the other and it might 'slide into effeminacy.' Only when a man was visibly a member of the fighting services, Rose argued, could the necessary components of hegemonic masculinity cohere.¹⁵

Since the publication of *Which People's War?*, the study of Second World War masculinities has blossomed as scholars have interrogated Rose's analysis.¹⁶ In adopting the theory of hegemonic masculinity, Rose's work is open to some of the criticisms levelled against R. W. Connell's original formulation.¹⁷ The emphasis placed upon masculinity as an

¹⁴ Martin Francis, 'The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity', *The Historical Journal* 45 (2002), pp.637-652, p. 647.

¹⁵ Rose, *Which People's War?*, p.196. See also Sonya Rose, 'Temperate Heroes: Concepts of Masculinity in Second World War Britain' in Stefan Dudink et. al. (eds.), *Masculinities in War and Peace: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, 2004), pp.177-198.

¹⁶ For example, Robb, *Men At Work*; Alison Chand, *Masculinities on Clydeside: Men in Reserved Occupations During the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2016); Juliette Pattinson, "'Shirkers", "Scrimjacks", and "Scrimshanks"?: British Civilian Masculinities and Reserved Occupations, 1914-45', *Gender and History* 28 (2016), pp.709-727; Juliette Pattinson et. al., *Men in Reserve*; Arthur McIvor, 'Rebuilding Real Men: Work and Working Class Male Civilian Bodies in Wartime' in Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp. 121-144.

¹⁷ For Connell's formulation see R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge, 1995). See also R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (London, 1987). For a recent critique of Connell's model, see Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', *Gender & History* 30 (2018), pp.377-400.

ideal diverts attention away from masculinity as a practice; in focusing on what men strove to be during the war, we risk ignoring what they actually did. Further, masculinities are often multiple and overlapping, and so the concept of a singular, hegemonic ideal can appear simplistic. Rather than a dominant masculine ideal in a society, there are a multiplicity of masculinities. Ben Griffin has recently argued for the concept of ‘communication communities’ as a way of recognising the social formation within which it can be appropriate to speak of a hegemonic masculinity, while still acknowledging variations of region, occupation and so forth.¹⁸ Research on masculinities during the Second World War has revealed the range of communities in which men constructed their identities as men, demonstrating that there was no single accepted way of ‘being a man.’ Inspired by Rose’s research, scholars have uncovered the gendered experiences of men who did not conform to the ideal of the ordinary soldier outlined in *Which People’s War?*, particularly those outside traditional military structures including firemen, labourers, merchant seamen, and codebreakers.¹⁹

¹⁸ Griffin, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’, p. 385.

¹⁹ For firemen see Linsey Robb, “‘The Front Line’: Firefighting in British Culture, 1939-1945’, *Contemporary British History* 29 (2015), pp.179-178; Robb, *Men at Work*, pp. 76-100. For civilian labourers see Chand, *Masculinities on Clydeside*; Pattinson, “‘Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks”, and “Scrimshanks”?”; Pattinson et al, *Men in Reserve*; McIvor, ‘Rebuilding Real Men’. For merchant seamen see Linsey Robb, ‘For Those in Peril on the Sea: The Merchant Navy in Wartime Culture’ in Pattinson et al, *Men in Reserve*, pp. 101-129; Linsey Robb, ‘Blood Thunder and Showgirls: The Merchant Navy on the BBC, 1939-1945’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35 (2015), pp. 473-488; Penny Summerfield, ‘Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War, 1939–60,’ *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (2011): 330–53. For codebreakers see Chris Smith, ‘Bright Chaps for Hush-Hush Jobs: Masculinity, Class and Civilians in Uniform at Bletchley Park’ in Linsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp. 145-167.

Rose's delineation of 'temperate masculinity' as a wartime ideal remains convincing, but her focus on the heroism of 'ordinary' men left alternative codes of manliness underexplored, particularly among other fighting men. While the cheerful British Tommy exemplified one masculine ideal during the conflict, what was the gendered experience of the war for men whose military rank or specialised role placed them outside the collectivist structures of the 'People's War'? Juliette Pattinson's study of female and male agents of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) demonstrated the centrality of gender to their wartime experiences. Drawing primarily on oral history interviews and autobiography, Pattinson showed how ideals of masculinity and femininity influenced both the recruitment of agents and their performance of undercover identities in occupied France. Pattinson traced the connections between popular culture and agents' own accounts of their wartime activities, emphasising the distinct place of the SOE in British culture.²⁰ Her analysis of the ways in which agents drew on the resources of popular culture - newspapers, magazines, books, films etc. - to fashion their own identities has influenced my approach to Wingate and Lloyd Owen.

Some scholars have investigated more 'gentlemanly' versions of wartime masculinity. Martin Francis has argued that while the understated heroism of the British Tommy exemplified the egalitarian rhetoric of the 'People's War', older modes of heroism persisted. Francis identified the RAF fighter pilot as the embodiment of a public-school vision of

²⁰ Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2007).

chivalric masculinity.²¹ In his examination of the wartime photography of Cecil Beaton, Francis described ‘romantic Toryism’, an ‘individualist, elitist, and imperialist fantasizing of the wartime imaginary.’²² The socially elite genres of masculinity embodied by Beaton’s subjects – the military commander, the irregular soldier, the patrician statesman – encapsulated alternative wartime narratives which contested the ‘egalitarian morality’ of the ‘People’s War.’²³

Sonya Rose’s examination of wartime military masculinity provides a further reference point for this research.²⁴ Rose’s influential delineation of the ‘temperate heroism’ of the ‘ordinary soldier’ as a hegemonic masculine identity during the conflict appears at odds with the identities of men like Wingate and Lloyd Owen.²⁵ Elite in both a military and a social sense, neither appear initially to embody the temperate masculinity of the ordinary soldier. Influenced by Alison Light’s research, Rose argued that the inter-war years saw the displacement of the masculine ideal of the soldier-hero by discourses which emphasised

²¹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2008).

²² Martin Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp.90-117, p.94.

²³ Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism’, p.93.

²⁴ Rose, *Which People’s War*, pp.151-196

²⁵ Most subsequent examinations of Second World War masculinities have engaged directly with Rose’s work. For civilian masculinities, see Lindsey Robb, *Men At Work: The Working Man in British Culture, 1939-1945* (Basingstoke, 2015); Alison Chand, *Masculinities on Clydeside: Men in Reserved Occupations During the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2016); Juliette Pattinson, ‘“Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks”, and “Scrimshanks”?: British Civilian Masculinities and Reserved Occupations, 1914-45’, *Gender and History* 28 (2016), pp.709-727; Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities During the Second World War* (Manchester, 2017); Arthur McIvor, ‘Rebuilding Real Men: Work and Working Class Male Civilian Bodies in Wartime’ in Robb and Pattinson, *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture*, pp. 121-144. For military masculinities, see Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945*, (Oxford, 2008); Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines*; Juliette Pattinson, ‘Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 7 (2014), pp.179-190; Chris Smith, ‘“Bright Chaps for Hush-Hush Jobs”’: Masculinity, Class and Civilians in Uniform at Bletchley Park’ in Robb and Pattinson, *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture*, pp.190-177.

‘home, the “little man” and ordinariness.’²⁶ Under the conditions of the ‘People’s War’, Rose argued, hegemonic masculinity involved an unstable combination of seemingly antithetical ideals: the traditional ideal of the soldier-hero, and this inter-war shift in masculine identity. Several works exploring wartime martial masculinities have added further nuance to Rose’s findings. Juliette Pattinson has shown that inter-war narratives of romantic, imperial heroism shaped Second World War special-operations soldiers’ expectations of warfare, and even influenced their decision to volunteer for special duties.²⁷ In her examination of veteran’s memoirs, Frances Houghton highlighted the prominence of ‘pleasantly fuzzy, exciting and highly romanticised’ notions of war in shaping aspirant combatant’s attitudes to service.²⁸ This research adds to these works by exploring the masculinities of Second World War special-operations commanders, further complicating Rose’s notion of ‘temperate masculinity’ in military organisations as a hegemonic wartime ideal.

My thesis will build on the important research of Rose, Pattinson, Francis, and others by extending the study of wartime masculinities to special forces’ commanders. Special operations occupy a distinctive position in the vast literature on the Second World War. The actions of units like the Special Air Service (SAS) have been disproportionately represented

²⁶ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (Abingdon, 1991), pp.1-19; Rose, *Which People’s War*, p.153.

²⁷ Juliette Pattinson, ‘Fantasies of the “Soldier Hero”’.

²⁸ Houghton, *Veterans’ Tale*, p.221.

in popular histories of the conflict.²⁹ These works vary in historical rigour but meet a continued appetite for exciting adventure stories. While academics agree that the war was won primarily as a result of Allied material superiority and the application of overwhelming force, daring tales of desert raids, coastal attacks and subversion behind-the-enemy-lines continue to entertain readers.³⁰ Military historians have also thoroughly explored the activities of Second World War special forces, providing detailed assessments of tactics, tradecraft and operational minutiae.³¹ Yet any systematic analysis of the cultural aspects of special forces' units, of issues of representation, gender, race and class, has largely been absent from both popular narratives and military histories.³²

As soldiers trained to undertake irregular warfare and specialised roles, often falling outside conventional military structures and discipline, special forces soldiers' experience of the war differed to that of the 'ordinary' soldier. The unique status of the special operative in the British army was further underlined by a sense of martial 'difference' that often

²⁹ For the SAS, see Ben Macintyre, *SAS: Rogue Heroes* (London, 2018); Gavin Mortimer, *The SAS in World War II* (London, 2011); Phillip Warner, *The Special Air Service* (London, 1971); Virginia Cowles, *The Phantom Major* (1958, London); For the LRDG, see Gavin Mortimer, *The Long Range Desert Group in World War II* (London, 2017); Gavin Mortimer, *The Men Who Made the SAS: The History of the Long Range Desert Group* (London, 2015); John Sadler, *Ghost Patrol: A History of the Long Range Desert Group, 1940-1945* (Oxford, 2015); Mike Morgan, *Sting of the Scorpion: The Inside Story of the Long Range Desert Group* (Stroud, 2000).

³⁰ David French, 'British Military Strategy' in John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2015), pp.28-50.

³¹ For scholarly assessment of special forces in the Second World War, see Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II*; Warner, *Secret Forces of World War II*; Julian Thompson, *The Imperial War Museum Book of War Behind Enemy Lines* (London, 1998); John W Gordon, *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa, 1940-1943* (London, 1987); David Thomas, 'The Importance of Commando Operations in Modern Warfare, 1939-1982', *Military History* 4 (1983), pp.689-707.

³² In a rare acknowledgment of this absence, Andrew Hargreaves *Special Operations*, p.9, explained it on the grounds that while such work may be valuable, 'only once the foundations of a subject have been firmly laid (and, at root, military operations are the foundations of this particular subject) can one turn to other avenues of research.'

underpinned recruitment. Units such as the LRDG and the SAS were highly selective of personnel, searching for men with extraordinary qualities of endurance, initiative, self-discipline, resourcefulness, and mental and physical stamina. While the Chindits were not subjected to such a rigorous selection process, they nonetheless underwent robust training designed to weed out the men unsuited to the specialised task of warfare in the jungle. This specificity in the role and experience of special forces soldiers has led to their omission from important recent studies. Frances Houghton's examination of soldiers' memoirs excluded recollections penned by special forces soldiers because they encompassed an alternative experience to that of the 'ordinary' frontline soldiers that comprised the bulk of the British army.³³ In similar fashion, Jonathan Fennell's examination of the 'true wartime experience of the ordinary rank and file' of the British and Commonwealth armies does not dwell at any length on special operations.³⁴ Such omissions are not surprising. Despite their prominent position in post-war popular culture, special operations accounted for a small percentage of military personnel and arguably played only a minor role in the outcome of the war, particularly when compared with the large-scale operations of regular Allied forces.

The principal academic analysis of the gendered dimensions of special operations has been Juliette Pattinson's recent examination of the experiences of British men in the 'Jedburghs', a multi-national unit tasked with parachuting into occupied France and the

³³ Frances Houghton, *The Veterans Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019), p.22.

³⁴ Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 19-20.

Netherlands to stimulate guerrilla warfare and co-ordinate resistance forces.³⁵ Through interviews with former Jedburghs, Pattinson examined their gendered expectations of warfare and the construction of their masculine subjectivities, highlighting the impact of hero discourses in shaping their military experiences. Pattinson's chapter provides a rare examination of the masculinities of irregular British soldiers, emphasising how heroic narratives 'featured as the ideal model' despite the rhetoric of communality during the 'People's War'. This thesis will build on her insights about the gendered identities of special-forces soldiers through an analysis of the masculine self-fashioning of David Lloyd Owen and Orde Wingate. In summary, while there is no shortage of histories of special operations during the Second World War and the officers who led them, scholarship on the masculinities of such men is scarce.³⁶ Chapters one and two thus seek to address this gap in the literature by examining the strategies of self-fashioning adopted by Wingate and Lloyd Owen. Following Graham Dawson's dictum that masculinities are 'lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination', this research highlights how both men sought to construct and project masculine identities as British military officers during their careers.³⁷ Exploring Wingate and Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning in a variety of texts, the thesis examines these

³⁵ Juliette Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero", Frustrations of the Jedburghs' in Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp.25-47.

³⁶ For a classic text, see Virginia Cowles, *The Phantom Major: The Story of David Stirling and the SAS* (London, 1958). For more recent works see, among many, Damien Lewis, *Churchill's Secret Warriors* (London, 2014) and Ben Macintyre, *SAS: Rogue Heroes: The Authorized Wartime History* (London, 2016). For the gendered experiences of special forces operatives, the field is narrower. See Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester, 2007); Juliette Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero", Frustrations of the Jedburghs' in Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp. 25-46.

³⁷ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.1.

officers' fantasies of elite leadership, and the tensions generated by these fantasies during the 'People's War.'

Representations of special forces in wartime British culture have also received surprisingly little attention from scholars, perhaps put off by the sheer volume of popular works. In an important early study, John Newsinger traced the rise of the Special Air Service (SAS) as a cultural phenomenon, examining depictions of the unit in books, films and magazines. While Newsinger's study is primarily concerned with the meanings projected onto the unit following the high-profile 1980 siege of the Iranian embassy, he also examined the industry of Second World War special forces' memoirs that flourished after 1945, tracing the construction of notions of 'masculinity and male camaraderie' in narratives of combat.³⁸ Newsinger neither analysed wartime depictions of British special operations, nor how soldiers drew on the broader iconography of warfare when constructing their narratives. Nevertheless, my study follows Newsinger in examining the specific cultural meanings ascribed to the special forces.

A further notable contribution to the cultural history of special forces was made by Mark Connelly's and David Willcox's analysis of depictions of commandos in newspapers and newsreels. Connelly and Willcox argued that representations of commandos conformed

³⁸ John Newsinger, *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture* (London, 1997), pp.39-70, p.41.

to stereotypical notions of the gentleman adventurer - individualistic, daring and resourceful - while simultaneously embodying the spirit of the 'people's war' as 'ordinary men' trained to do extraordinary things. Stories of commando operations delighted the British public, epitomising notions of British character in warfare and capturing the sense of 'the few against the many.'³⁹ This thesis extends our understanding of the representation of special forces in wartime Britain by challenging Connelly's and Wilcox's explicit assertion that neither Wingate nor the Chindits 'had a particularly high profile in British wartime culture'.⁴⁰ Further, by extending the focus beyond the commandos, the thesis argues that representations of special forces units were differentiated and gendered.

2. Orde Wingate and David Lloyd Owen

The histories of the LRDG and Chindits are well known. Wingate's life, in particular, has been extensively examined.⁴¹ Although a highly respected officer, Lloyd Owen did not attract similar attention either during the war or after; although he published two memoirs, he

³⁹ Mark Connelly, David Wilcox, 'Are You Tough Enough? The Image of the Special-Forces in British Popular Culture, 1939-2004', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25 (2005), pp.1-25, p.6.

⁴⁰ Connelly and Wilcox, 'Are You Tough Enough?', p.1.

⁴¹ Five biographies of Wingate have been published: Leonard Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War* (London, 1955); Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London, 1955); Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: A Man of Genius* (London, 1995); David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (London, 1995); John Bierman, Colin Smith, *Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia and Zion* (London, 1999). Other works for popular audiences have focused on Wingate's role in the Chindit campaigns: Charles Rolo, *Wingate's Raiders* (London, 1944); Wilfred Burchett, *Wingate's Phantom Army* (London, 1944). Additional books have analysed Wingate's military ideas: Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972); Peter Mead, *Orde Wingate and the Historians* (Braunton, 1987); Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army* (London, 2010); Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior* (Barnsley, 2014).

has yet to receive a biography. This disparity reflects both their wartime public profiles, and assessments of their respective contributions to the war effort. In spite of such disparities, this thesis will demonstrate how the study of both men within the same frame, as dictated by the AHRC grant, generates revealing insights on the gendered dimensions of the cultural circuit and other issues. In order to provide important context for the main chapters, the following section offers a brief account of the lives of both men, and of the operations of the LRDG and the Chindits.

Born in 1903, fourteen years before Lloyd Owen, Wingate had already enjoyed an eventful career in the British army before 1939.⁴² Raised in an intensely religious household, Wingate was educated at Charterhouse before receiving his Royal Artillery officer's commission from Woolwich Academy in 1923. His first significant role came in 1928 when, with the help of his father's first cousin Sir Reginald Wingate, former Governor General of Sudan and British High Commissioner in Cairo, Wingate secured a five-year posting with the Sudan Defence Force. At the end of this tour in 1933, he mounted an expedition to explore the Libyan Desert in search of the lost oasis of Zerzura and published an account of his adventure in the journal of the *Royal Geographical Society*, a chapter in Wingate's career that has received little attention from historians and one which chapter one examines. The next significant episode came during Wingate's posting as an intelligence officer in Haifa during the Palestine Arab uprising of 1936-1939, when he was granted permission by Generals

⁴² The following paragraph draws on the biographies listed above.

Archibald Wavell and Robert Haining to train Jewish policemen in British-led irregular Special Night Squads to undertake counterinsurgency activities against suspected Arab rebels.⁴³

In 1940 Wingate was summoned by Wavell to take over an operation aimed at coordinating guerrilla resistance forces in Italian-occupied Ethiopia. At the head of 'Gideon Force', a formation comprised of British officers, Ethiopian irregulars and men from the Sudan Defence Battalion, Wingate defeated an Italian force several times larger than his own and helped restore Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie to the throne.⁴⁴ Based on his experiences in Ethiopia, Wingate began to push his superiors to apply in other theatres of the conflict the methods of warfare that he believed brought him success in Ethiopia. Described by Wingate as 'Long Range Penetration' (LRP), he advocated for the use of light infantry units, supplied by air, operating deep behind enemy lines to employ 'guerrilla' methods against the enemy.⁴⁵ Wingate is best remembered in Britain for his application of these ideas in two operations deep inside Japanese-occupied Burma, the first codenamed Operation *Longcloth* in February

⁴³ For Wingate in Palestine see Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, pp. 47-93; Royle, *Orde Wingate*, pp.95-126; Bierman, Smith, *Fire in the Night*, pp.57-144; The conduct of the Special Night Squads towards suspected rebels has generated controversy, see Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counter-Terrorism?', *Contemporary Security Policy* 28 (2007), pp.28-41; Matthew Hughes, 'Terror in Galilee: British-Jewish Collaboration and the Special Night Squads in Palestine During the Arab Revolt, 1938-39', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43 (2015), pp.590-610; : Matthew Hughes, *Britain's Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, The Colonial State and the Arab Revolt, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 2019), pp.281-288.

⁴⁴ For Wingate in Ethiopia see Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, pp.94-135; David Sherriff, *Bare Feet and Bandoliers: Wingate, Sandford, the Patriots and the Liberation of Ethiopia* (Barnsley, 1995). See also Wilfred Thesiger, *The Life of My Choice* (London, 1987).

⁴⁵ For Long Range Penetration see Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate, "Guerrilla" Warfare and Long-Range Penetration, 1940-1944', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17 (2006), pp.241-262.

1943, and the second Operation *Thursday* in March 1944, during which he died in an aeroplane crash.⁴⁶ Better known by their propaganda name, Chindits – a mispronunciation of *Chinthe*, the stone griffin statues that guard Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia – Wingate's Long Range Penetration Groups continue to fascinate and divide military historians, in particular regarding the effectiveness of the Chindit operations and his theory of Long Range Penetration.⁴⁷

Operation *Longcloth* achieved very little in terms of strategic advantage and has been dismissed by several critics as a costly failure.⁴⁸ The expedition saw Wingate lead 3,000 men behind enemy lines into the Burmese jungle, ostensibly to destroy enemy dumps, cut supply lines and divert Japanese troops away from the front line.⁴⁹ The operation provided Wingate with an opportunity to test his theory of LRP and to demonstrate its value to his superiors. After three months in the jungle only 2,000 of the original force returned, and only 600 of them regained fitness for active soldiering.⁵⁰ Even so, *Longcloth* was undoubtedly a propaganda success. The operation was celebrated in the British press as evidence that British soldiers could match the Japanese at jungle warfare, a message that was particularly effective

⁴⁶ For Wingate in Burma, see Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, p.136-204; Anglim, *Wingate and the British Army*, pp. 145-212; Smith, Bierman, *Fire In the Night*, pp. 275-336; Royle, *Orde Wingate*, pp.229-312.

⁴⁷ For the best overview of different assessments of Wingate and his legacy see Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, pp. 5-17; Anglim, *Wingate and the British Army*, pp. 1-19.

⁴⁸ For criticism of *Longcloth*, see, among many, Kirby, *The War Against Japan, Volume III*, pp.324-329; Slim, *Defeat Into Victory*, pp.162-163. For a more recent critique, see Daniel Todman, *Britain's War, 1942-1947: A New World* (Oxford, 2020), pp.712-713.

⁴⁹ This summary is taken from the memoir of Bernard Fergusson, *Beyond the Chindwin: Being An Account of the Adventures of Number Five Column of the Wingate Expedition into Burma 1943* (London, 1945), pp. 13-14.

⁵⁰ Royle, *Orde Wingate*, p.253.

after humiliating reverses in Singapore and Burma. The operation also secured Wingate the backing of Winston Churchill, and in 1944 a much larger force of 20,000 men was allocated to his command for operation *Thursday*.⁵¹ With a brief to establish bases behind enemy lines from which to launch further offensive operations, *Thursday* provided Wingate with the opportunity he desperately sought to demonstrate the efficacy of his military theories. His death in an aeroplane crash at the beginning of the operation in March 1944 effectively signalled the end of the Chindits, and the unit would eventually be absorbed into regular operations.

Both during his lifetime and after his death, Wingate aroused considerable controversy. His fiery temperament often caused friction with those around him, not least with his superiors in the army. Born into the Plymouth Brethren, he was intensely religious and regarded the Old Testament as literal history. He became a fanatical Zionist, turning his mission in Palestine into a personal campaign for the establishment of a Jewish state.⁵²

Wingate suffered bouts of severe depression, and attempted suicide by cutting his throat shortly after the Ethiopian campaign.⁵³ In official writings he was sometimes openly critical of his superiors and of the practices of the British Army, often using Biblical quotations and analogies to reinforce his arguments. To his admirers Wingate was a visionary genius and

⁵¹ For operation *Thursday* see, among many, Shelford Bidwell, *The Chindit War: The Campaign in Burma, 1944* (London, 1979); Allen, *Burma: The Longest War*, pp. 197-202; Andrew Wax, *Behind Enemy Lines in the China-Burma-India Theatre of Operations* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.73-118.

⁵² Anglim, *Wingate and the British Army*, p.2; Royle, *Orde Wingate*, p.108, p.168.

⁵³ The most detailed account of this incident is found in Christopher Sykes' official biography *Orde Wingate*, pp.335-336.

inspirational leader.⁵⁴ To his detractors he was a charlatan, unhinged and overrated, whose unsound operations were a waste of resources and human lives.⁵⁵

No such controversy dogged David Lloyd Owen, either during his life or following his death in 2001. Born in Hampton in 1917 to a military family, Lloyd Owen survived the war and enjoyed a long career in the British Army that began with his passing out from the Royal Sandhurst Military Academy in 1938 and ended in retirement in 1972 with the rank of Major General. He served in several notable positions after 1945, including as Military Assistant to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff William Slim in 1949, and then to General Sir Gerald Templar during the Malayan Emergency in 1952. During the 1960s he commanded the 24th Infantry Brigade in Kenya and Aden, before promotion to General Officer Commanding (GOC) Cyprus District between 1966 and 1968, and then GOC Near East Land Forces from 1968 to 1969.⁵⁶ Lloyd Owen's career during the end of empire would offer rich terrain for future research, but this thesis focuses on his involvement with the LRDG during the Second World War.

⁵⁴ For example, Rolo, *Wingate's Raiders*; Burchett, *Wingate's Phantom Army*; Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War*; Royle, *Orde Wingate*; David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (London, 1994). Several soldiers who served with Wingate defended his reputation in published works, most notably Bernard Fergusson, *The Wild Green Earth* (London, 1947), pp.139-146; Michael Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope* (London, 1952); Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972); Peter Mead, *Orde Wingate and the Historians* (Braunton, 1987). For a further defence of Wingate see Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits*.

⁵⁵ For the key works in the case against Wingate, see S. Woodburn Kirby *et al*, *History of the Second World War, The War Against Japan, Volume III: The Decisive Battles* (London, 1961); Field Marshal Sir William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London: 1956). See also Ronald Lewin, *Slim the Standardbearer* (London, 1976); Robert Lyman, *Slim, Master of War: Burma and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London, 2004), pp. 177-189. For more recent criticism of Wingate, see Frank McLynn, *The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph 1942-45* (London, 2010).

⁵⁶ The National Army Museum holds a collection of papers relating to his time in Malaya that was consulted as research for this thesis.

A common factor in the creation of British special forces was the actions of a ‘maverick’ individual, often a junior officer who pressed upon his superiors the need for a force capable of carrying out tasks beyond the abilities of regular formations.⁵⁷ David Stirling of the SAS, Roger Courtney of the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) and Vladimir Peniakoff of ‘Popski’s Private Army’ (PPA) were notable examples.⁵⁸ As the driving force behind both the Chindits and the Special Night Squads, Wingate conformed to this pattern. In contrast, Lloyd Owen did not play a role in establishing the LRDG, having joined the unit in 1941 a year after its creation in June 1940. The ‘errant’ officer responsible for establishing the unit was Major Ralph Bagnold. A seasoned explorer of the Libyan Desert, in the early months of the war Bagnold pushed for the establishment of a unit capable of mounting motorised, long-range patrols in the desert.⁵⁹ With the entry of Italy to the war in 1940 the plan was finally approved by Commander-in-Chief Middle East, Archibald Wavell, and Bagnold set about assembling the first British special operations unit of the war.

Bagnold established the LRDG both to monitor troop movements, and to engage in hit-and-run raids on Italian outposts in Libya.⁶⁰ The primary function of the LRDG in North Africa, the one which it performed most successfully and most frequently, was the gathering

⁵⁷ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars* (London, 1984), p.45; Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II*, p.55.

⁵⁸ For the SAS see Ben Macintyre, *SAS Rogue Heroes: The Authorised Wartime History* (London, 2016). For the SBS see John Parker, *SBS: The Inside Story of the Special Boat Service* (London, 1998). For PPA, see Vladimir Peniakoff, *Popski’s Private Army* (London, 1945).

⁵⁹ Saul Kelly, *The Lost Oasis: The Desert War and the Hunt for Zerzura* (London, 2002), pp.133-158.

⁶⁰ Ralph Bagnold, *Sand, Wind, and War: Memoirs of a Desert Explorer* (Arizona, 1990), p.123.

of intelligence.⁶¹ Of particular note were the almost continuous ‘road watches’ along the coastal road between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania from February 1942. The unit gathered topographical information, assisted with map-making, provided reports on terrain, transported SOE, SIS and MI9 agents into the desert and, for a period, performed a similar role transporting soldiers of the SAS.⁶² Composed of Rhodesian, New Zealand and British soldiers, the LRDG had already proven itself a highly effective force by the time Lloyd Owen took command of British Yeomanry Y1 patrol in July 1941.

Lloyd Owen showed himself to be a capable patrol leader, quickly overcoming initial scepticism.⁶³ He was involved in a number of LRDG operations in the Libyan Desert and earned the Military Cross for his part in the joint LRDG and SAS raid on Tobruk in September 1942. Following Allied victory in North Africa in 1943 the LRDG was redeployed in Greece and the Balkans. At the age of twenty-six, Lloyd Owen was given command of the unit following the death of his predecessor, Lieutenant Colonel Jake Easonsmith, in the Battle of Leros. Under Lloyd Owen the LRDG continued its role of gathering intelligence, reporting the movement of enemy shipping and personnel, and directing Royal Navy and RAF strikes on targets. The unit also undertook offensive actions both independently and in co-operation with partisan forces.⁶⁴ In September 1944 Lloyd Owen parachuted into Albania to co-

⁶¹ Hargreaves, *Special Operations in WWII*, pp.213-215.

⁶² Hargreaves, *Special Operations in WWII*, p.58.

⁶³ Lofty Carr of Y1 Patrol later reported that the men initially judged Lloyd Owen a ‘pretty boy’ and viewed him with disdain, Mortimer, *Men Who Made the SAS*, p.102;

⁶⁴ John Sadler, *Ghost Patrol: A History of the Long-Range Desert Group, 1940- 1945* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 159-245.

ordinate operations against the German withdrawal. Despite fracturing his spine on landing, Lloyd Owen insisted on remaining in the field and continued to direct operations. In 1945 he was awarded the DSO for his leadership in the Balkans.⁶⁵

The type of operations which Lloyd Owen and Wingate led were very different. Moreover, the mercurial, maverick Wingate was of a very different temperament to the more conventional Lloyd Owen. The coverage the British press gave the Chindits during the conflict undoubtedly contributed to Wingate's post-war notoriety, as did his unexpected death. The approach of this thesis is not to assess or compare the contributions of Lloyd Owen and Wingate to the outcome of the campaigns they fought, or to comment on the effectiveness of the units they led. Nor is it to contribute to the debate surrounding Wingate's reputation, or to argue for a more prominent place for Lloyd Owen in histories of the conflict. Instead, this thesis traces the connections between Wingate and Lloyd Owen by examining constructions of their gendered identities; it situates both within a broader cultural discourse of heroic masculinity and explores the interactions between public narratives of heroism and their personal self-fashioning as men.

3. Methodology, Sources and Chapter Structure

⁶⁵ DSO recommendation, WO 373/46/244, The National Archives, London.

This dissertation originated with the Imperial War Museum's advertisement for a research project on both Wingate and Lloyd Owen. The purpose of the project was never to produce a joint biography. Wingate has already generated extensive study, while the broad outline of Lloyd Owen's life is well-known. No memoir or journal of Wingate's has survived, and nor did either man leave substantial correspondence; the IWM collections for both men are fragmentary. The challenge, then, has been to develop a research project which moved beyond biography and instead used Wingate/the Chindits and Lloyd Owen/LRDG to illuminate broader themes in the cultural history of World War Two. I met this challenge by adopting Richard Johnson's theory of the 'cultural circuit'. Johnson highlighted the interactions between the 'production, circulation and consumption of cultural products...[and] subjective forms.'⁶⁶ He theorised that this relationship was best understood as a circuit in which private or local stories were shared within particular communities or social groups.⁶⁷ Technologies of cultural production such as print, radio and film distributed these stories to wider audiences, detaching them from their immediate context and transforming them into 'public' or 'general' stories.⁶⁸ These public stories were then consumed and internalized by individuals, shaping further personal accounts.⁶⁹ Personal narratives and public representations thus inform one another in a 'cultural circuit'.

⁶⁶ Richard Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?', *Social Text* 16 (1986), pp.38-80, p.46. See also Richard Johnson et. al., *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (London, 2004), pp. 26-42.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?', p.50.

⁶⁸ Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?', p.52.

⁶⁹ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice* (London, 2019), p.122.

Johnson used the example of a girls' magazine to illustrate this process. The magazine, he argued

Picks up and represents some elements of the private cultures of femininity by which young girls live their lives. It instantaneously renders these elements open to public evaluation - as, for example, 'girls stuff', 'silly' or 'trivial.' It also generalises these elements within the scope of the particular readership, creating a little public of its own. The magazine is then the raw material for thousands of girl-readers who make their own *re*-appropriations of the elements first borrowed from their lived culture and forms of subjectivity.⁷⁰

Johnson's circuit provides a useful framework for understanding how soldiers' personal experiences of war move from a private context to a broader cultural consciousness that, in turn, influences other soldiers' perceptions of their experiences. In his study of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZACS) during the First World War, for example, Alistair Thomson examined how public discourses of the conflict influenced veterans' accounts. Thomson's interviewees incorporated well-known public accounts of the conflict into their own anecdotes, moulding their experiences to the dominant memory of the war.⁷¹ Similarly, in a project examining the home guard, Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird found that many interviewees used the popular television comedy *Dad's Army* as a reference point for their own recollections.⁷²

Some historians have looked beyond oral history and used other sources to examine how individual subjectivities have been shaped by wider cultural discourses. Frances

⁷⁰ Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?', p.52.

⁷¹ Alastair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford, 1994).

⁷² Penny Summerfield, Corinna Penniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard* (Manchester, 2007).

Houghton's recent examination of the memoirs of British survivors of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps provides a striking example of the relationship between soldiers' written testimonies and the dominant cultural representations of their experiences. Houghton highlighted how memoirists engaged with the depiction of their incarceration in David Lean's 1957 film, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*. While many sought to correct the 'myth' of the prisoner experience that emerged from the public film, it nonetheless played an integral role in shaping the imagery that the authors selected in their own, personal accounts.⁷³

Graham Dawson's innovative research on the imagining of masculinities further influenced how this project approaches the cultural circuit. Dawson argued that individuals construct a sense of self from the narrative resources of a culture, 'its repertoire of shared and recognisable forms.'⁷⁴ The range of forms available in this repertoire delimits the possibilities for the masculine self. Certain forms are deemed more appropriate, or recognisably masculine, than others. For Dawson, the soldier hero represents an exalted masculine identity, and so narratives of soldier heroism are among those that move from the 'private' or 'local' contexts described by Johnson and are transformed into 'public' or 'general' stories. Dawson described this process as 'public-ation - the "making public" of cultural products'.⁷⁵ Through 'public-ation', narratives of soldier heroism are detached from their immediate context and

⁷³ Frances Houghton, "'To the Kwai and Back': Myth, Memory and the Memoirs of the "Death Railway", 1942-1943', *Journal of Culture and War Studies* (2014), pp.223-235.

⁷⁴ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.23.

⁷⁵ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.25.

acquire a more general significance, becoming more visible and powerful. These forms of masculinity, which are more readily accessible and recognisable than others, are the result of the complex interactions between the local and public contexts outlined in Johnson's circuit. They are then consumed and put to use by individuals in concrete local situations. This thesis draws on the work of these authors and follows Dawson in approaching the cultural circuit as a 'repertoire of shared and recognisable forms' of masculinity available to individuals out of which they assemble their own sense of self.⁷⁶ In the cultural circuits of male heroism representations of exemplary men are celebrated and shared by media, furnishing men with a set of values, aspirations, appearances, tastes and desires that are recognised as 'masculine.'⁷⁷

In an important early study of British masculinities, John Tosh and Michael Roper called for scholars to examine not only cultural constructions of manhood, representations in print and on screen, but also to explore 'how cultural representations become part of subjective identity.'⁷⁸ To conceive of masculinity simply as a 'set of external codes and structures' fails to engage with the processes by which men come to identify with, or reject,

⁷⁶ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.23.

⁷⁷ Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity', p.386.

⁷⁸ Michael Roper and John Tosh, 'Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity' in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London, 1991), p.14.

such codes.⁷⁹ In subsequent years many scholars have engaged with their insight.⁸⁰ In 2005, Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard summed up the unfortunate division ‘between works on cultural codes and representations, on men’s social relations with each other and with women, and on subjective experience.’⁸¹ This thesis responds to the demand to reconcile the examination of cultural representations and lived experience by using the cultural circuit as a framework. The thesis traces the ‘cultural repertoire of images and narratives’ that Lloyd Owen and Wingate found exemplary and explores the ways in which they drew on this repertoire when fashioning their own masculine subjectivities.⁸²

Soldier Heroes remains an influential text.⁸³ The book’s frequently quoted assertion that ‘masculinities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination’ informed my analysis of the self-fashioning performed by Wingate and Lloyd Owen.⁸⁴ Dawson focused primarily on cultural representations, drawing on the psychoanalytical theories of Melanie Klein to reconcile the theoretical divide between culture and fantasy. His examination of

⁷⁹ Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherall, *Men in Perspective: Practice, Power and Identity* (Hemel Hempstead, 1995), pp.210-211.

⁸⁰ See, among many, Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, ‘What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, 1500-1950’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), pp. 274-280; Michael Roper, ‘Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History’, *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), pp.57-72; John Tosh, ‘The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?’ in John Arnold and Sean Brady (eds.), *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 17-34; John Tosh, ‘Home and Away: The Flight From Domesticity in Late-Nineteenth Century England Re-visited’, *Gender & History* 27 (2015), pp. 561-575.

⁸¹ Harvey and Shepard, ‘What Have Historians Done With Masculinity?’, p.275.

⁸² Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.

⁸³ For studies which have built on Dawson’s delineation of the soldier hero, see, among many, Pattinson, ‘Fantasies of the “Soldier Hero”, Frustrations of the Jedburghs’; Frances Houghton, ‘Becoming “a Man” During the Battle of Britain: Combat, Masculinity and Rites of Passage in the Memoirs of “the Few”’ in Linsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp. 97-117; Matt Houlbrook, ‘Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinity and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, circa 1900-1960’, *Journal of British Studies* 42 (2003), pp.351-388.

⁸⁴ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.1.

lived experiences of masculinity was limited primarily to reflections on his own childhood fantasies; *Soldier Heroes* paid little attention to the ways in which soldiers themselves engaged with stories of heroism.⁸⁵ This thesis follows Dawson in analysing public narratives about soldier heroes, but extends his study by tracing the impact of these narratives of masculine heroism on individuals through an examination of Wingate's and Lloyd Owen's own writings. By tracing the cultural circuits which connect public constructions of the soldier hero with personal testimonies, the thesis illuminates how stories of heroism were woven into narratives of the self.

Although the Imperial War Museum holds an extensive archive for Orde Wingate, it has until relatively recently been unavailable to scholars. The collection consists of official documents written by Wingate relating to operations between 1924 and 1944, folders of official and private correspondence, and other documents that were assembled by his widow, Lorna Wingate, and his friend and colleague, Derek Tulloch. Until her death in 1995 Lorna prohibited access to this collection, apparently a consequence of her dissatisfaction with Christopher Sykes's authorised 1959 biography. Wingate's son sold the collection to the Imperial War Museum, with the exception of the papers relating to his father's time in Palestine, which were sold to an American publisher with microfilm copies being held by the British Library. Wingate did not live to write a memoir, and although the Imperial War Museum holds a transcribed page from what appears to be a journal kept by Wingate after the

⁸⁵ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.234, acknowledged this avenue for future research.

Ethiopian campaign, no other diary entries survive. Fortunately, his idiosyncratic writing style makes Wingate's official reports more revealing than many official military documents. In his useful overview of debates about Wingate, Simon Anglim observed that most studies have focused on his eccentricities and clashes with superiors, paying only cursory attention to Wingate's own writings.⁸⁶ Anglim's research has focused on assessing Wingate's military theories in their historical context.⁸⁷ This thesis takes a different approach to Anglim and Wingate's biographers by examining Wingate's official reports as a form of personal testimony, deploying methodological tools more commonly adopted for letters and diaries.

The Imperial War Museum's David Lloyd Owen archive consists of documents relating to the establishment, organisation and activities of the LRDG including official, semi-official and private papers. The majority of the folders were donated by Lloyd Owen, but several items were donated by other members of the unit and assembled by Lloyd Owen before the IWM acquisition. The collection includes Lloyd Owen's journal from his time commanding the unit in the Balkans between 1944-1945, which provides a fascinating contrast with the two books Lloyd Owen later published. *The Desert My Dwelling Place* (1957) recounts his experiences joining the LRDG and leading a patrol during the North

⁸⁶ Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army, 1922-1944* (London, 2010), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Theory Behind the Chindit Operations: Some Recent Findings', *The RUSI Journal* 147 (2002), pp.92-98; Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate in Sudan, 1928-1933: Formative Experiences of the Chindit Commander', *The RUSI Journal* 148 (2003), pp.96-101; Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the "Phoney War" and After, 1939-1940', *Journal for the Society of Army Historical Research* 84 (2006), pp.241-262; Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate, "Guerrilla" Warfare and Long-Range Penetration, 1940-1944', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17 (2006), pp.241-262; Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counter-terrorism?', *Contemporary Security Policy* 28 (2007), pp.28-14; Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army, 1922-1944* (London, 2010); Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior* (Barnsley, 2014);

African campaign, while *Providence Their Guide* (1980) is part memoir, part history of the LRDG, and narrates his experiences in Europe, in addition to the unit's desert operations. The collection also includes a manuscript titled *The Larder Was Often Bare*, completed in 1955, which describes the LRDG's operations between 1943-1945 and formed a basis for *Providence Their Guide*. These texts are the principal sources for my examination of Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning alongside Wingate in chapters one and two.⁸⁸ The chapters show how two men from similar backgrounds - military family, public school, army training college - drew on a shared repertoire of imperial heroic exemplars in their writings, although the religious Wingate was drawn to General Gordon, while Lloyd Owen singled out T. E. Lawrence as his inspiration. Both men deployed familiar racial stereotypes to construct their identity as *British* officers. And both men navigated similar, historically specific, tensions when engaging with the discourses of the 'People's War', tensions between the ordinary and the exceptional, the mass and the elite, the temperate and the romantic.

John Tosh and Michael Roper have rightly argued that historians of institutions assumed to be homosocial need to be aware of the continued impact of women on male experiences and identity.⁸⁹ In both the Wingate and Lloyd Owen archives, traces of the women who featured in both men's lives are fragmentary. Lloyd Owen's collection might be

⁸⁸ I chose not to follow Michael Roper's innovative 'Re-remembering the Soldier Hero: the Psychic and Social Construction of Memory in Personal Narratives of the Great War', *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000), pp.181-204, and focus in detail on the variations of Lloyd Owen's testimonies in order to leave space both to analyse Lloyd Owen and Wingate in tandem, and to extend my study to include the Chindits and the LRDG.

⁸⁹ John Tosh and Michael Roper (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London, 1991). See also Francis, *The Flyer*, p.85.

described as a ‘professional’ archive, in that it relates primarily to the unit he led rather than his personal life. Women are notably absent from the diary that he kept between 1944 and 1945. Wingate’s archive does contain a few letters from his wife and other members of his family sent during the war, but his own correspondence and voice are frustratingly absent.

Chapter three extends the parameters of the project beyond Wingate and Lloyd Owen to analyse public representations of the Chindits and the LRDG. Wingate generated far more attention than Lloyd Owen, but newspapers, magazines, and newsreels regularly featured both the LRDG and the Chindits, and my decision was influenced by the rich sources available and the paucity of scholarship on wartime representations of special forces. Chapter three focuses on print and broadcast media, primarily ‘popular’ and ‘quality’ national newspapers, but also regional newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts and newsreels. Despite the necessary secrecy that surrounded special operations, the activities of the LRDG and the Chindits were extensively covered by the wartime press, their successes used to boost morale. Chapter three deploys discourse analysis to examine the different ways in which the men of the LRDG and the Chindits were represented. Text and images celebrated the ordinary background of Chindits who were cheerful and stoic ‘temperate heroes’. In contrast, reports of the exploits of the LRDG disrupted popular discourses of egalitarianism and emotional restraint, presenting romantic adventure stories of elite officers who were compared with Gordon and Lawrence.

Chapter four explores a further set of public sources to analyse responses to Wingate’s death in 1944. In addition to British newspapers, the thesis offers the first analysis

of Wingate's commemoration in Hebrew publications from Palestine which had been collected in a folder in the IWM collection and were specially translated for this project. By examining British and Palestinian commemorations the thesis provides the first detailed study of responses to Wingate's death. The chapter exposes the very different investments made by British commentators who celebrated an imperial hero in the tradition of Gordon and Lawrence, and Zionists in Palestine who emphasised different qualities and singled out Wingate's contribution to their political cause.

Chapter five examines the representation of the LRDG and the Chindits in an additional public source, 'picture library' comic books from the late 1950s to the 1970s. Given their enormous popularity comics have received surprisingly little attention from scholars, particularly in comparison with films. Since Andy Medhurst's call for a critical re-evaluation of 1950s war films in 1984, the genre has been highlighted as a crucial site in the production and transmission of the popular memory of the Second World War.⁹⁰ Around eighty films about the war were released during the 1950s, and weekly cinema audiences remained as high as 14.5 million in 1959.⁹¹ The broadcast of films on television ensured that the genre continued to influence attitudes as cinema attendances declined.⁹² Recent research has argued that the focus on a small canon of critically acclaimed, commercially successful

⁹⁰ Andy Medhurst, '1950s War Films' in Geoff Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London, 1984), pp. 35-38.

⁹¹ James Chapman, *War and Film* (London, 2008), p. 198; Nicholas Pronay, 'The British Post-Bellum Cinema: A survey of the Films Relating to World War II Made in Britain Between 1945 and 1960', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8 (1988), pp.39-54, p.39.

⁹² Ramsden, 'Refocusing the People's War', p. 36.

films has produced a misleadingly homogenous impression of the popular memory of a war fought and won by British troops - usually officers - on European battlefields.⁹³ The focus on a few key films has contributed to the marginalisation of imperial soldiers and battlefields beyond Europe.

In contrast, comics featured a wider range of battlefield scenarios with stories regularly set in the desert and the jungle. Weekly comic sales reached 14 million during the 1950s, although the actual readership is likely to have been much higher as publications were passed around.⁹⁴ For a generation of (primarily) boys and young men, many of whom did not experience the war first-hand, comics were an important source of memory production. Chapter five examines the longer form 'picture library' comics that were introduced in 1958. Three factors influenced my decision to focus on picture libraries rather than short-form comics such as *Victor* or *Lion*. The first was the greater scope for character and story development granted by the extended format of the picture library, allowing a deeper analysis of the ideas that underlay the narrative. Whereas a story in *Victor* would cover two pages (or around fourteen panels), picture libraries were over sixty pages long (around a hundred and forty panels). A second factor was the popularity of the picture library format between the 1950s and 1970s. Picture libraries proliferated in the 1960s, each printing

⁹³ Martin Francis, 'Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema', in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014); Penny Summerfield, 'Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), pp.935-957.

⁹⁴ James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London, 2011), p.76.

up to six new stories a month.⁹⁵ By the time it was discontinued in the mid-1980s, *War Picture Library* had published 2,103 copies, while *Commando*, still in print today, has passed 5,000.⁹⁶ The final consideration was pragmatic. Picture library comics are more easily accessible, and extensive collections can be bought cheaply. I examined three hundred issues of *Commando* and *War Picture Library* for this thesis generating stronger claims about the prevalence of key themes and settings than would be possible from analysis of a fragmentary collection of short format comics. Chapter five shows how picture library comics engaged more regularly with imperial themes and settings than films, and continued to deploy similar racial stereotypes to those found in the writings of both Wingate and Lloyd Owen many years before.

A final conclusion summarises the principal arguments of each chapter to foreground the operation of the cultural circuit. The five chapters of the thesis work together to show the cultural circuit in action: public tales of imperial heroes influenced the personal writings of Wingate and Lloyd Owen. Journalists and film-makers drew on the same narratives in their public accounts of the operations of the Chindits and the LRDG during the war. Reports of special operations often exposed tensions in the rhetoric of the 'People's War' between the ordinary and the exceptional, the mass and the elite. Picture library comic books demonstrate

⁹⁵ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.97.

⁹⁶ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.96. As of 22/12/2020 *Commando* reached no.5398.

the continued popularity of exciting tales of British heroism defined against foreign enemies until at least the 1970s.

Chapter 1: Fashioning the Hero: War, Exploration and Heroic

Masculinities

In August 1943 Winston Churchill set sail for Quebec aboard HMS *Queen Mary* for talks with President Roosevelt and his chiefs of staff on the future direction of the war. In a bid to impress his American counterpart, the Prime Minister assembled a collection of esteemed officers from the British armed forces. From the RAF came Wing Commander Guy Gibson, the celebrated hero of Operation Chastise, the ‘Dam Busters’ raid. From the Royal Navy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, a second cousin of Princess Elizabeth and the commander of HMS *Kelly*, whose exploits had inspired the 1942 film *In Which We Serve*. Representing the army was Brigadier Orde Wingate, fresh from the Burmese jungle following the first Chindit operation, for which the British press was already hailing him as ‘a new Clive of India.’⁹⁷ Wingate’s inclusion in Churchill’s pantheon of dashing men-of-action placed him in rarefied company, embodying the finest qualities of the British officer-class and expressing the Prime Minister’s romantic conception of warfare. To be considered in such terms was a significant moment in Wingate’s career, a validation of the identity of heroic military commander that he had pursued throughout his life.

The *Queen Mary* would have made a prize target for a German torpedo. Churchill’s retinue of advisors included Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Chief of the Imperial General

⁹⁷ *Daily Express*, 12/04/43, p.1.

Staff Alan Brooke, and Chief of Air Staff Charles Portal. The government ministers, service chiefs and military commanders present were largely men whose social background and leadership role placed them outside the collectivist discourses that underpinned the rhetoric of the ‘People’s War.’ Churchill captured the gulf between the experiences of those on board and ordinary citizens in his memoirs: ‘The *Queen Mary* drove on through the waves, and we lived in the utmost comfort, with a diet of pre-war times.’⁹⁸ While no lover of luxury, Wingate was not out of place in this company. As a decorated soldier, senior officer, and commander of irregular operations, he exemplified a masculine identity beyond that of the ‘ordinary’ soldier. In a war of mass conscription in which narratives of masculinity emphasised the understated heroism of the ‘ordinary’ soldier, how did elite commanders such as Wingate – ‘extraordinary’ soldiers – negotiate their identities as men?⁹⁹

The following chapter maps the discourses of heroic masculinity that shaped Wingate and Lloyd Owen’s self-fashioning. Both officers drew on a familiar repertoire of images and narratives in the cultural circuit of male heroism to construct and project their own heroic identities. By highlighting the influence of narratives of elite heroism on the self-fashioning of both men, my investigation supports Frances Houghton’s assertion that traditional concepts of the soldier-hero continued to influence how soldiers imagined war and

⁹⁸ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume V* (London, 1951), p. 63.

⁹⁹ For ‘ordinariness’ and Second World War masculinity, see Sonya Rose, *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), pp.151-196.

constructed their personal identities through to 1945 and after.¹⁰⁰ By identifying the discourses of heroism which both Wingate and Lloyd Owen considered aspirational, and analysing how both men drew on these discourses in their own self-fashioning, the chapter follows Michael Roper by integrating a study of cultural codes with an investigation of the subjective experience of being male.¹⁰¹ By highlighting the relationship between personal testimony and cultural representations, a key theme of this thesis is introduced: the circuitous relationship between personal accounts and public discourse.

My approach to Wingate and Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning is influenced by theories of performative identity. Judith Butler adapted this concept to question the fixity of gender identities, proposing instead a performative reading of gender as a signifying practice, operating through reiterated acting, rather than an 'interior depth that is said to be externalised in various forms of "expression."' ¹⁰² Butler argued that identities are produced through performance; the identity of an individual does not pre-exist such performances. Gender identity is therefore an 'act' which occurs within a field of socially established meanings of masculinity and femininity.¹⁰³ Butler's notion of the performed self in everyday

¹⁰⁰ Frances Houghton has traced the influence of discourses of heroic masculinity on Second World War servicemen's expectations of warfare, expressed in their memoirs. Frances Houghton, *The Veterans' Tale: British Military Memoirs and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019), p.219. See also Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the "Soldier Hero"', especially pp.28-32.

¹⁰¹ Michael Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), pp. 343-362.

¹⁰² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p.195.

¹⁰³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.202.

life can also be applied to the textual identity of the self, created through writing.¹⁰⁴ In her work on women's autobiography, Sidione Smith has proposed a performative reading of self-narration, arguing that identities are constructed through language and are discursive. For Smith, there is 'no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of narrating.' The self expressed through autobiography is 'an effect of autobiographical story telling.'¹⁰⁵ These theories about self-fashioning inform the following two chapters' analyses of Second World War officers, in which I show how the masculine ideal of the soldier-hero was strived for and performed. I argue that Wingate and Lloyd Owen's writings can be read as performative acts of identity formation in which each author attempted to construct his heroic masculine self. The performance of the narratorial self in both men's texts was complemented and reinforced by other kinds of performance during their careers as soldiers, as we shall see.

The following chapter is divided into three sections. First, it maps the cultural models of heroism that Wingate and Lloyd Owen found aspirational, highlighting how both officers drew on narratives of exemplary men in the cultural circuit of male heroism, integrating them into their own self-image. Section one argues that the archetype of the Christian soldier-hero exerted a powerful influence on Wingate's self-perception and self-representation. In his

¹⁰⁴ Sidione Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington, 1987); Leigh Gilmour, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (London, 1994); Sidione Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Woman, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (London, 1998); Sidione Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide For Interpreting Life Narratives* (London, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Sidione Smith, 'Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance' in Sidione Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Woman, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (London, 1998), pp.108-115, p.109.

emphasis upon Christian faith and martial heroism, Wingate actively positioned himself in the tradition of the nineteenth-century imperial hero, evoking (and occasionally invoking) his own hero, General Gordon. The figure of T. E. Lawrence also shaped Wingate's self-fashioning, serving as a model whom the Chindit commander explicitly rejected in order to better define his own heroic persona. Section two turns to David Lloyd Owen. In contrast to Wingate, Lawrence was a source of inspiration for Lloyd Owen, shaping both his expectations of the desert and his self-image as a practitioner of irregular warfare. Lloyd Owen's personal testimonies reveal the influence of romantic narratives of elite heroism on the author, and the ways in which he drew on those narratives to cultivate his own subjectivity. A final section turns to examine Wingate's 1933 expedition to search the Libyan Desert for the mythical oasis of Zerzura. The extended account of the expedition which Wingate wrote for the Royal Geographical Society was the only example of his writing published during his life, and offers a case study of masculine self-fashioning. Emerging from the analysis in these three sections is the role of 'ideal types' in the cultural circuit, idealised forms of masculinity that shaped both men's self-image.

1. Heroic Exemplars and Masculine Self-Fashioning: Orde Wingate

Geoffrey Cubitt has analysed the role of exemplary figures in the process of self-fashioning. By selecting exemplars, people make choices 'not just of moral precepts, but of

character, of existential attitude and of presumptive destiny.’¹⁰⁶ Men of Wingate and Lloyd Owen’s background – both products of elite British public schools and officer training colleges, from families with a strong military tradition – found in narratives of British imperial heroism models of masculinity to be emulated from an early age.¹⁰⁷ While the didactic function of imperial heroes has been well established, less attention has been paid to the internalisation of these scripts by imperial heroes themselves.¹⁰⁸ This may in part be due to the limitations of available sources. In her examination of British masculinity after the First World War, Joanna Bourke noted the absence of references to figures like T. E. Lawrence in servicemen’s testimonies.¹⁰⁹ In the writings of Wingate and Lloyd Owen such references were more frequent. As ‘elite’ soldiers in both the military and social sense of the word, it may be that both were more predisposed to the valorisation of such figures than the subjects of Bourke’s study. As military commanders conducting irregular operations in imperial theatres of war, and well-versed in the conventions of imperial heroism, Wingate

¹⁰⁶ Geoffrey Cubitt, ‘Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives’ in Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (eds.), *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000), pp.1-26, p.13.

¹⁰⁷ For imperial heroes in boys’ education see, among many, John M. MacKenzie, ‘Heroic Myths of Empire’, in John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992), pp.109-138; J. A. Managan, ‘Duty Unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of the New Imperialism’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (1995), pp.10-38; Steven Heathorn, ‘Representations of War and Martial Heroes in English Elementary School Reading and Rituals, 1885-1914’ in James Marten (ed.), *Children at War: A Historical Anthology* (New York, 2002), pp.103-115; Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: the Politics of history Teaching in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 2015), esp. ch. 5; Kristina Sperlich, ‘The Heroic in British Young Adult Fiction: Traditions and Renegotiations’ in Barbara Korte and Stefanie Lethbridge (eds.), *Heroes and Heroines in British Fiction Since 1800* (London, 2017), pp.169-182.

¹⁰⁸ Max Jones et. al., ‘Introduction: Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42 (2014), pp.787-825, p.798.

¹⁰⁹ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996), p.28.

and Lloyd Owen looked to British imperial heroes as they sought to fashion their own heroic identities, self-consciously performing their roles as soldiers of the British empire.

Wingate's choice of exemplary figures was tied not only to his profession as a soldier, but also to his intense religious faith. Three men appear to have inspired Wingate most strongly: the old Testament figure of Gideon, Gordon of Khartoum, and Oliver Cromwell. The men whose character, outlook and life trajectory he sought to emulate were celebrated military commanders and Christian soldiers, inspired to great deeds by a religious sense of duty. As a young boy, Wingate's hero was Oliver Cromwell, a figure whose religious fervour and battlefield success was invoked to describe the British imperial heroes of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.¹¹⁰ In the absence of an autobiography or memoir, the principal sources for Wingate's youth remain biographies written by authors who interviewed his contemporaries. A number of texts refer to Wingate's interest in Cromwell. In his 1955 biography of Wingate, Leonard Mosely described an incident in which a seven-year-old Wingate ambushed an aunt with a stick while reciting a passage from Jeremiah. When the child's parents attempted to discipline him, Wingate 'angrily shouted that he was Oliver Cromwell, off to war with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other.'¹¹¹ This game's performance of a righteous Christian soldier, invoked by his biographer to underline Wingate's early enthusiasm for scripture, anticipated a desire in later life to inhabit the identity of his heroes and even attempt to re-enact episodes

¹¹⁰ MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths', p.117.

¹¹¹ Leonard Mosely, *Gideon Goes To War* (London, 1955), p.10. See also Ivy Hay, *There Was a Man of Genius: Letters to my Grandson, Orde Jonathan Wingate* (London, 1963), p.151.

from their lives. During his posting in Palestine, Wingate attempted to recreate Gideon of Orah's routing of the Midianites as described in the Book of Judges.¹¹² Where his biblical hero and his Israelite followers lit torches and blew trumpets in the night to scare the enemy and force them to flee, Wingate and his Special Night Squads blew bugles around the walls of villages they suspected were harbouring terrorists.¹¹³ Wingate selected the geographical area where Gideon was said to have fought the Medianites, Ein Harod, as the base of operations for the Special Night Squads. A similar performativity marked the name of 'Gideon Force', the title Wingate gave to the army of British officers and 'native' irregulars under his command during the Ethiopian campaign in 1942. If the Ethiopians whom Wingate sought to liberate were symbolic of the Israelites, and the Italians their Midianite oppressors, then Wingate cast himself in the role of Gideon, the 'mighty man of valour' appointed by God to lead the small band of men to victory.¹¹⁴

The nineteenth-century construction of imperial heroism blended religious zeal with martial prowess, and undoubtedly shaped Wingate's self-perception from an early age.¹¹⁵ If Cromwell was an early childhood hero, General Gordon was a later one. By the time he entered Charterhouse in 1916, Wingate was able to argue fluently about Gordon's military campaigns.¹¹⁶ Given the Chindit commander's familial connections to Gordon, his

¹¹² Book of Judges, 7:16-22, *King James Bible*.

¹¹³ Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London, 1959), pp.171-172.

¹¹⁴ Book of Judges, 6:12, *King James Bible*.

¹¹⁵ MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths', p.117.

¹¹⁶ Mosely, *Gideon Goes To War*, p.14.

fascination with the archetypal Victorian Christian soldier-hero is unsurprising. Wingate's maternal grandfather was a friend of Gordon's: the two men shared an interest in religion and in improving conditions for the poor. For a time they worked together.¹¹⁷ More significantly, Wingate's father's cousin, Reginald Wingate, served as Kitchener's Director of Intelligence during the Omdurman campaign and as Governor-General of the Sudan from 1899-1916.¹¹⁸ John Mackenzie has asserted that Reginald Wingate was the most significant 'high priest' who constructed the cult of Gordon, publishing two of the texts central to creating the mythology that surrounded the general's last stand at Khartoum.¹¹⁹ 'Cousin Rex', as he was known to Wingate, exerted considerable influence on him as a young man and intervened on several occasions to help Wingate secure promotion or to otherwise further his military career.¹²⁰ Rex's admiration of Gordon contributed to Wingate's veneration of the Victorian soldier, and he remained a potent source of inspiration during Wingate's adult life.¹²¹ The Victorian general even found his way into Wingate's official report of the first Chindit

¹¹⁷ Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.25; Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War*, p.14. Mosely suggested that Gordon invited Wingate's ancestor to accompany him on his famous relief mission to Khartoum, although he is the only biographer of Orde Wingate to make this claim.

¹¹⁸ See Roy Pugh, *Wingate Pasha: The Life of General Sir Francis Reginald Wingate 1861-1953, First Baronet of Dunbar and Port Sudan, and Maker of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Barnsley, 2011).

¹¹⁹ Mackenzie, 'Heroic myths', p.117. Joseph Ohrwalder, *Ten Years Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp* (1892) and Rudolf Carl Slatin, *Fire and Sword in the Sudan* (1896) described the experiences of two Austrian prisoners of the Mahdi. Wingate published the books purporting to act as 'translator', but in reality he embellished the story considerably, amplifying the heroism of Gordon and the debauchery of the Mahdi.

¹²⁰ Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate, Unconventional Warrior: From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley, 2014), p.31.

¹²¹ Max Jones "'National Hero and Very Queer Fish': Empire, Sexuality and the British Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918-72", *20th Century British History* 26 (2015), pp.175-202 argues that Gordon remained a major figure in British culture after 1918.

operation, with Wingate quoting Gordon to justify his severe approach to perceived malingers in the forces under his command.¹²²

In another echo of Gordon, Wingate deliberately cultivated an eccentric public image. Describing the process of interviewing the Chindit commander, journalist Wilfred Burchett reported:

I visited him morning after morning and the procedure never varied. I sat on a chair with my notebook, while he paced up and down the room always naked and usually rubbing himself with a rubber brush, replying to my questions. Often the work would be interrupted for hours on end while he gave a dissertation on the current political or military situation or outlined his plans for the post-war world.¹²³

Burchett was not the only journalist to describe Wingate's unusual behaviour during interviews.¹²⁴ An unmistakable air of performance surrounded such interactions. There was a further eccentricity to Wingate's appearance, bordering on showmanship. Almost any famous photo of Wingate highlights his striking appearance, particularly the distinctive old-fashioned Wolseley sun helmet which became his personal trademark in Ethiopia and Burma. When in 1943 the famous pith helmet went missing following a flight to Delhi; Wingate immediately purchased a replacement rather than search for a more contemporary or lightweight alternative.¹²⁵ His choice of headwear came with its own associations, evoking Victorian explorers and colonial officer. In the popular imagination it was most closely associated with

¹²² 'Gordon said that a man is either his own physician or a fool at thirty, and this is the only teaching for infantry soldiers', Orde Wingate, 'Report on Operations of 77th Indian Infantry Brigade in Burma, February to June 1943' (June, 1943), p.9. IWM Wingate Archive, Chindit Box 1.

¹²³ Wilfred Burchett, *Wingate's Phantom Army* (London, 1944), p.53

¹²⁴ Photographer Anthony Beauchamp for example, who marched with the Chindits for the opening stages of *Longcloth*, described similar behaviour, see *Daily Express*, 28/08/1957, p.8.

¹²⁵ Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.470.

Henry Morton Stanley.¹²⁶ It also featured prominently in the 1930s imperial adventure films of Alexander Korda: a pith helmet was displayed on posters for *Sanders of the River* (1935). For Wingate, the helmet expressed the heroic persona he sought to fashion. It is noteworthy that he appears to have adopted the helmet in 1936, after his expedition to the Libyan Desert to search for the lost oasis of Zerzura. On board the *Queen Mary* in 1943, Wingate replaced his bush-shirt and helmet with the only fitting clothes apparently available – a navy uniform which he wore on deck along with his triple Distinguished Service Medal. One biographer speculated that Wingate had ample opportunity to purchase more conventional apparel, but deliberately neglected to do so in order to stand out from his fellow passengers.¹²⁷

Gordon's religiosity provided Wingate with particular inspiration. He peppered his official operational reports with biblical quotations, configuring campaigns in which he was involved as religious conflicts. This strategy of self-fashioning was most strikingly conveyed in two written reports of Wingate's actions during the 1942 Ethiopia campaign in which he led a small army of 'patriot' Ethiopian soldiers and British officers against a much larger Italian force.¹²⁸ Part narratives, part manifestos, the reports not only outlined Wingate's role in the campaign, but also offered his views on leadership, his criticisms of his superiors and his proposals for the development of the concept of Long Range Penetration. Often

¹²⁶ Clare Pettit, *Dr Livingstone, I Presume? Missionaries, Journalists, Explorers and Empire* (London, 2007), pp.179-210.

¹²⁷ Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, p.451.

¹²⁸ For the Ethiopian Campaign see Andrew Stewart, *The First Victory: The Second World War and the East African Campaign* (London, 2016), pp.165-203; David Shirreff, *Bare Feet and Bandoliers: Wingate, Sandford, the Patriots and the Liberation of Ethiopia* (London, 1995).

intemperate in tone, resorting to immoderate language and occasionally even irrational, his 'Appreciation of the Ethiopian campaign' was composed in June 1941. Notably, this document was written shortly before he attempted suicide, and provides a telling insight into his mental state during this period. He referred to his superior, General Alan Cunningham, as a 'military ape'; the NCOs under his command as 'the scum of the army'; his commissioned officers as 'mediocre and inferior'; and his signallers as 'lazy, ill-trained and sometimes cowardly.'¹²⁹ A second report, written in November 1941, attempted a more balanced analysis of the campaign, but nonetheless reiterated many ideas found in the earlier account.¹³⁰ What emerges from both documents is the author's construction of himself as a heroic figure: Wingate positioned himself firmly in the nineteenth-century tradition of imperial heroism, emphasising his qualities as an inspirational leader and Christian soldier.

Central to Wingate's philosophy of leadership, outlined in both campaign documents, was that there must be 'a clear and definite war aim for the patriots to pursue,' and that it must be 'preached by men of integrity and personality.'¹³¹ This doctrine echoes the much-quoted words of Wingate's hero, Oliver Cromwell: 'If you choose godly honest men to be captains of horse, honest men will follow them ... I would rather have a russet-coated captain who knows what he fights for and loves what he knows than that which you call a gentleman

¹²⁹ Orde Wingate, 'Appreciation of the Ethiopian Campaign' (18/06/1941), pp.8-16, IWM Wingate Collection Box 7. Hereafter, 'Appreciation.'

¹³⁰ Orde Wingate, 'The Ethiopian Campaign, August 1940 to June 1941', IWM Wingate Collection Box 7. Hereafter, 'Ethiopian Campaign.'

¹³¹ Wingate, 'Ethiopian Campaign', p.7.

and is nothing else.’¹³² It is likely that Wingate had Cromwell in mind when detailing his own approach to leadership. Emmanuel Yalan, an intelligence officer of the *Hagana* who worked with Wingate in Palestine, recalled after Wingate’s death that ‘he often used to quote Cromwell on the importance of a soldier understanding the purpose of the war in which he is fighting.’¹³³ His exhortations to the Ethiopian patriot forces suggest Wingate enthusiastically adopted this principle. His report recalled the tone with which he addressed potential local recruits: ‘for five years you have refused to submit to the yoke of the oppressor; for five years rather than surrender your ancient Christian culture, you have endured bombing, rapine and pillage ... Bring me your ... armed men and I will direct you against the common enemy.’¹³⁴ Portraying himself as a man of ‘integrity and personality,’ Wingate framed the conflict as an unequal struggle to defend ‘Christian culture’ from an uncivilised ‘common enemy.’ Through such rhetoric, Wingate positioned himself as Christian soldier in the mould of his own heroes. There was an interesting double meaning in his delineation of a ‘common enemy’. Though Wingate was undoubtedly referring to a shared enemy (an enemy ‘in common’) his choice of words can be contrasted with the exceptionalism implicitly present in himself. The ‘common’ enemy inevitably lacks the qualities of such ‘rare’ individuals. As the embodiment of the Christian virtues of ‘courage, faith and self-respect,’ victory is possible under his command.

¹³² Cited in Christopher Hill, *God’s Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London, 1970), p.67.

¹³³ In her book of personal recollections of Wingate, Wingate’s mother-in-law reproduced an article written by Emmanuel Yalan in its entirety, Hay, *There Was a Man of Genius*, p.152.

¹³⁴ Wingate, ‘Ethiopian Campaign’, p.8.

Further evidence of Wingate's desire to present the conflict in biblical terms can be found in both campaign reports' assertions that propaganda should highlight the Italian advantage in arms and men. According to Wingate, 'the motif of the campaign was David versus Goliath ... All propaganda should reflect this.'¹³⁵ Significantly, Wingate's interpretation of the conflict was echoed in a 1941 Ministry of Information film celebrating victory in the Ethiopia campaign, entitled 'The Lion of Judah,' which featured shots of Wingate and General Cunningham alongside Haile Selassie, as the emperor surveyed his reconquered capital. It concluded with Haile Selassie seated in the palace garden at Addis Ababa, speaking in English and addressing the camera directly: 'People who see this throughout the world will realise that even in the twentieth century, with faith, courage and a just cause, David will still beat Goliath.'¹³⁶ Wingate's influence on the emperor's words is unmistakable, both in the invocation of David and Goliath and the emphasis on 'faith and courage and a just cause.' Religious faith shaped Wingate's interpretation of the conflict, and he wished it to shape the views of others. Wingate even directed biblical language at his own government in his 'Appreciation,' to caution against annexing the newly liberated Ethiopia, quoting from the Book of Proverbs that 'righteousness exalteth a nation.'¹³⁷

Although Wingate's Christian interpretation of the Ethiopian campaign seems sincere, a certain theatricality underlay his use of Biblical imagery, suggesting a desire to impose on

¹³⁵ Wingate, 'Appreciation', p.7.

¹³⁶ Ministry of Information, 'Lion of Judah' (1941), IWM Ref: CET 200.

¹³⁷ Wingate, 'Appreciation', p.7.

his contemporaries his own conceptualisation of the conflict and his role in it. To the Ethiopian patriot, or a senior military figure, the interpretation of the campaign as a battle to defend Christianity might not be immediately obvious. Yet as an exercise in self-fashioning, both documents seek to shape the terms of their reception. In presenting the campaign as a righteous Christian struggle, Wingate sought to position himself as a Christian soldier-hero. The pious reputations of nineteenth-century imperial heroes served as archetypes representing a set of personal qualities and heroic characteristics which Wingate drew on to fashion his own heroic persona.¹³⁸

Wingate found further resources for self-fashioning beyond his Christian faith. As with his Zerzura expedition, Wingate's posting to Ethiopia appealed to his romanticism. The Byronic tradition of the misfit taking up the cause of an oppressed people was a role in which Wingate cast himself five years earlier in Palestine during the Arab Revolt; he was to remain a passionate Zionist for the rest of his life. Yet, while in his published narrative of his Zerzura expedition examined below, Wingate consciously aligned himself with an older, romantic tradition of the adventurer, in his 'Appreciation' of the Ethiopia campaign he was at pains to distance himself and his methods from those of another imperial hero, T. E. Lawrence.

The case of Lawrence demonstrates how the influence of exceptional individuals was not limited to emulation, but could also manifest in conscious differentiation. A distant

¹³⁸ MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths', p.112.

cousin of Wingate's, the ghost of Lawrence haunted him throughout his career, and Wingate rarely missed an opportunity to disparage him.¹³⁹ This may not always have been the case. In his 1955 biography of Wingate, Leonard Mosely claimed that as a young man Wingate was enthralled by stories of Lawrence. In my research of Wingate's writings I have not found any direct evidence to support this view, although Mosely's assertion might appear to be borne out by Wingate's enrolment at the School of Oriental Studies in 1926 to learn Arabic.¹⁴⁰ Both Wingate and Lawrence were practitioners of irregular warfare in exotic settings, and comparisons between the two officers were often drawn by the press, most notably following Wingate's death as chapter 4 will show. Wingate himself, however, used Lawrence as a kind of negative template, against which he contrasted his own actions and qualities. Describing the process of eliciting support from local patriots in Ethiopia, Wingate singled out Lawrence's methods for criticism: 'it became increasingly clear that the type of operation usually associated with the name Lawrence, is wasteful and ineffectual. In fact psychologically it is wrong.'¹⁴¹ Continuing under the heading 'The Wrong Method,' Wingate outlined a hypothetical situation in which a British commander adopted Lawrence's approach, attempting to exchange arms and money with a patriot leader for a promise that the 'native' troops would perform some operation. According to Wingate, this 'type' of commander 'achieves nothing,' and is easily fooled by 'bogus reports' of patriot

¹³⁹ Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, p. 36.

¹⁴⁰ Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War*, pp.16-17.

¹⁴¹ Wingate, 'Appreciation', p.3.

operations.¹⁴² For Wingate, the Lawrence ‘type’ of soldier embodied characteristics he found undesirable, in particular the emphasis on material rewards rather than moral inspiration.

Wingate’s ‘Appreciation’ continued by contrasting Lawrence’s ‘Wrong Method’ with his own approach. Under the title ‘The Right Method’, he outlined a further hypothetical situation in which, rather than asking for patriot assistance, a commander demonstrates his force’s worth by carrying out an attack on the enemy. Slighted by his exclusion from the operation, the patriot leader approaches the commander and offers his services. The commander accepts – with the proviso that ‘I shall judge you by your results, and if you make a mess of it, I shan’t be able to use you again.’ The result is that the patriot ‘rushes to the fray with keenness and devotion. He regards the commander as his leader. It is a privilege to help him.’ The lesson, according to Wingate, is that to ‘raise a real fighting revolt you must send in a *corps d’elite* to do exploits and not peddlers of war material and cash. Appeal to the better nature, not the worse.’¹⁴³

The juxtaposition of the success of his own method with the failure of Lawrence’s approach amplifies Wingate’s qualities as a leader whom it is a ‘privilege’ to follow, and his appeal to the ‘better nature’ of the patriot presents the act of leading as a moral undertaking. The phrase ‘do exploits’ is evocative of a language of heroism which is quite out of place in a military report. It is possible that Wingate adopted the phrase from the Book of Daniel (a

¹⁴² Wingate, ‘Appreciation’, p.3.

¹⁴³ Wingate, ‘Appreciation’, p.4.

device examined further below) which, in the King James Version favoured by Wingate, states ‘the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.’¹⁴⁴ The tacit implication is that Wingate’s model of leadership was more virtuous and heroic than that of Lawrence. Rather than exchanging arms and money for empty promises, the heroic commander ‘does exploits’ and leads from the front. In doing so, he earns the loyalty of the patriot.

Wingate's projection of himself as an exemplar of the ‘right’ method of leadership was even more explicit in his November 1941 report of the Ethiopian campaign. He outlined the same situation as above, only this time he wrote in the first person, explicitly presenting himself as the heroic commander. The patriot leader becomes ‘a most trusted lieutenant, as well disciplined as any ... officer.’¹⁴⁵ The qualities of inspirational leadership, implicit in his earlier account, were described in detail, as Wingate outlined his ethos as leader. He distinguished himself from his predecessors who had adopted Lawrence’s model of leadership: ‘hitherto we had made the mistake of appealing to the cupidity and self-interest of Ethiopians by offering them money and poor quality war material.’¹⁴⁶ For Wingate, the leader must offer an example of virtue so that he may appeal to the same qualities in the patriot,

¹⁴⁴ Book of Daniel, 11:32, *King James Bible*.

¹⁴⁵ Orde Wingate, ‘Ethiopian Campaign’, 5-6.

¹⁴⁶ Wingate, ‘Ethiopian Campaign’, p.5.

rather than to self-interest and greed: ‘courage, faith and self-respect, these were the qualities we could appeal to successfully because they were on our side.’¹⁴⁷

The reasons for Wingate’s disavowal of Lawrence were complex. Both men had taken up the cause of two groups in conflict with each other in the Middle East – Wingate, the Jews; Lawrence, the Arabs – and during his period in the region Wingate developed a vehement anti-Arabism. In a 1939 paper entitled ‘Palestine in Imperial Strategy’, Wingate criticised the destructive influence of the Lawrence legend on British policy in the Middle East. ‘In return for the highly paid assistance of this small rabble of Hejazi Bedouin, we have handed over to the “Arabs” the whole of Saudi Arabia, and the Yemen, Iraq, Trans-Jordan and Syria. A more absurd transaction has seldom been seen.’¹⁴⁸ A further cause of Wingate’s disapproval may have been Lawrence’s ‘assimilation’ into Arab culture. Wingate’s approach to leadership resembled the Victorian model of ‘muscular Christianity’ that was directly connected to the ‘civilising mission’ of empire, positioning the racially white British officer as emblem of the superiority of imperial British armed forces over ‘native’ fighters. Wingate thus sought to impose British discipline on the non-British troops participating in military operations. In contrast, Lawrence adopted the habits and customs of the indigenous soldiers under his command, apparently casting off his English identity to live as an Arab. His refusal

¹⁴⁷ Wingate, ‘Ethiopian Campaign’, p.6.

¹⁴⁸ Orde Wingate, ‘Palestine in Imperial Strategy, HMS Dorsetshire 6/9/39’, pp.6-7, The British Library, Orde Wingate Palestine Papers, no.2313.

of all organised religion in his adult years marked a further point of departure from the zealously Christian Wingate.¹⁴⁹

Wingate may also have had more concrete reasons to distance himself from his cousin. Simon Anglim has noted that many senior figures in the British army were not taken in by the ‘myth’ of Lawrence, sceptical of his heroic depiction in accounts by Basil Liddell Hart and Robert Graves, among others.¹⁵⁰ Wingate’s uncle Rex had been Lawrence’s operational commander in 1917 and provided a more authoritative source of information than his hagiographers. British official documents from 1917-18 expressed doubts about the cost-effectiveness of Lawrence’s methods, and in the official British summary of the 1917 Arab revolt Lawrence merited only two mentions.¹⁵¹ Certainly many soldiers who fought in the Middle East referred to Lawrence as a hero, not least David Lloyd Owen, as we shall see. But Wingate was certainly not alone among British army officers in questioning the legend of Lawrence of Arabia.¹⁵²

Wingate’s critique of Lawrence should not therefore be seen as a challenge to a prevailing view in the military. Instead, Lawrence served as a kind of reverse image for

¹⁴⁹ Lawrence’s ideas regarding the origins of Semitic religions are outlined in chapter three of T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London, 1935). See Irving Howe, ‘T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Heroism’, *The Hudson Review* 3 (1962), pp.333-364.

¹⁵⁰ Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, p.37. For examples of the hero-worship of Lawrence between the wars see Robert Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs* (London, 1927); Basil H. Liddell Hart, *T. E. Lawrence in Arabia and After* (London, 1934).

¹⁵¹ Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, pp.36-38; M. Hughes, ‘What did the Arab Revolt Contribute to the Palestine Campaign?’, *Journal of the T. E. Lawrence Society* 2 (2006), pp.75-87.

¹⁵² For a recent historical study of Lawrence’s activities during the First World War see Neil Faulkner, *Lawrence of Arabia’s War: The Arabs, the British and the Remaking of the Middle East in WWI* (New Haven and London, 2016).

Wingate's self-fashioning. Steven Greenblatt has proposed that part of the process of self-fashioning involves the rejection of the other, something or someone 'perceived as alien, strange or hostile.'¹⁵³ For Wingate, part of conveying who and what he was meant demonstrating who and what he was not. His invocation of Lawrence as a representative of the 'wrong' method – and thus the antithesis of Wingate – marked an appeal to a widely-recognised reference point in the British army at that time. The rejection of Lawrence as 'alien' helped define the limits of the 'self' Wingate sought to fashion.

2. Heroic Exemplars and Masculine Self-Fashioning: David Lloyd Owen

While Wingate sought to distance himself from T. E. Lawrence, he provided a source of inspiration for David Lloyd Owen, shaping the LRDG commander's understanding of the desert and his own identity as a practitioner of irregular warfare. In contrast to Wingate's cynicism, Lloyd Owen's writings conjured a romantic image of Lawrence. His 1957 *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, part of a broader publishing trend of veterans' memoirs, offered extended reflections on the heroes who had inspired him.¹⁵⁴ Lloyd Owen recalled his

¹⁵³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 2005 [1980]), p.9.

¹⁵⁴ For this trend see Houghton, *Veterans' Tale*.

romantic conception of the desert prior to beginning his service with the LRDG in 1941.

Tracing this conception back to Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, he wrote:

Lawrence had described the desert to me and had given me an insight into its conditions. I knew something of the thirst, the beauty, the silence, the heat, the Arab, the freedom and the arid stretches of sand which are characteristic of the desert. Lawrence had written, in his incomparable English, of the splendour that he had known and he had written of the greatness of it all with a touch of artistry that has never been excelled.¹⁵⁵

The role of 'imaginative geography' as a tradition of 'thought, imagery and vocabulary' in the construction of imperial identity has been explored by Edward Said, and applied by Graham Dawson to the study of military masculinities.¹⁵⁶ The same 'imagined geography' that Dawson identified in the construction of Lawrence's Arabia applies here to Lloyd Owen's Libya. Lawrence's romantic portrayal of the desert provided Lloyd Owen with more than an 'insight into its conditions'. The desert commander's exploits furnished a cultural script for Lloyd Owen's own expectations of warfare in the Libyan Desert. When imagining life with the LRDG prior to joining the unit, Lawrence's description of the desert featured as prominently in Lloyd Owen's imagination as his own previous experiences during the Arab Revolt in 1939, or the large-scale British advance into Libya in 1940.¹⁵⁷ The perception of a personal relationship with Lawrence enacted in the phrase 'described the desert to me' captures the sense of kinship Lloyd Owen felt with the celebrated desert leader. As an

¹⁵⁵ David Lloyd Owen, *The Desert My Dwelling Place* (London, 1957), p.46.

¹⁵⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), pp.49-72; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp.167-169.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.30-33.

exemplary figure, he embodied the attitude and presumptive destiny Lloyd Owen assumed for himself.

The invocation of Lawrence as igniting Lloyd Owen's 'passion' for irregular warfare in the desert reveals two kinds of performance. First, in the act of volunteering for the LRDG during the war, Lloyd Owen self-consciously performed the role of adventure hero in the tradition of Lawrence. The Lawrence myth provided the 'script' of the romantic hero: a British officer shunning material comforts to fight a guerrilla war on the colonial periphery. The second kind of performance was a literary one, a conscious decision made by the author of a memoir to shape their text through references to a well-known historical figure, conjuring a particular set of associations.

Lloyd Owen and Wingate's contrasting approach to the figure of Lawrence underlines the contested nature of heroic reputations, each placing a different imaginative investment in the desert commander. Even so, that Lawrence should play such a central role in both men's heroic self-fashioning testifies to the potency of the Lawrence myth, and indeed to the continued cultural resonance of narratives of imperial heroism in the mid-twentieth century. Just as Wingate imagined himself a Christian hero in the tradition of Gordon, Lloyd Owen was explicit in acknowledging his own fantasies of imperial heroism. In his memoir he confessed 'I have always been a bit of a dreamer, and my imagination could help me to live

in the most vivid way such stories as P. C. Wren told of *Beau Geste* and other tales of the French North African Empire.¹⁵⁸

Max Jones and Berny Sèbe et al. have suggested that desert adventure stories were more popular in France than Britain, but Lloyd Owen's writings testify to their influence on at least some Britons.¹⁵⁹ Here we see Lloyd Owen 'fashioning in his imagination' the masculinity of the imperial hero which he would 'live out in the flesh' during his career as a soldier.¹⁶⁰ In his eagerness to join the LRDG we see the process by which an imagined identity gives 'shape, purpose and direction to the lives of men.'¹⁶¹ Service with the unit provided Lloyd Owen with the opportunity to enact the role of imperial hero hitherto only imagined through accounts of Lawrence's exploits and romantic adventure fiction .

Like Wingate, Lloyd Owen's imaginative fashioning of a heroic identity predated his career as a soldier, although his continued after the Second World War. He recalled, in his memoir how 'Earlier I had been entranced with Rider Haggard and found no difficulty in identifying myself with the emotions, ideals, thoughts, fears and hopes of his heroes and I went all the way with him to King Solomon's Mines. '¹⁶² In identifying himself with the heroes of imperial fiction Lloyd Owen deliberately cultivated his own heroic subjectivity. His later identification with Lawrence marked a continuation of this strategy of heroic self-

¹⁵⁸ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.45.

¹⁵⁹ Jones, 'Introduction: Decolonising Imperial Heroes', p.798.

¹⁶⁰ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 1; p.118.

¹⁶¹ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, pp.118-119.

¹⁶² Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.44.

fashioning. Despite enacting his romantic fantasies of guerrilla warfare and heroic leadership with the LRDG, Lloyd Owen continued to imaginatively inhabit the identity of heroic figures after the war. Reflecting in 1957 on his 'ability to lose myself completely in the identity of a legendary hero', he described his emotional response on hearing a recent lecture by Everest mountaineer Sir John Hunt:

at the end I could feel the wind screeching up the South Col and whining on into eternal nothingness; I could feel the fatigue and exhaustion that he and the others must have felt; I could sense the triumph that must have crowned their superhuman efforts and the tears welled up in my eyes just as they must have flooded into theirs when the peak had been conquered.¹⁶³

British press reports of the 1953 expedition to Everest presented the triumph as a culminating moment of the British Empire, with the climbers hailed as the embodiment of imperial valour.¹⁶⁴ As an adventure story of a soldier performing feats of heroism in the service of the Empire, Hunt's lecture appealed to the same sensibilities that attracted Lloyd Owen to the works of Wren, Rider Haggard and Lawrence. Lloyd Owen's memoir reveals how the heroic myths of empire retained a powerful hold over the imaginations of at least some Britons through the 1950s.

Lloyd Owen synthesised the exploits of real individuals with imperial fiction into an imaginative geography that informed his perception of desert warfare before he joined the LRDG. That he was able to 'imagine' himself the hero of a Rider Haggard novel in the same

¹⁶³ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.46.

¹⁶⁴ Gordon T. Stewart, 'The British Reaction to the Conquest of Everest', *Journal of Sport History* 7 (1980), pp.21-39; Peter H. Hansen, 'Tenzing's Two Wrist Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture in Britain 1921-1953', *Past & Present* 157 (1997), pp.159-177.

way that he ‘imagined’ himself as T. E. Lawrence or John Hunt suggests that he made little distinction between real and fictional narratives of imperial heroism. Both follow a similar narrative structure, collapsing the distinction between fact and fiction within the category of ‘adventure story.’ The life-stories of imperial heroes like Lawrence performed similar emotional work to for Lloyd Owen as made-up adventure stories by authors such as Rider Haggard, with both creating a desirable male heroic identity.

The passages above from Lloyd Owen’s memoir highlight the continued resonance of narratives of elite imperial heroism in the mid-twentieth century, and their importance to the construction of military masculinities during the Second World War. The pantheon of ‘legendary heroes’ in whom Lloyd Owen ‘lost his identity’ encompassed a range of figures, from the Victorian adventurers of Rider Haggard’s novels to the soldiers of *Beau Geste*, through the dashing First World War heroics of Lawrence to the post-war mountaineers led by Hunt. Raised in an environment that valorised martial heroism, Lloyd Owen cultivated a subjectivity to match those of the romantic heroes of imperial fiction. As a soldier, he imagined himself as Lawrence, finding in the operations of the LRDG a stage on which to perform the role of soldier-hero. Narratives of imperial heroism not only provided the framework through which he related his experiences as a soldier, but also, as chapter three will demonstrate, shaped the ways in which the men of the LRDG were depicted in post-war popular culture.

3. Exploration, Technology and Heroic Self-Fashioning: Wingate's Search for Zerzura

Having established how heroic exemplars influenced both Wingate and Lloyd Owen, the final section of this chapter turns to analyse a specific example of masculine self-fashioning in Wingate's account of his 1933 expedition to search the Libyan Desert for the mythical oasis of Zerzura. Lloyd Owen's memoir provides unusually explicit reflections on the relationship between individual identity and wider popular culture, offering examples of the cultural circuit in action. In the absence of a comparable memoir or journal, the sources available for Wingate are more fragmentary, but his article on his Zerzura expedition in the Royal Geographical Society's journal - the only example of his writing published during his lifetime – offers some valuable insights. The expedition has received relatively little attention from writers, usually passed over as a staging-post in the development of his approach to planning and leadership.¹⁶⁵ The meticulous advance preparation, the marching of long distances across difficult terrain in an inhospitable environment, the leading of non-British comrades in a shared endeavour: all would feature later in Wingate's career and ideas about long range penetration. Yet the expedition reveals more about Wingate than the genesis of ideas about military strategy, also offering valuable insights into how he sought to present himself as a romantic explorer-hero to an influential audience.

¹⁶⁵ Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War*, pp. 24-33; Sykes, *Orde Wingate*, pp.71-81; Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972), pp.38-39; Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London, 1995), pp.76-78; John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia and Zion* (London, 2012), pp. 41-43; Jon Diamond, *Orde Wingate: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict* (London, 2012), pp.10-11.

In the very first paragraph Wingate positioned himself as embodying the ‘old type of exploration.’ He lamented that technological developments had left ‘the type of adventure pursued by the geographical explorer increasingly difficult to find’, echoing Joseph Conrad’s famous 1923 essay on ‘Geography and some explorers’ which had described the filling up of the ‘exciting spaces of white paper’ which pioneers had previously traversed.¹⁶⁶ Wingate drew a distinction between contemporary, scientific approaches and an older, romantic conception of exploration.¹⁶⁷ The

explorer of today dreams of microscopic discoveries that have escaped the telescopic vision of the early travellers ... He need have little love of danger, hardness or solitude. Instead of throwing his imagination across a range of mountains, a waste of sand or of waters ... he must concentrate it on a prescribed area about which little remains unknown.

Wingate’s distinction between scientific and romantic exploration expressed his yearning to be seen as an adventurer in the mould of his pioneering predecessors. It was a ‘love of danger’ rather than ‘microscopic discoveries’ that compelled him to ‘throw his imagination’ across the desert. Confessing that he did not initially possess the scientific qualifications required for the ‘new type’ of exploration, he believed that ‘five years of marching in the Sudan had qualified me to undertake the old type.’¹⁶⁸

The nature of exploration remained hotly contested in this period. Histories often present a progressive narrative of development from romantic to scientific exploration, but

¹⁶⁶ For analysis of Conrad’s essay see Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, 2001), pp.3-5.

¹⁶⁷ Orde Wingate, ‘In Search of Zerzura’, *Geographical Journal* 83 (1934), pp.281-385, p.281.

¹⁶⁸ Wingate, ‘Zerzura’, p.281.

such accounts underestimate the extent to which both co-existed. While the rapid growth of educational and research institutions promoted the (allegedly) objective practices of geographical science, tales of adventure in unknown lands continued to exert a powerful influence on men like Wingate through popular culture. The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) itself straddled the dual impulses of scientific exploration and romantic adventure, shaping the practices of British explorers.¹⁶⁹ Wingate spent months preparing for his expedition. Both the RGS and the Survey Department lent him a range of instruments and helped him ‘acquire such a smattering of geological and archaeological learning as would enable me to observe and record points of interest.’¹⁷⁰ He ‘had no experience of using the theodolite, and was faced with the necessity of teaching myself with the aid of Close’s textbook of topographical surveying.’¹⁷¹ Other preparation included reading anthropology textbooks to acquire ‘some idea of what to look for in the way of artefacts, etc., and of the most likely places to find them.’¹⁷² By describing his meticulous preparations, Wingate established his authority as an explorer following in the footsteps of his hero General Gordon, and officers like General Henry Rawlinson, and Lieutenant Colonel Francis Younghusband –

¹⁶⁹ The tension between the two impulses continues to generate conflict in the RGS. See, for example, Simon Reid-Henry, ‘The age of exploration is over’, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/may/15/expeditions-royal-geographical-society> [accessed 29 April 2020].

¹⁷⁰ Wingate, ‘Zerzura’, p.282.

¹⁷¹ Wingate, ‘Zerzura’, p.286.

¹⁷² Wingate, ‘Zerzura’, p.286.

all RGS Fellows who had led expeditions alongside their military careers and published in the society's journal.¹⁷³

Tensions around exploration frequently revolved around modes of transport in the first half of the twentieth century. Clements Markham, RGS President from 1893 to 1905, adhered to the Victorian technique of man-hauling sledges on polar expeditions, arguing that the use of dogs and skis undermined the nobility of the enterprise.¹⁷⁴ The failure of Robert Falcon Scott to embrace the methods adopted by his Norwegian rival Roald Amundsen was one reason for the disastrous outcome of his 1911-12 attempt on the South Pole.¹⁷⁵ The 1922 Everest expedition led by Charles Bruce initiated an ongoing controversy about the use of supplemental oxygen in mountaineering. Bruce questioned whether using bottled oxygen was 'sporting'. The British mountaineer George Mallory referred to the use of oxygen as a 'damnable heresy,' although he gave in and used oxygen during the 1924 attempt on the summit of Everest on which he died.¹⁷⁶ John Hunt's narrative of the successful 1953 ascent – so enchanting to David Lloyd Owen – also downplayed the role of science, focusing instead on the grit and determination of the mountaineers.¹⁷⁷ Concerned that the expedition's

¹⁷³ H. C. Rawlinson, 'Monograph on the Oxus', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 42 (1872), pp.482-513; F. E. Younghusband, 'A Journal Across Central Asia, From Manchuria and Peking to Kashmir, Over the Mustagh Pass', *Proceedings of the Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography* 10 (1888), pp.485-518.

¹⁷⁴ Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford, 2003), p.71.

¹⁷⁵ The extent to which Scott himself actively opposed the use of dogs is debated. See Jones, *Last Great Quest*, pp.117-120.

¹⁷⁶ Wade Davis, *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest* (New York, 2011), p.387.

¹⁷⁷ Jones, *Last Great Quest*, pp.277-278; John Hunt, *The Ascent of Everest* (London, 1953).

romantic heroism would be damaged if too much attention were given to scientific research, Hunt instead offered a rousing tale of fortitude and derring-do.¹⁷⁸

While Wingate earned the right to publish in the RGS's *Geographical Journal* by his preparation and training in the use of surveying instruments, he expressed his commitment to a more romantic model of exploration by choosing to cross the desert by camel not motor car.¹⁷⁹ Sand dunes 'held to be impassable to cars' a few years ago had recently been criss-crossed by Ralph Bagnold and Pat Clayton, members of the 'Zerzura club', a loose affiliation of primarily British adventurers who had explored the Libyan Desert.¹⁸⁰ Sceptical about the physical existence of the oasis, Bagnold nonetheless hailed Zerzura as a metaphor for the remaining unexplored spaces of the Earth, embodying the thrill of exploration, adventure and discovery.¹⁸¹ When Bagnold formed the Long Range Desert Group in 1940, several members of the Club joined him.¹⁸²

While Bagnold (and, later, Lloyd Owen) sought to modernise a romantic discourse of desert travel by incorporating motorised transport, Wingate travelled with thirteen camels and four Arab guides in his search for the lost oasis.¹⁸³ He carefully listed the many advantages

¹⁷⁸ Harriet Tuckey, *Everest - The First Ascent: The Untold Story of Griffith Pugh* (St Ives, 2013).

¹⁷⁹ For the debate over the use of motor cars in desert exploration, see Andrew Goudie, *Wheels Across the Desert: Exploration in the Libyan Desert by Motorcar, 1916-1942* (London, 2008) and Andrew Goudie, 'Desert Exploration in North Africa: Some Generalisations', *Libyan Studies* 50 (2019), pp.59-62.

¹⁸⁰ Saul Kelly, *The Lost Oasis: The Desert War and the Hunt for Zerzura* (Oxford, 2002), pp.1-26.

¹⁸¹ Ralph Bagnold, *Libyan Sands: Travel in a Dead World* (London, 1935), pp. 218-219.

¹⁸² As well as Bagnold and Clayton, other notable members included Guy Prendergast, William Kennedy Shaw, and George Murray.

¹⁸³ Wingate, 'Zerzura', p.286.

provided by cars equipped with improved engines and the latest tyres. But he chose to travel by camel, he explained, because the slower pace enabled a more thorough examination of the terrain:

If the object be purely to cross a waste, then the slowness of the camel is simply a disadvantage. ... But if the object is to search for something in the wilderness ... the verdict may well be given in favour of camel transport ... The occasional artefact that occurs in the sands of the northern desert would be missed by the occupant of a car because there is nothing to betray its presence and it is itself very inconspicuous.¹⁸⁴

He went on to explain that the leisurely pace of camels made 'the mind of the traveller ... less hurried and more deliberate', allowing the traveller to digest their observations.

Judged by its contribution to scientific knowledge, Wingate's Zerzura expedition achieved little. His article included detailed descriptions of the terrain and bird life, and illustrations of three knives and a rock specimen; Bagnold's motor car journeys had amassed a much larger haul of specimens. Sandstorms and a leaking water tank thwarted Wingate's plans to extend the map of the region, while a chance encounter led him to discover with dismay that Pat Clayton was operating in the same area for the Desert Survey. Using a motor car, Clayton had already reached a 'place to which I had penetrated with so much labour and effort'; Wingate dismissed the car as a 'hated symbol of civilization.'¹⁸⁵ 'Others have achieved material results far greater, have made journeys more perilous and more spectacular', Wingate freely admitted at the end of his report. He found meaning in the

¹⁸⁴ Wingate, 'Zerzura', pp.282-283.

¹⁸⁵ Wingate, 'Zerzura', p.297.

expedition not by its contribution to scientific knowledge, but as a demonstration of his own character: 'no one, going forth in the spirit of adventure, has found more joy and delight in the fulfilment of his enterprise than I did in the failure of mine'. By undertaking a hazardous expedition across the 'sand sea' by camel and publishing his account in the *Geographical Journal* Wingate positioned himself in a tradition of imperial explorer heroes. The performance, not the results, were what mattered.

Conclusion

The identities that Wingate and Lloyd Owen fashioned during their careers as soldiers offer an alternative to the discourses of 'temperate masculinity' that Sonya Rose sees as hegemonic during the Second World War. The heroic exemplars in the cultural circuit of male heroism that both officers drew on when constructing and projecting their personas were notable for their status as elite figures. The masculine ideal of the soldier-hero, particularly the imperial soldier, was central to the identities that both men projected and performed. As the products of families with strong military traditions, of elite public schools, officer training colleges, and, ultimately special-operations units, we should not be surprised that the veneration of elite models of heroism shaped both officers' masculine sense of self. Ben Griffin has argued that we need to pay more attention to the different 'communication communities' in which individuals are socialised, to better understand the multiplicity of

masculine identities that exist within a given society.¹⁸⁶ Such an approach acknowledges that multiple hegemonic masculinities may exist simultaneously across different communities. Individuals may even move between these communities, altering their behaviour in accordance with the masculine norms of a particular group. Griffin's concept adds further complexity to the cultural circuit as it is applied in this thesis. The communication communities in which Wingate and Lloyd Owen were socialised – familial, educational, professional, social – furnished them with a set of behaviours, values and appearances that would be recognised as 'masculine.' For such men during the Second World War, the masculine ideal of the elite soldier-hero was no less hegemonic than the temperate heroes described by Rose,

Both Wingate and Lloyd Owen drew on exemplary figures, 'ideal types', from the cultural circuit when fashioning their masculine identities. This chapter has demonstrated the importance of models of elite, heroic masculinity for the self-fashioning of both men. Unlike Lloyd Owen, Wingate did not explicitly acknowledge his internalisation of the identity of the imperial soldier hero in any of his surviving texts. Yet we can find both in his actions and in his writings examples of his emulation of Christian soldier heroes, his reports peppered with obscure quotations from the Old Testament and occasional references to General Gordon. His vocal criticism of Lawrence and his leadership style was a significance facet of his self-fashioning, helping to delineate Wingate's own heroic profile. Lloyd Owen was more

¹⁸⁶ Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', *Gender and History* 30 (2018), pp.377-400, p.385-391.

explicit than Wingate in acknowledging the influence of heroic exemplars on his own self-image; his memoir serves as an index of such figures and reveals the ways in which the young officer sought to cultivate his own heroic subjectivity.

The archetype of the imperial hero constituted a powerful model of identity for military commanders like Wingate and Lloyd Owen. In aligning themselves with such figures, both men's self-fashioning might appear to be more easily accommodated within Martin Francis' conceptualisation of romantic Toryism. The flamboyant and heroic men of empire whom they selected as exemplars certainly embodied many of the essential qualities of the romantic Tory pantheon: the superior breeding of the upper class, martial prowess, and patriotism.¹⁸⁷ Yet it is not sufficient to approach the individual as though they simply embody the masculinity of exemplary men. Such an approach fails to distinguish between representations of masculinities in cultural images and narratives, and the complexities of an identity as it is lived out. Cultural representations can obscure the complexity and ambiguity of the historical individual, neatly packaging lived experience into an uncomplicated and easily recognisable masculine ideal. Rather than reproducing masculine identities, cultural narratives of masculinity provide discursive reference points through which a range of subject positions may be articulated. Probing the subjective processes of masculine self-fashioning

¹⁸⁷ Martin Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp.90-117, p.94.

reveals the lived complexities of masculinity, highlighting tensions and contradictions that are not always visible when focusing on cultural representations alone. The following chapter explores some of these tensions and contradictions in the interactions between notions of leadership, social class and the self-fashioning of Wingate and Lloyd Owen.

Chapter 2: Fashioning the Hero: Leadership, Social Class and Race

The previous chapter mapped the discourses of heroic masculinity that influenced Wingate and Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning, tracing the ways in which both men internalised narratives of elite heroism and drew on these narratives when constructing and projecting their own heroic personas. Imperial soldiers, Christian military commanders, romantic explorers, and the heroes of adventure fiction: the cultural scripts of elite masculinity that shaped both men's self-image might appear at odds with the discourse of ordinary heroism identified by Sonya Rose as the hegemonic masculine ideal during the Second World War.¹⁸⁸ Wingate's admiration for Gordon of Khartoum and Lloyd Owen's for Lawrence of Arabia seems much closer to the romantic Toryism identified by Martin Francis, an 'individualist, elitist and imperialist fantasising of the wartime imaginary'.¹⁸⁹ Yet individual identities defy reduction to a single cultural script. Rather than assigning individuals either to the category of 'romantic Tory' or to that of 'temperate hero', the following chapter argues that the writings of Wingate and Lloyd Owen reveal how both men negotiated a spectrum of historically specific masculine identities ranging from the temperate, egalitarian and collectivist, through to the spectacular, elitist and individualist.

¹⁸⁸ Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), pp.151-196.

¹⁸⁹ Martin Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp.90-117.

Social class powerfully inflects masculine identities. Rose has argued that the masculine heroism of the ‘People’s War’ deliberately rejected the elite heroics of the First World War officer and emphasised instead the courage of the ‘little man.’¹⁹⁰ This democratising of the qualities of heroism produced a masculine ideal that stressed the ‘ordinariness’ of heroic figures with whom working-class men could identify.¹⁹¹ In contrast, Francis’ delineation of romantic Toryism highlighted a ‘flamboyantly elitist sensibility that sat uneasily with the democratic discourses of wartime populism.’¹⁹² The heroic figures of romantic Toryism – the patrician statesman, the military commander, members of the royal family – were primarily drawn from the elite classes of society. There is an opposition between ‘temperate masculinity’ and its ‘egalitarian morality’, and the ‘elitist sensibility’ of romantic Toryism.¹⁹³ Yet the lived experience of masculinity is messier than the ‘ideal types’ that emerge from the cultural circuit. These ideal types provide a spectrum of discursive reference points from which individuals can assemble a diverse range of subject positions. In their writings, Wingate and Lloyd Owen adopted various strategies to navigate the cultural scripts of ordinary and exemplary heroism outlined by Rose and Francis. Analysing the

¹⁹⁰ Rose, *Which People’s War*, p.157.

¹⁹¹ Scholars have also explored how notions of ‘ordinariness’ shaped heroic representations of men who were not part of the military during the war. See Lindsey Robb, *Men At Work: The Working Man in British Culture, 1939-1945* (Basingstoke, 2015); Alison Chand, *Masculinities on Clydeside: Men in Reserved Occupations During the Second World War* (Edinburgh, 2016); Juliette Pattinson et al, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinities During the Second World War* (Manchester, 2017); Arthur McIvor, ‘Rebuilding Real Men: Work and Working Class Male Civilian Bodies in Wartime’ in Lindsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp. 121-144.

¹⁹² Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’, p.93.

¹⁹³ Rose, *Which People’s War*, p.25; Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’, p.91, p.92.

processes of masculine self-fashioning highlights tensions and contradictions that are not always visible when focusing on cultural representations alone.

This chapter moves beyond the 'ideal types' that shaped Lloyd Owen and Wingate's self-image, to explore the influence of notions of social class and race on both men's self-construction as exemplary leaders. First, the chapter investigates tensions between notions of ordinary and elite heroism in Lloyd Owen's personal testimonies. The egalitarian sentiments and modest self-effacement expressed in Lloyd Owen's 1957 memoir, *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, conformed to the collectivist rhetoric that underpinned the 'People's War', yet these ideas existed uneasily alongside contrary tendencies in the text and in other writings. In a private diary kept between 1944 and 1945 whilst commanding the LRDG's operations in the Balkans, Lloyd Owen did not find it necessary to genuflect to wartime populism, instead expressing his frustration with his new role away from the front-line and a yearning for heroic action. Secondly, the chapter explores Wingate's official narrative of the first Chindit operation in 1943, codenamed *Longcloth*. Wingate's report of the expedition expressed his dissatisfaction with the conscript soldiers of a citizen army. His many criticisms of the ordinary men under his command assumed a class dimension, echoing broader concerns among the military establishment regarding generational decline. Far from emphasising the indomitable collective spirit of the 'People's War', Wingate's report centred on his own essential role in transforming the brigade into an adequate fighting force. In contrast to this official report written primarily for the military leadership, Wingate's public comments on the operation to journalists mobilised the language of the 'People's War',

celebrating the status of the ‘ordinary’ Chindit soldier. A final section explores how racial stereotypes influenced both Wingate and Lloyd Owen. Both men constructed their identities as specifically white *British* officers when expressing their views on the fighting qualities of soldiers of other ‘races’. In these descriptions, Allied soldiers from the colonies served to underline their own qualities as leaders, while enemy soldiers functioned as a set of alien characteristics against which each author could define himself.

1. Leadership and Social Class: David Lloyd Owen

David Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning both complements and contrasts that of Orde Wingate. Unlike Wingate, Lloyd Owen survived the war, went on to participate in further conflicts and deployments, and was able to curate his self-representation in memoirs and other writings. In these works, his generally egalitarian attitudes and careful performance of modest self-effacement contrast with the individualistic and eccentric character of Wingate. Yet while these elements of temperate masculinity were certainly part of the public character enacted by Lloyd Owen, the following section reveals how they co-existed with seemingly contradictory elements drawn from alternative cultural scripts and divergent models of class and masculinity.

Lloyd Owen's descriptions of the nature of the LRDG and its men conformed to many important aspects of the discourse of the ‘People's War.’ In both of the memoirs he published

– in 1957 and 1980 – he stressed the egalitarian nature of the command structure on operations, with each man pitching in regardless of rank and performing several jobs in order to ensure the operation was a success.¹⁹⁴ In his first memoir, *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, Lloyd Owen often emphasised the professional and meritocratic nature of the unit, with individuals selected for their skills and abilities rather than social class or connections. In contrast to the self-conscious amateurism of the enthusiastic all-rounder that underlay Wingate’s Zerzura expedition, Lloyd Owen’s memoir demonstrated a careful respect for the roles of equipment and training. Where Wingate ‘acquire[d] ... a smattering’ of knowledge about navigation equipment, Lloyd Owen described his ‘learning the art of shooting the stars with a theodolite and working out the elaborate and complicated formulae that would result in giving an accurate latitude and longitude.’¹⁹⁵ Upon first meeting the Yeomanry Patrol, of which he was to become a part, Lloyd Owen ‘stared in blank wonder at their equipment.’¹⁹⁶ Equally, his attitude towards professional knowledge underlined the value of meritocracy in selection for the unit. Lloyd Owen noted approvingly that, in putting together the LRDG, Ralph Bagnold and Guy Prendergast ‘made certain that they chose good tradesmen to carry their plans into effect.’¹⁹⁷ Further, Lloyd Owen stressed the necessity of training in a range of skills, since ‘[a] signaller, who could not fire a Lewis gun, was not much use nor was a

¹⁹⁴ David Lloyd Owen, *The Desert My Dwelling Place* (London, 1957), p.79; David Lloyd Owen, *The Long Range Desert Group, 1940-1945: Providence Their Guide* (London, 2000 [1980]), pp.17-25.

¹⁹⁵ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.78

¹⁹⁶ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.51

¹⁹⁷ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.81

navigator who could not help the fitter to change a tyre or repair a radiator.’¹⁹⁸ There is no room for the amateur, reliant on his being the ‘right sort’ to achieve his ends; instead, there is a professional body of knowledge and associated set of skills and tools that constitute ‘soldiering.’

Yet contrary tendencies are also evident in Lloyd Owen’s account. Autobiography may be seen as the ‘product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary [and] omission.’¹⁹⁹ Drawing on the conventions of the *bildungsroman*, Lloyd Owen’s self-narrative charts a trajectory from naivety to wisdom, ignorance to knowledge.²⁰⁰ The very familiarity of this format obscures how ‘amateurish’ Lloyd Owen might have initially been, possessing no specific qualifications for selection for the LRDG, but nevertheless implicitly convinced that he is the ‘right sort.’ His selection proceeded through his social acquaintances in Cairo, through connections with those of comparable class standing. It was General Wavell who arranged the initial meeting between Lloyd Owen and Bagnold; Lloyd Owen mentioned, almost in passing, that not only had he ‘known [Wavell’s] only son when we were both at Winchester,’ but also that he and the General’s sister ‘saw quite a lot of each other’ and ‘dined at Government House on several occasions’ together.²⁰¹ When describing his initial interview

¹⁹⁸ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.55

¹⁹⁹ Sidione Smith, *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington, 1987), p.45.

²⁰⁰ Frances Houghton has traced the trope of the ‘coming of age’ story in veterans’ memoirs in *The Veterans’ Tale: British Military Memoirs and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019), pp.205-224.

²⁰¹ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.44

with Bagnold, Lloyd Owen's assumptions about his merits despite his lack of qualifications are all too apparent. After Bagnold barked a series of enquiries at him, Lloyd Owen admitted to himself that 'so far I had professed very little knowledge of all the things that must have been essential in the LRDG.' Finally, at a loss for any other factor in his favour, Lloyd Owen could only assert that he was 'dreadfully keen and sure [he] can learn.'²⁰²

Even in his accounts of an elite fighting unit, Lloyd Owen frequently repeated the familiar rhetoric of the 'People's War' emphasising the importance of common sacrifice. In describing his thoughts when interviewing potential recruits, he 'thought all the while of trying to find men who would fit in with the others,' and would, in the face of hardship and shortage, be willing to 'share together and share alike.' In this regard, he reported with apparent pride that '[t]here were no privileges for the officers and none for the men.'²⁰³ Yet upon close reading, the phrasing of this statement may reveal a degree of tension. If there was no practical difference between 'no privileges' and 'none,' why is the distinction maintained in the structure of the sentence? Lloyd Owen here betrayed an undercurrent of social differentiation beneath the outwardly democratic rhetoric. A further nuance to this attitude emerges in a dialogue between Lloyd Owen and his commander Guy Prendergast, upon the former's arrival at Kufra. Having apparently been informed that Lloyd Owen had seemed 'too ready to watch and not willing enough to lend a hand' during the journey, Prendergast

²⁰² Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.49

²⁰³ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.83.

chided him that ‘in the LRDG, we’ve all got to take a hand. None of us can be passengers and sit back and let others do the work.’²⁰⁴ Lloyd Owen’s description of his response is revealing: ‘I thought for a moment and knew he was right. I suppose I had been a little over-anxious not to be a nuisance...’ The hesitancy in this reported response, its feel of a retrospective justification, suggests something not previously considered. Again, in the tradition of the *bildungsroman*, Lloyd Owen attributed his passivity to inexperience.

Through such elisions and omissions, the insufficiency of any characterisation of Lloyd Owen as an egalitarian, ‘temperate Tommy’ becomes apparent. This is certainly not to denounce him as a fraud or hypocrite. Rather, such details demonstrate the ongoing interaction that takes place between the individual and the discourses they absorb from the cultural circuit. The apparent disparity between text and subtext provides a mirrored image of the relationship between the ‘ideal types’ of the cultural circuit and the individual, who interacts with, adapts to, and interiorises these types. Tensions, inconsistencies, omissions and contradictions persist in part because no single ideal type can wholly dictate self-representation, with all its historically specific nuances of class, race, gender and so forth.

In the context of wartime rhetoric, the term ‘ordinary’, with its implicit flattening of class difference, relies upon the existence of an inverse attribute of ‘extraordinariness’. Tensions between the construction of the Long Range Desert Group trooper as ‘ordinary’ and

²⁰⁴ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.79.

‘extraordinary’ persist throughout *The Desert My Dwelling Place*. In a foreword, Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templer observed that the ‘reputations of great captains could never have been built without the exploits, courage and loyalty of the “ordinary man.”’²⁰⁵ Early in the narrative Lloyd Owen contemplated the ‘type’ of man accepted into the unit. He reflected that the LRDG trooper was not a ‘tough devil-may-care brigand,’ nor was he ‘attracted to the glamour which attached to the LRDG’ or even ‘outstandingly good or bad at any aspect of [his] trade.’ Rather, he was ‘the very ordinary and decent type of man with a high sense of responsibility and duty.’ For Lloyd Owen, the mark of the LRDG trooper was his ‘even temperament’, and thus it was ‘the ordinary man who was not subject to fits of depression or elation’ whom the unit sought to recruit. The ‘quiet unassuming nature’ that Lloyd Owen described as the defining characteristic of LRDG soldiers echoes the discourse of ‘temperate masculinity’ identified by Rose.²⁰⁶

Yet Lloyd Owen was also at pains to emphasise that ‘every man ... was a volunteer’ who willingly came to the unit ‘fully aware of the difficulties and hardships which they might have to face.’²⁰⁷ Soldiers of the LRDG

lived through days and weeks of suffocating heat when the water ration was insufficient to slake [their] thirst ... toiled through days of digging trucks out of endless quicksands ... slept through nights when [they] lay within a few miles of the enemy and never knew what the dawn might bring.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.13.

²⁰⁶ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.82-83.

²⁰⁷ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.84-85.

²⁰⁸ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.83.

This passage reveals the tension between ordinariness and extraordinariness in Lloyd Owen's account. LRDG soldiers may have been ordinary, decent men, but they also displayed exceptional courage in volunteering to brave the multiple dangers of an extraordinary environment.

Elsewhere, Lloyd Owen informs readers that although 'ordinary', the LRDG recruit had 'a rather higher than average standard of intelligence.' The unit looked for men who 'possessed the qualities of leadership and moral courage' required to stand up to the trials with which they were faced. The values celebrated here echo the public school ethos of heroism associated with the First World War officer. Lloyd Owen recalls that he once interviewed 'nearly seven hundred men, all of whom were volunteers, in order to select twelve new recruits.'²⁰⁹ The clear implication is that the men selected for service in the LRDG were exceptional. The 'even temperament' which Lloyd Owen identified as vital was in fact a rare and precious characteristic. At times he explicitly acknowledged this point.

I suppose, they were not really so ordinary because they had to possess that essential quality of being able to live without bicker, without jealousy, prejudice or malice towards their comrades. It sometimes takes a man who is rather out of the ordinary to do that.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.82-83.

²¹⁰ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.85.

That the LRDG trooper was something ‘out of the ordinary’ soldier was further emphasised by Lloyd Owen’s reflection that, after the unit’s dissolution, ‘it took me a long time to get used to ordinary soldiering again... I did not realise that I could not expect the same results in the post-war army.’²¹¹ It was the LRDG’s ability to ‘skim the cream off other units’ which enabled the recruitment of troopers with a ‘higher standard of intelligence, tolerance and ability to fend for themselves.’²¹² Despite the author’s insistence that his comrades were ‘very ordinary’, the LRDG troopers described in *The Desert My Dwelling Place* possessed extraordinary qualities which set them apart from their fellow soldiers in the regular army.

Lloyd Owen’s construction of the LRDG trooper is significant for what it reveals not only about how the writer viewed his fellow soldiers, but also how he himself wished to be viewed by the reader. Lucy Hall and Gill Plain have followed Sonya Rose in arguing that modesty was a central quality of mid-century British heroism; heroes did not talk of heroism and their actions went unvoiced unless displaced through mechanisms of humour, euphemism and banter.²¹³ In this analysis, one’s own heroism is ‘unspeakable’, as to articulate it would be to undermine the condition of modesty on which heroism depends. Lloyd Owen’s

²¹¹ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.85.

²¹² Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.85.

²¹³ Lucy Hall and Gill Plain, ‘Unspeakable Heroism: The Second World War and the End of the Hero’ in Barbara Korte and Stephanie Lethbridge (eds.) *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction Since 1800* (London, 2016), pp.117-133.

insistence that he and his LRDG comrades were ‘ordinary men’ indicates the enactment of this heroic ideal which celebrated modesty and restraint.

Modesty is used as rhetorical device throughout *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, most often in the author’s persistent disavowal of exceptional bravery. In the introduction Lloyd Owen confessed that he ‘was often frightened, often tired, often worried and very often longing to ... be in some other place when danger was lurking.’²¹⁴ When the author does make a seemingly brash statement about his own courage, it is immediately mitigated by an admission of his frailty in order to acknowledge the necessary convention of modesty. Thus, although we are told that ‘danger has some kind of satanic appeal to me. I am drawn to it in an octopus-like grip of fear,’ this observation is immediately counterbalanced by the admission that ‘I am just one of the many ordinary people who have not the courage to show that I am afraid... so often have I wished that I was brave like the fortunate few.’²¹⁵

Descriptions of the operations in which Lloyd Owen was involved are told with characteristic understatement. The narrative of the unit’s 1942 raid on the fort of Tobruk – for which Lloyd Owen was awarded a Military Cross – focuses primarily on the author’s trepidation and his frustration with his role in the operation.²¹⁶ He makes no mention of the decoration awarded for his gallantry in action. Indeed, the medal is conspicuous by its absence from the text; to

²¹⁴ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.19.

²¹⁵ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.20.

²¹⁶ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.245.

articulate his own bravery or heroism too loudly would risk the condemnation associated with pride and would be unheroic.²¹⁷

Rather than dwell upon his own heroism, Lloyd Owen lionised the men with whom he served in his memoir. Although he failed to mention his own medal, he meticulously recorded his comrades' decorations and described at length the courage and fortitude of the men on his patrol. Five pages are spent relating the story of Titch Cave's 'gallant escape' from captivity and hazardous journey across the desert to allied lines.²¹⁸ Lloyd Owen signalled his approval of Titch's modesty, recognising the conventions of heroic self-effacement and reflecting that 'he told me the story shyly.'²¹⁹ Titch's account

explains practically nothing of the emotional stress and physical hardship...no mention of the cold that he suffered at night... he does not refer to the torture that his feet underwent when they were blistered, cut, septic and sore; nor the pangs of thirst which must have beset him...He barely recounts the terror that must have seized his mind when it was filled with hallucinations and doubt and anxiety.

Lloyd Owen foregrounded the courage of the men of his patrol while down-playing his own actions, his heroism is displaced onto the men around him. Modesty and understatement amplify the author's heroism. In a private diary kept between 1944 and 1945 during his period as LRDG commander, Lloyd Owen did not find it necessary to adopt the same strategies of modesty. Indeed, the tensions between notions of 'ordinary' and 'elite', and modesty and bravado that run through his memoir are largely absent from his more

²¹⁷ Gill Plain, 'Unspeakable', p.119.

²¹⁸ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.69.

²¹⁹ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.69.

immediate and private reflections on the war. Often abandoning the ‘even temperament’ described in *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, Lloyd Owen used his journal to record his frustrations with his new role co-ordinating operations from central command, away from the action on the front line. The text offers a more straightforward example of heroic self-fashioning, freed from the conventions of ‘temperate masculinity’ and ‘unspeakable heroism’ which restrained his published memoirs. In his journal Lloyd Owen expressed his romantic fantasies of heroism, clearly distinguishing himself from ordinary men.

Lloyd Owen’s frustration with his new role away from the action and his difficulty in adjusting to the long hours and incessant meetings – almost entirely absent from both of his published memoirs – runs throughout his journal.²²⁰ Although briefly acknowledged in *Providence Their Guide* (‘I wanted to taste that spice and thrill of adventure which were the antidote for overwork’), Lloyd Owen regularly expressed his discontent in his journal.²²¹ He repeatedly attempted to join missions carried out by men under his command and recorded his despair when he was forbidden to do so by his superiors. On 26 June 1944 he wrote of his wish to ‘see some fun and get a change from all this,’ and his feeling that he was ‘almost on my knees and have really begun to get tired.’ Similarly, on 25 August he wrote that he hoped to join a mission parachuting behind enemy lines in Croatia because he was ‘so bored with the office and conferences and the continued struggle to get on with the war.’ On 4

²²⁰ All quotations in this chapter are taken from David Lloyd Owen, *Personal Diary, June 1944 – July 1945*, IWM, Lloyd Owen Collection, Box 4.

²²¹ Lloyd Owen, *Providence*, p.187.

September, after extracting ‘half a promise’ from his superiors that he could join an operation on the Greek island of Kithira, Lloyd Owen remarked that he was ‘planning to go as I don’t intend to be sitting in Bari when peace is declared.’²²² The next day he wrote of a mission in Austria, ‘this may be a huge success and I would love to go but nobody will let me. Oh! It makes me furious and I’m sick and tired of being kept in a glass case! One of these nights I will just go unbeknown to everyone.’

These episodes highlight the importance of visibly performing an active role to the LRDG commander’s expectations of military service, and the damage caused to his masculine sense of self when opportunities to enact such a role were denied. In contrast, when leading an LRDG patrol during the desert campaign between 1941 and 1943 Lloyd Owen was able to live out his pre-war fantasies of masculine heroism, imagining himself as soldier-hero in the tradition of Lawrence of Arabia. Removed from front-line action, Lloyd Owen was unable to construct a sufficiently heroic narrative of his contribution to LRDG operations that accorded with his gendered expectations of warfare.

This disjuncture between special-forces soldiers’ fantasies of service and their experiences in the war has been explored by Juliette Pattinson in interviews with veterans of the Jedburghs, a special operations team tasked with stimulating guerrilla warfare in occupied France and the Netherlands. Pattinson traced the psychic ‘discomposure’ in veterans’

²²² LRDG command was based in Bari, Italy.

accounts caused by unsettling aspects of their service, such as long delays before deployment, failing to be utilised altogether or the lack of available weaponry to take action on the ground.²²³ For such men, the realities of warfare failed to deliver the daring adventures they sought when volunteering for special operations. Lloyd Owen's diary reveals a similar crisis in the author's psyche, further highlighting the fragility of a masculine subjectivity that placed the highest value on active front-line service.

A revealing moment appears when Lloyd Owen faced being invalided out of the unit following a serious back injury. Having finally been granted permission to lead three patrols on a mission behind enemy lines in September 1944 – a development recorded in his diary with much glee – Lloyd Owen injured his back parachuting into occupied Albania. A doctor was inserted behind enemy lines to treat him, and the LRDG commander spent a month in enemy territory coordinating operations as the Allies joined the partisans in harassing the German retreat. After his return to Italy, Lloyd Owen visited the military hospital for an x-ray and was informed that he had badly fractured his spine and was to be sent back England for six months to recover. In his memoir, he recorded that this news 'nearly made him weep' and that he 'felt so very frustrated.'²²⁴ In his diary, however, suffused with the freshness of recent experience and facing the prospect of missing the rest of the war, Lloyd Owen described the

²²³ Pattinson, 'Fantasies of the Soldier-Hero', p.39.

²²⁴ Lloyd Owen, *Providence*, p.200.

episode in a passage worth repeating at length for what it reveals not only of his frustration, but also of his perception of himself and the men he served with:

I feel everyone now is conspiring against me to wrench from me the only life that has really ever gladdened me, with people of my own choice whose very spirit and nature have been the driving force behind my own soul. To leave them means somehow I feel becoming again a dull automaton whose unavoidable and frustrated floundering in the mire of world iniquity will be so helpless until once more I can escape to a cause which has a purpose and disciples to fight wholeheartedly for its fulfilment.²²⁵

The florid prose adopted by Lloyd Owen stands out from the undemonstrative tone of most of his journal entries and provides a clear contrast to the understatement that is characteristic of his memoirs. Lloyd Owen's tortured response evokes the romantic individualism of the heroes of the adventure stories he read before the war, rather than the 'even temperament' so central to the performance of 'temperate masculinity.' The LRDG commander's sense of elevated purpose and destiny, his desire to display his heroic virtue and 'fight wholeheartedly' for a cause with likeminded 'disciples', the spiritual bond described between LRDG troopers, these sentiments all express a heroic ideal which set Lloyd Owen and his comrades apart from 'ordinary' soldiers.

Lloyd Owen's disgust at the prospect of becoming a 'dull automaton' further underlines his sense of the elite status of the LRDG. On the surface, the phrase suggests a rejection of the professionalism of a modern army that stifled individualism and reduced

²²⁵ Lloyd Owen, personal diary, 08/11/44.

soldiers to little more than cogs in a machine. His desperation to remain part of the unit also expressed a broader disillusionment with the routines of modern life, and ‘mass society.’²²⁶

My stream has flowed under many bridges and navigated many falls and hazardous ravines through the mountains of war and suddenly it turned a corner across the quick easy plain before I flow unheeded and in vain into the sea of the humdrum uninitiated majority. Oh! No. Will rise again somehow! I cannot long remain with clipped wings and fettered by the irons of vicious little power. I must join again the small crowd of real free people whose minds and bodies are motivated by conscience and not by pompous printed proclamation.

Lloyd Owen’s fear at the loss of autonomy and individuality that might accompany being removed from the LRDG echoes a discourse in which war was raised as a means of escaping ‘the soul-killing mechanism of modern technological society.’²²⁷ Eric Leed has argued that war enthusiasm in 1914 was built upon a perception of war as ‘liberating’ the individual from modern economic activity into an arena in which ‘character and identity’ would be realised.²²⁸ In the context of the First World War, the campaign in the Middle East, with its possibilities for adventure, provided an ‘imaginative contrast’ not only to the mechanised, industrial warfare of the Western Front, but also to the dehumanizing effects of industrial society as a whole. The impulse towards romantic adventure can therefore be seen as an ‘escape from modernity’, a flight into simplicity from ‘the pressures and paradoxes of modern life.’²²⁹ For Lloyd Owen, life with the LRDG provided a similar ‘imaginative contrast’ to the stultifying lives of the ‘humdrum initiated majority’. He and his comrades were an elite, a ‘small crowd

²²⁶ Graham Dawson has noted that the war in the Middle East provided a similar imaginative contrast to Western modernity during and after the First World War. See Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p. 174-175.

²²⁷ Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge, 1979), p.69.

²²⁸ Leed, *No Man’s Land*, p.68.

²²⁹ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.174.

of real free people' whose actions were governed by conscience and not by the 'pompous printed proclamation[s]' of bureaucrats.

2. Leadership and Social Class: Orde Wingate

Orde Wingate expressed similar anxieties about the negative consequences of the rise of mass society in his diverse writings. Assumptions about social class infused his self-fashioning as an exemplary leader of men. Whereas small expeditions like the Zerzura adventure were the preserve of exceptional men like himself and other adventure heroes like Stanley and Livingstone, under the conditions of total war Wingate was required to train the 'softer generation' that he dismissed in his Zerzura narrative, or the 'scum of the army' that he condemned in his Ethiopia report. The rapid expansion of the army in the Spring of 1940 saw men who had never before considered military service thrust into uniform.²³⁰ Some commentators expressed fears over the mental preparedness of a generation of civilian soldiers softened by hand-outs and easy living.²³¹ Selina Todd has described the emergence by the late 1930s of a 'new, modern working class' in bustling cities that benefitted from high employment, reasonable wages and was catered to by a booming leisure culture.²³² Social

²³⁰ For this expansion see, among many, Jonathan Fennell, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2019), pp.63-67; Sanders Marble, 'Filling the Ranks: Conscription and Personnel Policies' in John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume 1: Fighting the War* (Cambridge, 2015), pp.585-607; Geoffrey Field, "'Civilians in Uniform': Class and Politics in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945', *International Labour and Working-Class History* 80 (2011), pp.121-147.

²³¹ Alan Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War* (London, 2015), pp.100-103.

²³² Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010* (London, 2014), p.91.

critics prior to the war bemoaned the perceived weakening of a generation of young British men who concerned themselves with the pleasures of dancing and the cinema rather than the robust, manly activities such as boxing or football enjoyed by their fathers.²³³ The 1944 propaganda film *The Way Ahead* captured these concerns, depicting a group of soft, self-pitying conscripts entering the army and eventually learning to appreciate the rigours of military life. The promotional material for the film described the recruits as members of ‘the pampered generation.’²³⁴ For traditionalists in the military, the mass of new conscripts lacked the necessary stoicism and deference to authority that characterised the soldiers of the First World War. The string of humiliating reverses suffered by the army in the opening years of the war – Dunkirk, Norway, Singapore, Burma – led some senior figures to point to generational decline as a key factor in the poor performance of British troops. After the failed Norway expedition, for example, General Auchinlek complained in a confidential document for the War Cabinet that soldiers seemed ‘depressingly young, not so much in years but in self-reliance and manliness generally.’²³⁵ Following the Dunkirk evacuation, General Edmond Ironside recorded in his diary ‘I feel more than ever we must get men who can fight. The namby-pamby people that have grown up in late years are not to be trusted in this emergency.’²³⁶ Written in the early stages of the war when victory was not assured, these

²³³ Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years* (Manchester, 2012), pp.106-108.

²³⁴ Quoted in Vincent Porter and Chaim Litewski, ‘*The Way Ahead*: Case Study of a Propaganda Film’, *Sight and Sound* 50 (1981), pp.110-116, p.113.

²³⁵ Quoted in Henrik Lunde, *Hitler’s Pre-emptive War: The Battle for Norway, 1940* (Newbury, 2009), p.549.

²³⁶ Edmund Ironside, *Time Unguarded: The Ironside Diaries, 1937-1940* (London, 1962), p.352.

words contrast sharply with the mythology of a 'golden generation' the pervades narratives of the conflict today.

Wingate appears to have held the same fears of generational decline as Auchinlek and Ironside. During operation *Longcloth*, he assembled all his officers in a jungle clearing behind enemy lines. The men assumed the commander intended to give them some new information about the enemy, or important new instructions regarding the mission. Instead, Wingate delivered a lecture for over an hour on what he described as the 'so-called miracle' of Dunkirk, pouring scorn on the mentality that viewed defeat and flight from the battlefield as a national victory. Wingate's official biographer recorded that he 'declared that the rejoicing over Dunkirk manifested a degenerate state of mind which had lured on aggressive nations to plunder and war.'²³⁷ Dunkirk marked a significant moment in the popular understanding of the conflict as a 'People's War.' Sonya Rose has argued that it was after the evacuation that the depiction of the war as a 'People's War' 'took hold in public imagination.'²³⁸ Wingate's dismissal of the triumphalism that followed the evacuation struck a different note to the rhetoric that followed the evacuation, expressing a cynicism about populist narratives of wartime collectivism. Further evidence of this cynicism can be found in

²³⁷ Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London, 1959), p.396.

²³⁸ Rose, *Which People's War*, p.29. Richard Titmuss also argued that the evacuation stimulated the move to wartime collectivism. Richard Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (London, 1950), p.508. For an examination of the discourse surrounding the evacuation during the war and after, see Penny Summerfield, 'Dunkirk and the Popular Memory of Britain at Wat, 1940-58', *Journal of Contemporary History* 45 (2010), pp.788-811.

Wingate's official report of *Longcloth*, in which he expressed his dissatisfaction with an army of ordinary citizen soldiers from the 'softer generation.'

In his report, Wingate provided descriptions of the personnel under his command and the methods employed to prepare them for the operation. Although he had succeeded in persuading his Commander-in-Chief, Wavell, to back him with a brigade-sized force, manpower shortages meant that the troops allotted to Wingate were the only ones available at the time. Consequently, a large contingent of Wingate's long-range penetration group, formally titled the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade, were the officers and men of the 13th Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment. A wartime unit raised in 1940 and 1941 of conscripts from Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester, the 13th Battalion had been employed since its formation on coastal defence in England and garrison and security duties in India. Few of the men were young by the standards of the British army, and many of them were married. The physical fitness of many of the soldiers was considered to be poor, and almost 40% were rejected in the course of training.²³⁹ Chapter three explores depictions of *Longcloth* in the British press and the propaganda message attached to the operation: that 'ordinary' men might be trained to achieve extraordinary feats, and that the British soldier could match the Japanese at jungle warfare. Wingate's own narrative emphasised the poor standard of the troops and the qualities of his leadership, which demonstrated the potential for his theories to

²³⁹ Orde Wingate, 'Report to Commander 4th Corps on Operations of 77th Indian Infantry Brigade in Burma February to May 1943' (1943), IWM Wingate Archive, Chindit Box 1, p.3. Hereafter referred to as 'Burma Report'.

be applied on a broader scale. If a small force of sub-optimal troops could penetrate and wreak havoc deep behind enemy lines, what might a larger contingent of soldiers better suited for Long Range Penetration (LRP) operations achieve? Wingate's criticisms of the city-dwellers of 13th Battalion assumed a specifically class dimension, emphasising not only the lack of physical fitness, but also the weak character, low intelligence and poor education of the soldiers allocated to him. As Wingate informed his superiors in the report, his criticisms of the men were to be read as guidance for the selection of personnel for future LRP operations.²⁴⁰ In Wingate's narrative, the operation was primarily a success because of his ability to transform the sub-optimal human material at his disposal into a capable and enthusiastic fighting force, despite their many shortcomings.

Far from emphasising the indomitable collective spirit of the 'People's War', throughout his report Wingate was forthright in stressing the unsuitability of the men of the Battalion for the type of operation he intended to lead. Describing the soldiers, he noted that 'the physical standard was not high', and that 'it would be wrong for me to pretend they were well chosen physically or mentally.' Commenting on a training exercise designed to test the unit's fitness for operations, he observed that 'there was an undue number of fainthearted stragglers.' Even at the end of the brigade's intensive training period he judged that the standard of troops fell 'short of the ideal.' His emphasis on their perceived mental

²⁴⁰ Wingate, 'Burma Report', p.2.

shortcomings echoed broader concerns over the quality of citizen soldiers conscripted into the British army.²⁴¹

Wingate theorised about the softening effect that greater access to healthcare had on recruits. Describing the medical aspects of training, he reflected that

hypochondria is the prevailing malady of Englishmen today. National Health Insurance, necessary and beneficial in many ways, plays its part in inducing this disease complex. While a native of Africa or India will not, unless encouraged to do so by a European, even bother to mention a temperature above 103° F, an Englishman will throw himself out of work on the slightest deviation from normal. Even common colds are regarded as serious excuses for idleness. To this kind of self-indulgence there is no end.²⁴²

Placing the emphasis on the soldiers' psychological frailty and their apparent inability to withstand hardship, Wingate highlighted a constitutional weakness in the recruits, their 'idleness' denoting a failure of character. He went on to invoke his own hero as an exemplar of the correct, self-reliant approach of the individual soldier to his personal health: 'Gordon said truly that man is either his own physician or a fool at thirty, and this is the only teaching for infantry soldiers.' Wingate's task in training the Battalion, as he laid it out in his report, was not only to prepare them for the technical and strategic aspects of *Longcloth*, but to instil in the men the necessary personal qualities to become good soldiers.

²⁴¹ For interwar concerns over physical fitness see Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006), pp.595-610. For the persistence of these concerns during the Second World War see Emma Newlands, *Civilians into Soldiers: War, the Body and British Army Recruits, 1939-1945* (Manchester, 2015), pp.26-47; Alan Allport, *Browned Off*, pp. 77-78.

²⁴² Wingate, 'Burma Report', p.9.

To describe this process, Wingate outlined the three virtues that he believed made a good soldier: ‘physical toughness, training (in which are included intelligence and education, which alone ensure adaptability and grasp), and courage. The last, which is the most important, may be defined as the power to endure present evil for the sake of ultimate good.’

²⁴³ Courage, an innate quality of character, might not be possible to instil through military drill and training. Thus, Wingate continued, ‘whatever courage a man has will be greatly assisted in war by physical hardness and knowledge. In other words, a hard well-trained soldier needs far less courage than a soft ignorant one. Training is more important than physical hardness.’ Later in the report, Wingate returned to the theme of combating the pre-war tendency to ‘softness’ in his men, recording that he bivouacked his troops seven miles from Imphal so that they would not be ‘softened’ by the cinema.²⁴⁴ For Wingate, his training compensated for the defects in the character of recruits, transforming ‘soft, ignorant’ men into ‘hard well-trained’ soldiers.

Wingate’s criticism of the quality of the soldiers at his disposal was not limited to other ranks. Describing the force that he was tasked with training, he wrote ‘the intelligence of the majority of pupils and the standard of their education were unfortunately low. This was inevitable, granted the methods of selection for the Infantry Arm pursued throughout the war and before it. The criticism applies to the officers even more than the men.’ As with the

²⁴³ Wingate, ‘Burma Report’, p.3.

²⁴⁴ Wingate, ‘Burma Report’, p.13.

quality of citizen soldiers, the apparent lack of leadership qualities among junior officers was a further source of anxiety for some figures within the military establishment. Jonathan Fennell has argued that by the inter-war years the British army was a relatively meritocratic institution.²⁴⁵ During the 1914 conflict the demand for officers was so great that the War Office had no choice but to commission large numbers of men from the ranks, rather than rely on the limited supply of the privately educated sons of upper-class families, the traditional candidates for the officer corps.²⁴⁶ Reforms continued during the interwar years. By 1930, only one in ten incoming Sandhurst candidates listed their father's occupation as 'gentlemen', whereas in 1860 the figure was over half.²⁴⁷ During the Second World War, the shortage of junior officers was as severe as it had been in the previous war, once again forcing a broader approach to candidate selection. In 1939 there were 53,500 officers in the British army, a that number had more than doubled to 136,500 by October 1941.²⁴⁸ For some senior figures, the crises that had come to define the army's contribution to the war by 1942 was a consequence of this new crop of officers that lacked the necessary, inherent qualities of leadership. These sentiments were captured in a letter sent by a lieutenant colonel to *The Times*, 'Our armies are being officered by classes of society who are new to the job.'²⁴⁹ As Alan Allport has observed, 'to the traditionalists, this crisis was being caused by the

²⁴⁵ Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p.31.

²⁴⁶ Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-1918* (London, 2005), p.333; Allport, *Browned off and Bloody Minded*, p.96.

²⁴⁷ Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p.31

²⁴⁸ Fennell, *Fighting the People's War*, p.228. For officer selection during the war, see Jeremy A. Crang, *The British Army and the People's War, 1939-1945* (Manchester, 2000), pp.21-44.

²⁴⁹ *The Times* 15 January 1941, p.5, quoted in Allport, *Browned Off*, p.99.

commissioning of the products of obscure secondary schools and nameless concrete suburbs.²⁵⁰

How far was Wingate expressing a similar snobbery in his comments on the low standard of education of his officers? It is unlikely that he cared much about which schools they had attended. But his emphasis upon their lack of experience and adequate training suggests that he held similar concerns over commissions being granted to men without the necessary background. Outlining their failures from a pragmatic perspective, he emphasised the basic lack of knowledge of the new intake of junior leaders: ‘the average infantry officer does not know how to put out a road block or an ambush, or how to place a Bren gun in position with due regard to the circumstances, how to post a century, how to direct and control fire, or a hundred other elementary points.’²⁵¹ Wingate’s criticisms were not unfounded. The performance of British and Commonwealth troops in the early years of the war was certainly undermined by a training regime that inadequately prepared both leaders and men for the challenges they would face on the battlefield.²⁵² In jungle warfare, where command was necessarily devolved and officers were required to make rapid decisions when confronted with the enemy, the shortcomings of junior leaders were all the more costly. One

²⁵⁰ Allport, *Browned Off*, p.100.

²⁵¹ Wingate, ‘Burma Report’, p.6.

²⁵² Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War*, p.254.

commentator later wrote that ‘it is enough to say that the shortage of good officer material was perhaps the gravest of all the enemies of military morale.’²⁵³

Dissatisfied with the quality of both ordinary soldiers and junior officers, Wingate’s Burma report stressed the significance of his own leadership. It was his unique ability to mould a battalion of unfit, uneducated, inexperienced, and poorly motivated ordinary men into an effective force for LRP operations, and to lead it into battle, that the report consistently emphasised. He described this transformation in terms of their morale:

It is of interest and profit to record that although this battalion at first showed a marked lack of enthusiasm for the role allotted to it, by the end of the training it was keen to go in and meet the enemy, and, throughout, the morale remained high. This change of heart was not achieved by accident, but by making the right approach to the men.²⁵⁴

He returned to the effect of his training regime on the men several times, reminding readers that although the force ‘could not have been what was wanted’ it was ‘far from untrained’ and ‘Although, for reasons of physical exhaustion, generally lacking in aggressiveness, a ready obedience was given to orders, and all ranks came out with their spirit high.’²⁵⁵ As in Ethiopia, Wingate had taken the ‘scum’ of the army and led it into battle.

Wingate’s Burma report performed several important tasks. It provided a narrative of the training and execution of the first Chindit operation and served as a ‘best practice’ guide

²⁵³ Cited in Fennell, *Fighting the People’s War*, p.229.

²⁵⁴ Wingate, ‘Burma Report’, p.3.

²⁵⁵ Wingate, ‘Burma Report’, p.4.

for similar future operations. It made the case for Wingate's methods of long-range penetration to be applied on a larger scale. It provided a vehicle for Wingate to express his opinions about all aspects of leadership, from his views on smoking to the optimum foods to be included in the soldier's rations. Finally, the report positioned Wingate as an exemplary commander of soldiers, able to achieve results despite the poor quality of his men. The importance of the operation for Wingate's self-image is captured in a 1942 letter sent to Mike Calvert, an officer who commanded a column during *Longcloth* and assisted Wingate in training the men. Calvert advised his superior that he had heard from a 'reliable source' that some individuals within the army considered the plans for *Longcloth* impracticable and Wingate himself 'unfit to command.' One general, he wrote, had said that 10% of Wingate's ideas were brilliant but 90% were dangerous, while another said that he was not fit to command so many men.²⁵⁶ Wingate's response encapsulates the significance of the mission for the image that he wished to project: 'it is because I am what I am, objectionable though that appears to my critics, that I win battles... if the commander in chief will give me the indispensable minimum of backing, he will be rewarded by the existence in the field of a force that no one else can create for him.'²⁵⁷

In marked contrast with his Burma report, Wingate readily used the familiar terms of wartime populism when describing operation *Longcloth* to a broader audience. Wingate's

²⁵⁶ Mike Calvert to Orde Wingate, 6 August 1942, IWM Wingate Archive, Chindit Box 1

²⁵⁷ Orde Wingate to Mike Calvert, 8 August 1942, IWM Wingate Archive, Chindit Box 1

‘Order of the Day’, delivered to all ranks before they crossed the Chindwin, struck a remarkably utopian note. He informed his men that ‘our aim is to make possible a Government of the world in which all men can live at peace and with equal opportunity of service.’²⁵⁸ Wingate reminded the Chindits that ‘At this moment we stand beside the soldiers of the United Nations in the front-line trenches throughout the world.’²⁵⁹ The words appear to have had a varied effect on the men. One soldier was reported to have burst into tears on reading the order.²⁶⁰ Others were less moved. In his memoir of the campaign, Lieutenant Phillip Stibbe recalled some of his men’s reactions: ‘He may be fighting for the United Nations and all that but I’m fighting for my missus and children’; ‘Him and his war aims. My aim is to get back to Birkenhead as quickly as possible.’²⁶¹ Phrases such as ‘Government of the world’ and ‘equal opportunity of service’ were unusual in orders coming from a field commander before an operation, and show Wingate strategically mobilising the ideas of collectivism that underpinned the ‘People’s War’ to boost the morale of his soldiers.

The most striking examples of this rhetorical mobilisation can be found in Wingate’s statements to journalists reporting on *Longcloth*. The presence of three reporters among the Chindit columns marching from Imphal to the Chindwin River in the opening stages of *Longcloth* suggests that high command was aware of the propaganda potential of the

²⁵⁸ Orde Wingate, ‘Order of the Day’, 13 February 1943, IWM Wingate Archive, Chindit Box 1

²⁵⁹ Wingate was referring to the nations united against the Axis, rather than the institution founded after the war.

²⁶⁰ Derek Tulloch, *Wingate In Peace and War* (London, 1972), p.77.

²⁶¹ Phillip Stibbe, *Return Via Rangoon* (London, 1947), p.75.

operation before the brigade had even entered the jungle. The three correspondents – Alaric Jacob of the *Daily Express*, Martin Moore of the *Daily Telegraph* and Stuart Emeny of the *News Chronicle* – were summoned by Lieutenant-General Geoffrey Scoones and instructed to march as far as the Chindwin, before making their own way back to India.²⁶² Upon his return, Wingate was unveiled at a press conference in Delhi on May 20 where he spoke further to journalists about the operation.²⁶³ Whereas in his official report he sought to impress on his superiors that such low-quality soldiers should not be designated for future LRP operations, in interactions with journalists he stressed the potential for such men to conduct operations behind enemy lines. Jacob reported Wingate’s description of the operation:

Most of my Chindits are not in their first youth, but married men between 28 and 35 who have previously done coastal defence work and...never dreamed they would serve as shock troops doing one of the toughest jobs of any soldiers undertaken in this war... If ordinary family men from Liverpool and Manchester can be trained for specialised jungle war behind enemy lines then any fit man in the British army can do the same.²⁶⁴

Rather than a marker of his unsuitability for deployment in LRP operations, the status of the Chindit as an ‘ordinary man’ exemplified the ability of all British men to engage in such expeditions. While in Wingate’s report his men fell ‘short of the ideal’ even after his rigorous training programme, in his descriptions to the journalist they became ‘shock troops’ able to perform ‘one of the toughest jobs’ of the war. The soldiers’ lack of education, intelligence

²⁶² Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller’s War: A Journey to the Wars in Africa, India and Russia* (London, 1944), p.325.

²⁶³ John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia and Zion* (London, 2012), p.308.

²⁶⁴ *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943, p.1.

and physical fitness, the hypochondria perceived by Wingate to be typical of conscripted men, were all absent from the Chindit commander's glowing public accounts of the operation. As chapter three demonstrates, Wingate's emphasis on the ordinary heroism of the men under his command became the central focus of media reports about the Chindits.

In a special BBC broadcast on 25 May, Wingate gave an additional account of *Longcloth*. Speaking directly to his largest audience, he heaped further praise on the 'ordinary' Chindit. 'Let us consider for a moment the composition of the force that was to enter Burma and sing the Mikado's beard. It was not composed of selected troops. It consisted of ordinary British and Indian infantry.'²⁶⁵ He celebrated the soldiers who, listeners were informed, were 'ordinary, typical troops born and trained for the most part to factory and workshop.' In statements such as these, Wingate strategically mobilised the rhetoric of the 'People's War', just as Lloyd Owen would do in his post-war memoirs.

3. Leadership, National Identity and Race

Just as assumptions about social class pervaded Wingate's and Lloyd Owen's writings, so their encounters with and attitudes towards soldiers of other nationalities influenced their self-fashioning as military leaders. Both men constructed their identity as

²⁶⁵ Orde Wingate, 'Broadcast to London (BBC)', 15:00 IST, 25 May 1943, IWM Wingate Collection, Chindit Box 1.

specifically white *British* officers. Allied soldiers of other nationalities under their command exhibited complementary or contrasting characteristics to those of the author. These served to highlight the qualities of leadership and character expected of a British commanding officer. The enemy served as an alien ‘other’, representing a set of negative characteristics that the author could reject. Through that rejection, each man defined himself more clearly.

Ideas about the relationship between race, nationality and the behaviour of soldiers formed in the nineteenth century continued to play a significant role in British military thinking through the twentieth.²⁶⁶ After the First World War, the army reverted to its pre-1914 role of maintaining order in the newly expanded Empire, with each infantry regiment consisting of two battalions, one for service at home and the other for the Empire.²⁶⁷ Men serving overseas could expect to be stationed in India, Egypt or the Sudan, and were likely to see action against hostile ‘tribesmen’ at some point during their posting. The curriculum at British military staff colleges in the interwar years continued to be based, in part, upon texts which dealt with colonial warfare and the policing of rebel uprisings.²⁶⁸ A persistent theme in

²⁶⁶ See Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture* (Manchester, 2004). Also note Paul Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986), p.145.

²⁶⁷ For the army in this period see, among many, Keith Jeffrey, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire, 1918-1922* (Manchester, 1984); T. R. Moreman, “‘Small Wars’ and Imperial Policing: The British Army and the Theory and Practice of Colonial Warfare in the British Empire, 1919-1939’ in Brian Holden Reid (ed.), *Military Power: Land Warfare in Theory and Practice* (London, 1997); David French, *Raising Churchill’s Army: The British Army and the War Against Germany, 1919-1945* (Oxford, 2000), pp.12-47; David French, ‘Big Wars and Small Wars Between the Wars, 1919-1939’ in Hew Strachan (ed.), *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the 20th Century* (London, 2006), pp.36-53.

²⁶⁸ Notably Major General Charles Callwell’s *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* which was reprinted in three editions between 1896 and 1906. Other significant texts included Major General Charles Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London, 1934) and Colonel H. J. Simson, *British Rule, and Rebellion* (London, 1937).

British imperial military strategy was the idea that 'race' powerfully influenced how an individual would think and behave. Conventional military thinking dictated that colonial rebellions consisted of inferior and unsophisticated 'savages' who would easily be defeated by superior British troops or overawed into surrender.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, the theory of martial races – the Victorian idea that only certain ethnic groups possessed the necessary characteristics of courage and discipline required to make good soldiers – had shaped recruitment into the Indian Army for almost a hundred years.²⁶⁹ Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that ideas about racial and national characteristics continued to play a role in British military planning during the conflict. In his examination of the wartime experiences of the Caribbean Regiment, Michael Healey has highlighted the 'vigorous opposition' of the War Office and the army to the use of 'non-martial' West-Indian troops in combat.²⁷⁰ In a similar fashion, the RAF only allowed a small number of non-white air crew despite the pressing need for manpower.²⁷¹ William Slim's tactics in Burma were influenced by his interpretation of Japanese national characteristics and how they would determine their behaviour in battle.²⁷² For career soldiers like Wingate and Lloyd Owen, both products of officer training academies and men who had served the Empire before the outbreak of the war (both in Palestine, and Wingate also in

²⁶⁹ Daniel P. Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Indian Army and the Burma Campaign* (London, 2003), pp. 13-15; Streets, *Martial Races*, pp.1-17.

²⁷⁰ Michael Healey, 'Colour, Climate and Combat: The Caribbean Regiment in the Second World War', *The International History Review* 22 (2000), pp.65-85, p.73.

²⁷¹ Iain Johnston-White, *The British Commonwealth and Victory in the Second World War* (London, 2017), pp.91-135.

²⁷² William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London, 1956), pp.17-18.

Sudan), ideas about race and national characteristics shaped the way in which they viewed themselves, the enemy, and the men under their command.

Alongside ideas about other races came assumptions about the fighting qualities of British soldiers and the virtues of British officers.²⁷³ In 1933 Archibald Wavell, an important patron of Wingate's during his military career, proposed the introduction of a branch of the War Office 'to study ourselves, our national characteristics and our reactions as a nation to military matters.'²⁷⁴ Despite a growing sense of professionalism in the British Army on the eve of the Second World War, public-school notions of 'character' continued to pervade the recruitment and training of British officers.²⁷⁵ In 1940, the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, insisted that 'the army officer must be a leader first and a technician second.'²⁷⁶ The writings of Wingate and Lloyd Owen frequently referred to the qualities of heroism, endurance and, most importantly, leadership expected of a British officer, and the requirement to embody these characteristics shaped their actions as soldiers. In constructing their identities as specifically British commanders in their military narratives, both men adopted two strategies: first, by juxtaposing the characteristics of the enemy with those of themselves and their men; and, secondly, by describing their leadership of soldiers of other nationalities. In the writings of both men, the enemy served both as a strategic entity to be

²⁷³ For these assumptions see Anthony Clayton, *The British Officer: Leading the Army From 1660 to the Present* (Oxford, 2006), pp.8-9, pp.202-224.

²⁷⁴ Archibald P. Wavell, 'The Training of the Army for War', *RUSI Journal* LXXVIII (1933), pp.258-259

²⁷⁵ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c. 1870-2000* (Oxford, 2005), pp.145-179.

²⁷⁶ Cited in French, *Military Identities*, p.149.

defeated on the battlefield, and as a discursive reference point, a set of negative characteristics and behaviours against which the superior qualities of British officers and men could be delineated. Their descriptions of the enemy thus reveal as much about how both commanders understood their own identities as British soldiers as they do of their attitudes towards enemy soldiers.

Throughout both his published memoirs, Lloyd Owen was contemptuous of the fighting abilities of the Italian army, attributing their defeat in the Desert War to the inherent character of Italian soldiers.²⁷⁷ In his descriptions of Italians on the battlefield Lloyd Owen drew on stereotypes of Italian men as emotional, childlike, undisciplined and cowardly.²⁷⁸ His description of Italian soldiers under attack during a 1942 LRDG raid on an airfield at Barce was typical:

the Italian garrison was taken by such surprise that they simply did not know how to stop this savage onslaught, and they resorted to their usual practise of just letting off every weapon in the air as fast as they could; this seemed to give the Italians some sort of relief from their abject terror on this sort of occasion. The psychological effect of being able to let off a bang, albeit with no apparent retaliatory result, was always a morale-booster to Italians.²⁷⁹

In his dismissal of these failures among Italian forces Lloyd Owen tacitly attributed the inverse qualities to himself and his men. If the Italians were chaotic, cowardly and

²⁷⁷ Such disparagement, while almost ubiquitous, was not altogether justified. See Brian Sullivan. 'The Italian Soldier in Combat, June 1940-September 1943: Myths, Realities and Explanations', in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of the War in the West, 1939-1945* (London, 1997), pp.177-205.

²⁷⁸ Lucy Riall, 'Men at War: Masculinity and Military Ideals in the Risorgimento' in Lucy Riall and Silvana Pariarera (eds.), *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (London, 2012), pp.152-170, pp.152-153.

²⁷⁹ Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide*, p.110.

psychologically weak, the men of the LRDG were organised, courageous and mentally resilient. Furthermore, his own observation that there was ‘no apparent retaliatory result’ highlighted his superior perception of the encounter, and suggested a pragmatic focus on the effectiveness of military actions.

Lloyd Owen’s perception of such characteristics among Italian soldiers appears to have informed some of the strategic decisions he made during LRDG engagements with Italian troops. In *The Desert My Dwelling Place* he described his attempts to lead his small Yeomanry patrol to take the ‘*Beau Geste*-like’ Italian fort of El Ezzeiat using only rifles and small arms. The seemingly impossible task was eventually accomplished simply by firing a grenade at the fort. Lloyd Owen correctly judged that the dramatic but ineffective explosion would cause the larger Italian force stationed in the fort to panic and surrender.²⁸⁰ He described the scene as he and his seven men stood to receive the Italian soldiers:

We stood and counted them as they ran out towards us. One, two, three...ten, eleven, twelve...and so on until there were seventeen. I have never seen a more morose, sullen and dispirited section of the human species than those seventeen miserable defenders of Mussolini’s outpost of the Italian Empire at El Ezzeiat.²⁸¹

Lloyd Owen’s construction of the cowardice of Italians and the heroic qualities of himself and the men under his command in his narrative appears to have had some resonance. In 1962, the incident was cited in an educational article in the boys’ comic *Lion Book of War*

²⁸⁰ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.120-128.

²⁸¹ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.126

Adventures. Young readers were informed that that Italians ‘popped out [of the fort] like pips from a gooseberry, falling over themselves in their eagerness to surrender.’²⁸² Making explicit Lloyd Owen’s implied comparison between the qualities of his men and Italian soldiers, the article continued, ‘such was the spirit of the men of the Long-Range Desert Group – daring, self-reliant, tough and incredibly brave. They struck fear into the hearts of the Italians.’

Wingate achieved a similar feat on a much larger scale during the 1941 Ethiopia campaign when, using deception, he induced an army of 14,000 Italians at the fort of Debra Markos to surrender to an Ethiopian force one third of its size. The Italian surrender was secured through Wingate’s communications with their commanding officer, in which he greatly inflated the size of the force of fighters under his command, and threatened to withdraw his British troops and hand control over to the Ethiopian fighters within twenty-four hours.²⁸³ As with Lloyd Owen, assumptions about inherent national characteristics shaped Wingate’s decisions on the battlefield, first in his confidence that the Italians would surrender. This perception of the enemy is clear from his observations regarding the training of soldiers during the Ethiopian campaign, in which he argued that battlefield tactics must be adopted which would force Italians to ‘fight under conditions which brought out their worst qualities; conditions demanding bold manoeuvre, junior leadership and ability to endure

²⁸² *Lion Book of War Adventures* (London, 1962), pp.80-82, p.82.

²⁸³ Orde Wingate, ‘The Ethiopian Campaign, August 1940-June 1941’, p.12.

hardships.’ He went on to note that Italians were ‘naturally timid, [and] they preferred to think in terms of defence.’²⁸⁴ Secondly, in threatening to leave the fate of the Italians in the hands of Ethiopian soldiers, Wingate exploited Italian fears of the inherent savagery of non-white troops.²⁸⁵

The idea that the ethnicity or nationality of an enemy might determine their behaviour was central to much of Wingate’s writing on military strategy.²⁸⁶ In a 1926 exam paper, written as part of his promotion to the rank of captain, he attributed the German 1914 Schlieffen Plan to a Teutonic love of envelopment, and described popular Russian attitudes to the expansion of the Russian empire as ‘typical of the Slav race.’²⁸⁷ During the 1936 Arab revolt in Palestine, Wingate’s ‘Special Night Squads’ – small squads of Jewish supernumeraries led by British officers engaging in counter-insurgency operations against Arab ‘terrorists’ – were predicated on the theory that Arabs were afraid of face-to-face confrontation with an enemy. A 1938 paper outlined his proposals for the Special Night Squads, noting that the Arabs fighters were:

²⁸⁴ Wingate, ‘Ethiopian Campaign’, p.7.

²⁸⁵ Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior. From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (London, 2014), pp.128-129.

²⁸⁶ Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, p.20. See also Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate and the British Army, 1922-1944* (London, 2010), p.80.

²⁸⁷ Orde Wingate, ‘Strategy in Three Campaigns’, p.1. The British Library, Orde Wingate Palestine Papers, Manuscript 2313.

unable to face any kind of charge or surprise onslaught. This is their character, and experience will not change it. In person they are feeble, and their whole theory of war is to cut and run. Like all ignorant and primitive people they are especially liable to panic.²⁸⁸

Implicit in Wingate's description of the Arab rebels was the superiority of the British forces under his command. Where Arabs were 'primitive', Wingate and his men were civilised; where the enemy were 'feeble' and disposed to 'cut and run', Wingate's force was strong and drilled to stand and fight. A British officer could bring out the inherent courage of British soldiers to withstand a charge or surprise attack, but no Arab leader could dredge up such qualities from his men because it was within their character to retreat. Through such descriptions Wingate and Lloyd Owen constructed their own idea of the British soldier.

Similar notions of the 'character' of the Japanese informed Wingate's LRP tactics in Burma. The fall of Singapore and Japan's rapid advance through Burma created a perception among some quarters of the British war command that the Japanese army was an invincible foe. The natural dispositions of Japanese soldiers featured prominently in Wingate's conceptualisation of jungle warfare. Indeed, a key objective of the first Chindit operation in 1942 was to demonstrate that the British soldier could match his enemy in the Burmese jungle. In a 1943 essay outlining the theory behind LRP operations, Wingate wrote:

The Japanese is as unpredictable as the village pye dog. One moment he will cringe and fawn on the stranger, and at the next he will snap or bolt. This is his natural make up, but his military doctrine and carefully fostered belief in his own national superiority has introduced a predictable quality to his

²⁸⁸ Quoted in John Knight, 'Securing Zion? Policing in British Palestine, 1917-39', *European Review of History* 18 (2011), pp.523-543, p.534.

tactics and conduct on the battlefield when things are going well. By exploiting these we can shake his faith in his invincibility and superiority and allow his natural character to come into play.²⁸⁹

As in the Debra Marcos incident, ideas about national characteristics were central to Wingate's approach. The Japanese soldier's misguided faith in his 'own national superiority' would enable British officers to predict the enemy's dispositions and defeat him on the battlefield. Implicit also were the superior qualities of the British forces who, having exposed the 'natural character' of the Japanese as erratic, would demonstrate their superiority by defeating the enemy in battle through the execution of a coherent strategy.

In a 1943 article on the first Chindit operation published in a Bureau of Information pamphlet, Wingate explicitly highlighted the natural character of the British as key to defeating the Japanese. The operation had demonstrated, he argued, that the 'obstinate, but unimagined courage of the Japanese soldier [would] give scope to the military qualities the British soldier still shares with his ancestor.'²⁹⁰ While Japanese perceptions of national superiority were the result of 'military doctrine and carefully fostered belief', British soldiers' natural superiority was an organic inheritance of the same qualities that had enabled their ancestors to conquer the globe. Wingate went on to list the specifically British characteristics which could be mobilised against the Japanese:

These qualities, hitherto in this war unsuspected by the world, are, firstly intelligence in action, i.e., originality in individual fighting, and lastly, on the morale side, great self-reliance and power to give of his best even when the audience is smallest. Thus, while in the case of nearly every other nation a sense of drama and public approval is necessary to produce courage and effort, in the case of the British

²⁸⁹ Orde Wingate, LRP Essay, Chapter XV, IWM Wingate collection, Chindit box 1.

²⁹⁰ Orde Wingate, 'Intruder Mission', *War* 48 (10/07/1943), IWM Wingate collection, Chindit box 1.

soldier he can be relied upon to excel himself in jungle so thick that no one but himself can be a spectator of his actions.²⁹¹

In such statements, Wingate might be describing the virtues he believed himself to possess, as much as those of his countrymen. In a culture that valorised self-effacement, it was common to proclaim as valuable in others what one would see valued in oneself. Intelligence and originality in warfare; self-reliance; and the ability to perform to a high level out of the public eye: these were all elements of the heroic persona Wingate sought to project to the world.

Both Wingate and Lloyd Owen also delineated the contours of the ideal British soldier through their descriptions of foreign allies. Wingate's 'doctrine' (as he described it in his report) for gaining the trust of Ethiopian soldiers was built upon the necessity for a commander visibly to demonstrate his value to the indigenous soldiers he wished to lead: 'we had first to convince the Ethiopian, suspicious as he was of all white men, of our bona fides.'²⁹² As with his approach to enemy combatants, his theory drew on his understanding of the natural dispositions of Ethiopian soldiers. In his 'Appreciation' of the campaign Wingate extended his theory of guerrilla leadership to the governance of non-white imperial subjects, emphasising the broader significance of gaining the trust and respect of colonial peoples. In order to maintain an empire an imperial power must demonstrate the same qualities of 'courage, faith and self-respect' required of an officer seeking to lead foreign

²⁹¹ Wingate, 'Intruder Mission', p.5.

²⁹² Orde Wingate, 'The Ethiopian Campaign' (1941), p. 6.

soldiers. Fearing that British promises of the restoration of Ethiopian liberty were not being honoured, he used his report of the campaign to caution his superiors:

So long as it was advantageous to us, we preached liberty to the captives, and now that there seems something to be gained by offering to replace the chains we see no objection in doing so. If Ethiopia, always suspicious of white Imperialisms thinks this today, the world will find cause to think it tomorrow and we shall lose at one blow the potential support of millions.

Here, the ‘correct’ method of leading non-white allied soldiers exceeds battlefield strategy and becomes a duty necessary for the maintenance of the empire, as well as the successful continuation of the war. The British officer commanding guerrilla fighters (Wingate) embodies the unique moral virtues associated with British imperialism.

While Lloyd Owen did not outline an overarching strategy for leading soldiers of other nations, he nonetheless subscribed to similar notions of the inherent qualities and characteristics of the men under his command. In *The Desert My Dwelling Place* he described the respective differences between the soldiers of various nationalities that made up the LRDG: the New Zealanders were ‘self-reliant, tough individuals with an earthy sense of humour and an indomitable spirit’; Rhodesians were ‘quiet and unassuming...but behind this façade there lies a spirit which is unconquerable. As soldiers they were unique in that they would never get into bad trouble for their emotions were not subject to excessive changes of temperature.’²⁹³ The English soldiers of the yeomanry units were ‘mostly countrymen, and thus knew how to move silently and how to outwit their enemy... They were salt of the

²⁹³ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, pp.58-59

English earth and I never doubted their worth.’²⁹⁴ Of Scots Guardsmen he merely remarked ‘their characteristics as soldiers are so well known and written in the immortal pages of three hundred years of military history. Even the worst of them are good, and let it suffice to say that we had the best.’²⁹⁵

Such observations of the attributes of different nationalities expressed familiar stereotypes. Indeed, Lloyd Owen went on to suggest that such attitudes played a role in Bagnold’s initial recruitment of the unit:

Perhaps he found that the New Zealanders were more dashing in aggressive operations and a little restive in those that required more patient qualities. Perhaps he found that the Guardsmen were a little inflexible when it came to operations for which he could give no-clear cut directive and that they were more painstaking in a task that required careful attention to detail. But whatever he found, there was certainly a very mixed bag to call upon.²⁹⁶

The valorisation of soldiers from Rhodesia and New Zealand alongside the British echoed a wartime discourse in which whiteness served as a unifying identity for British and 'White Dominion' soldiers.²⁹⁷ The inherent qualities of the 'White Dominion' soldiers listed by Lloyd Owen justified their inclusion alongside British men in the specialised role of operations behind enemy lines. This tacit reproduction of the racial hierarchies of empire becomes clearer in Lloyd Owen’s descriptions of Arabs who assisted the LRDG. In his memoir he described how the approach of a ‘horde’ of Egyptian labourers hired to assist the British in

²⁹⁴ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.59.

²⁹⁵ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.58.

²⁹⁶ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.59.

²⁹⁷ See Johnston-White, *British Commonwealth and Victory*, p.144; p.275.

digging a trench in the desert conjured images of the uncivilised imperial subjects of adventure films, remarking ‘at first I thought we were being treated to some scene for a film of a Dervish charge.’²⁹⁸ Such a description is typical of both of Lloyd Owen's memoirs. Most frequently he treated Arabs with indifference and occasionally exasperation; at worst they were presented as objects of derision and condescension.²⁹⁹

Conclusion

At first glance David Lloyd Owen and Orde Wingate might appear to embody very different masculine types, with the flamboyant, maverick Wingate set against the model of self-effacement Lloyd Owen presented in his 1957 memoir, which extolled the heroism of his comrades and passed over his own exploits. The present chapter has argued instead that masculine self-fashioning resists reduction to single categories. By analysing a variety of texts including published memoirs, private journals, and official reports, the chapter has shown how both men navigated similar, historically specific, tensions when constructing and projecting a heroic masculine self, tensions between the ordinary and the exceptional, the mass and the elite, the temperate and the romantic. Corinna Peniston-Bird has observed that ‘[m]en did not have a choice whether to conform or reject hegemonic [military] masculinity:

²⁹⁸ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p. 27.

²⁹⁹ Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide*, p.96; Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling*, p.205.

they positioned themselves in relation to it.³⁰⁰ Both men's self-representation reveals the complexities of that process of positioning.

Individual self-fashioning occurs in interaction with the exigencies of a particular historical moment, through the adaptation and application of elements of the cultural circuit. Chapter one showed how both Wingate and Lloyd Owen drew inspiration from a similar repertoire of heroic exemplars, including idealised narratives of imperial military officers (although each developed their own personal favourites). Chapter two has questioned how far either man should be reduced to a single category and described as a romantic Tory or a temperate hero. The chapter has analysed how both men engaged with the prevailing discourses of the 'People's War', their writings both displaying the tension between the pressures of collective conformity and their yearning for adventure and heroic action. Both men also defined their masculine selves as British through reference to a familiar set of shared racial stereotypes.

Both men achieved public prominence in their own life-times, Wingate most famously during the war and Lloyd Owen during the post-war years as one of the leading actors in a celebrated special-operations unit. While chapters one and two have focused primarily on the ways in which both men constructed a heroic masculine self through writing, this dissertation will now turn to focus on the stories which were written about them, stories

³⁰⁰ Corinna Peniston-Bird, 'Classifying the Body in the Second World War: British Men In and Out of Uniform' *Body & Society* 9 (2003), pp.31-47, p. 45.

about the operations of the Chindits and the LRDG during the war in chapter 3, stories written in the aftermath of Wingate's death in chapter 4, and stories about the exploits of special operations units in the desert and the jungle in post-war comic books in chapter 5. By examining stories written about Wingate and Lloyd Owen the following chapters will add a new dimension to this dissertation's study of the cultural circuit by addressing how far and in what ways both men's self-fashioning shaped their public image as British heroes.

Chapter 3: 'Men of Mystery' and 'the Bloke Living Next Door': Media Representations of the Long-Range Desert Group and the Chindits, 1940-1945

In this war men of mystery are flashing across the scene, here in the trackless desert, there among jungle and mountain paths...some day we shall learn who they are, and all about the romance and risks of their experience.³⁰¹

These words from the *Yorkshire Evening Post* capture the British fascination with special-forces operatives and irregular soldiers during the Second World War. Despite the valorisation of the 'ordinary' British Tommy identified by Sonya Rose as central to the egalitarian rhetoric of the 'People's War', the 'romance and risks' performed by 'men of mystery' in exotic climates held an exciting allure for the wartime British public.³⁰² While the conflict may have been won by Allied material superiority or the application of overwhelming force, romantic stories of small bands of men undertaking heroic raids against a brutal enemy frequently proved more popular than the faceless clashes of large armies.³⁰³ Despite the necessary secrecy which surrounded their movements, the operations of British

³⁰¹ *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14/02/1941, p.6.

³⁰² Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), p. 97. Ed Owens, 'The changing media representation of T. E. Lawrence and celebrity culture in Britain, 1919-1935', *Cultural and Social History*, 12 (2015), pp.465-488, reveals how the press frequently described Lawrence as a 'man of mystery' in the 1920s.

³⁰³ John Newsinger, *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture* (London, 1997), p.112.

irregular soldiers and special-forces units provided a valuable focal point for propaganda regarding the battlefield performance of the British army and thus had a relatively high profile during the Second World War. Accounts of lightning-raids, derring-do and adventure, provided a fillip to morale during periods of defeat and inactivity, and an escape from the realities of industrial warfare.³⁰⁴

Chapters one and two mapped the ways in which Wingate and Lloyd Owen drew on stories and images in the cultural circuit of male heroism to fashion and project their identities as men. The previous chapter explored both men's fantasies of elite leadership, and the tensions around these fantasies during the 'People's War.' The present chapter investigates cultural representations of special-forces in wartime popular culture, focusing on the discourse generated by the operations of the units Lloyd Owen and Wingate commanded: the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) and the Chindits. In doing so, it traces another stage in the cultural circuit, the moment Graham Dawson describes as 'public-ation': the 'making public' of cultural products.³⁰⁵ The activities of both units attracted the attention of the British press, transforming Wingate into a public figure and producing new national heroes in the men of the LRDG and the Chindits. In being broadcast to a national audience, the men of both units were invested with new meanings quite separate from their immediate operational and strategic objectives in the desert and the jungle. Focusing on representations of both units

³⁰⁴ Andrew Hargreaves, 'An analysis of the rise, use, evolution and value of Anglo-American commando and special forces formations, 1939-1945' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, King's College, 2008), p.228.

³⁰⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.25.

in popular newspapers, magazines and newsreels, this chapter argues that those meanings were gendered, and that the men of both units came to symbolise different ideas in the British wartime imaginary.

The Second World War was instrumental in developing the concept of British Special Forces as it is recognised today.³⁰⁶ Early British defeats at Dunkirk, Narvik and in Greece (followed by further reverses in Crete, Tobruk and Singapore) underlined the need for specialised units that could perform tasks beyond the abilities of regular formations.³⁰⁷ With the enthusiastic support of the prime minister, in 1940 Robert Laycock created the Army Commandos, while early advocate of irregular warfare Archibald Wavell approved Ralph Bagnold's proposals for the LRDG. Both men recognised the potential for small bands of specially selected soldiers who could undertake specialist operations to provide a cost-effective opportunity to regain the strategic initiative and to bolster civilian and military morale.³⁰⁸ The increasingly complex nature of modern warfare and the range of different operational environments produced a variety of Second World War British special-forces units, which developed distinctive cultures and roles.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Alastair Finlan, 'The (Arrested) Development of UK Special Forces and the Global War on Terror', *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009), pp. 971-982, p.973; Andrew Hargreaves, *Special Operations in World War II: British and American Irregular Warfare* (London, 2013.), pp. 19-20; Colonel Bernd Horn, 'When Cultures Collide: The Conventional Military/SOF Chasm', *Canadian Military Journal* (2004), pp. 3-16, p.5.

³⁰⁷ Hargreaves, *Special*, p. 21; John W Gordon, *The Other Desert War: British Special Forces in North Africa 1940-1943* (1987, Westport), p.44.

³⁰⁸ Hargreaves, *Special Operations*, pp.5-10.

³⁰⁹ Finlan, 'The (Arrested)', p.973; The array of British Second World War special forces includes: Army Commandoes; Special Operations Executive; Long Range Desert Group; 'Popski's Private Army'; Special Air Service; Special Boat Squadron; Force Viper; Chindits.

Although the strategic deployment and experiences of special-forces troops have been the subject of a large body of popular and academic literature, surprisingly little analysis has been given to cultural representations of British special-operations.³¹⁰ The few studies which have analysed representations of special-forces have tended to collapse elite or irregular Second World War soldiers into the superficially homogenous categories of ‘commando’ or ‘special-forces soldier’, failing to acknowledge the often significant differences in the cultural meanings ascribed to each unit.³¹¹ In their examination of the image of special-forces in wartime British popular culture, Mark Connelly and David Wilcox argued that the popular media ‘tended to treat them [British special-forces units] as one and the same.’³¹² This claim offers a fair assessment when considering units deployed in similar theatres of the war or those cooperating on joint operations, such as the LRDG and the Special Air Service (SAS) in North Africa, or the Royal Marine Commandos and the Army Commandos. Their claim becomes problematic when we consider units serving in different operational environments, peopled by troops drawn from different sections of the Allied forces and performing very

³¹⁰ Scholarly publications on special forces includes Hargreaves, *Special Operations*; James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terror* (Oxford, 2006); Ashley Jackson, ‘The Imperial Antecedents of British Special Forces’, *The RUSI Journal* (2009), pp. 62-68; Julian Thompson, *War Behind Enemy Lines* (London, 1998). Popular publications on special forces include William Seymour, *British Special Forces: The Story of Britain’s Undercover Soldiers* (1985, London); Sean Rayment, *Tales From the Special Forces Club: The Untold Stories of Britain’s Elite WWII Warriors*, (London, 2013); Sally Dugan, *Commando - The Elite Fighting Forces of the Second World War* (London, 2001); Eric Morris, *Churchill’s Private Armies: British Special Forces in Europe 1939-1942* (London, 1986); Ryan Jenkins, *World War 2: The Untold Daring Secret Missions of the Second World War* (London, 2014); Giles Milton, *Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare: The Mavericks who Plotted Hitler’s Defeat* (London, 2017).

³¹¹ For examples, see Mark Connelly and David Wilcox, ‘Are you tough enough? The Image of the Special Forces in British Popular Culture, 1939-2004’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25 (2005), pp. 1-25; Victoria Steward, ‘“Commando Consciousness” and Criminality in Post-Second World War Fiction’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 10 (2017), pp.165-177; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes* (London, 1994), p.19.

³¹² Connelly and Wilcox, ‘Are you tough enough’, p.1.

different combat roles. The following chapter demonstrates this point by contrasting the wartime portrayals of the soldiers of the LRDG in North Africa with those of Wingate and the Chindits in Burma.

In a study published in 1997, John Newsinger examined the cultural and political significance of representations of the SAS between the 1950s and 1990s. In focusing specifically on the SAS rather than attempting a more general treatment of elite British soldiers, Newsinger revealed the unique set of ideas and characteristics projected onto the unit.³¹³ This chapter follows Newsinger in exploring the specificity of representations of individual special-forces units. It examines the gendered meanings ascribed to the men of the LRDG and the Chindits, and their broader significance for understandings of British masculinity during the war. Further, it argues, *contra* Connelly and Wilcox, that popular media sometimes distinguished between specific special-forces units and that a range of factors shaped wartime representations of irregular soldiers.

It is necessary here briefly to acknowledge the debate concerning the definition of the Chindits as a special-forces unit. Andrew Hargreaves excluded the Chindits from his examination of British and American Second World War special operations on the grounds that the scale of both Chindit campaigns (3,000 men involved in the first, 20,000 in the second) was far greater than that of other specialist formations.³¹⁴ Further, while other British

³¹³ John Newsinger, *Dangerous Men*, p.4.

³¹⁴ Hargreaves, *Special Operations*, p.14.

special-forces units were staffed by volunteers, only 5% of the Chindits were recruited in this manner, with the remainder transferred into the unit compulsorily. As examined below, this fact did not escape the notice of the British press and certainly influenced the ways in which the Chindits were represented. Nevertheless, while these differences may be central to scholars of military strategy, they are less significant to this discussion. For our purposes, the Chindits' role as a specialised unit fighting warfare behind enemy lines separates them from conventional formations. Indeed, the second Chindit army was named 'Special Force' by Wingate's superiors in the military.³¹⁵ Unlike the LRDG, which was involved in numerous operations and sorties between the unit's inception in 1940 until the end of the war, the Chindits were only deployed on two occasions. The first was operation *Longcloth* between February and April 1943, and the second, larger scale engagement was operation *Thursday*, in February 1944. Representations of Wingate and the Chindits examined in this chapter are those that followed *Longcloth*, while chapter four explores in detail the discourse generated by Wingate's death in the opening stages of *Thursday*.

The following chapter is divided into three sections. Section one considers the gendered meanings ascribed to the operations of the Chindits and the LRDG. In the first section, Martin Francis' claim for the continued vitality of romantic Toryism in British wartime culture is investigated through the examination of depictions of Wingate in the British press following operation *Longcloth*. It argues that representations of the Chindit

³¹⁵ Royle, *Orde Wingate*, p.270.

commander exemplified the celebration of martial prowess and elite leadership that characterised romantic Toryism in the 1940s. Next, the chapter considers representations of the Chindits and the LRDG in wartime popular culture. It argues that despite the romantic notions of elite heroism that were attached to Wingate, the depiction of the men under his command strongly conformed to Sonya Rose's formulation of 'temperate masculinity.' Narratives of the Chindits in the British press emphasised their status as 'ordinary' men, echoing the propaganda message attached to the operation that, as chapter two demonstrated, Wingate himself publicly endorsed. In contrast to the Chindits, representations of the men of the LRDG embodied the exemplary masculinity of the romantic adventure hero: the press consistently emphasised their status as elite desert soldiers, among the very best in the Allied forces. Through the examination of images of the men of both units published in British wartime photographic magazine *Illustrated*, this chapter argues that the men of each unit symbolised different ideas in the wartime imaginary. A final section considers popular attitudes to the operational environments of the LRDG and the Chindits – the desert and the jungle - as a further factor in shaping interpretations of both units.

The narratives that shaped Wingate and Lloyd Owen's masculine self-fashioning explored in the previous chapters provide a useful starting point for this examination of cultural representations of special-forces soldiers. To varying degrees, both men's self-representations drew on notions of ordinary and exemplary heroism. While highly critical of the 'ordinary' men under his command for operation *Longcloth*, Wingate nonetheless mobilized the rhetoric of the 'People's War' in his public utterances regarding the expedition.

In Lloyd Owen's memoir notions of elite, heroic masculinity co-existed alongside his careful articulation of understatement, self-effacement and an emphasis on the author and the men of the LRDG as 'ordinary'. In his diary, we saw the LRDG commander drawing on a romantic language of heroism to enact a less restrained mode of elite, heroic masculinity. The image of the ordinary was central to the master narrative of the 'People's War,' and was vividly expressed in wartime cinema and radio.³¹⁶ Wartime documentaries like Humphrey Jennings' *Britain Can Take It* (1940) and *Fires Were Started* (1943) celebrated the cheerful resilience of ordinary people. Rose has asserted that during the conflict, Britain was imagined as a nation of ordinary people willing to make sacrifices, bear hardships and put community needs before individual ones.³¹⁷ Captured in the speeches and writings of J. B. Priestley, conservative visions of the nation, specifically Englishness, were challenged by a discourse which placed 'ordinary people' at the centre of national identity.³¹⁸ In her formulation of temperate masculinity, Rose asserted that masculine heroism during the Second World War was no longer the preserve of the special individual, but rather a quality emerging from 'ordinary men', albeit limited to those visibly involved in the armed struggle against the

³¹⁶ For cinema see, among many, James Chapman, 'British Cinema and the "People's War",' in Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill (eds.), *Millions Like Us? British Culture and the Second World War* (Liverpool, 1999), pp.33-61; Neil Rattigan, *This is England: British Film and the People's War, 1939-1945* (London, 2001); Jo Fox, 'Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the "Ordinary" in British Films of the Second World War', *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp. 819-845. For radio see Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45* (Manchester, 1996); Sian Nicholas, 'The People's Radio: The BBC and the Audience,' in Hayes and Hill, *Millions Like Us?*, pp.62-92.

³¹⁷ Rose, *Which*, p.71.

³¹⁸ John Baxendale, "'You and I – All of us Ordinary People": Renegotiating "Britishness" in Wartime,' in Hayes and Hill, *Millions Like Us?*, pp.295-322

Axis.³¹⁹ The ‘temperate heroes’ described by Rose were good humoured, stoical and, above all, ordinary.

Notions of ordinary heroism during the war appear to support Alison Light’s contention of a shift in national sensibilities in mid-twentieth century England ‘away from formerly heroic and officially masculine’ politics to a more ‘ordinary’ and inward-looking nation.³²⁰ In this analysis, England was defined around ‘home and countryside’ rather than military glory and empire. Yet, as we saw in the self-fashioning of Wingate and Lloyd Owen, narratives that emphasised the qualities of the uncommon man retained their potency in wartime Britain. Martin Francis’ examination of the photography of Cecil Beaton highlighted a ‘flamboyantly elitist sensibility that sat uneasily with the democratic discourses of wartime populism.’³²¹ Francis’ delineation of romantic Toryism, the celebration of martial prowess, patrician elegance, and social hierarchy, suggests the resilience in 1940s Britain of ‘conservative structures of feeling: patterns of desire whose presence in the wartime imaginary ensured that the meritocratic, technocratic, and populist discourses of 1939-45 would not go unchallenged, either during the war itself or in the years that followed.’³²² The wartime popularity of the costume melodramas of Gainsborough studios encapsulates these

³¹⁹ Rose, *Which Peoples’ War?*, pp.151-196

³²⁰ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London, 1991), p.8. For ‘ordinariness’ and national identity during the Second World War, Baxendale, “‘You and I – All of us Ordinary People’”, pp.295-322; Jo Fox, ‘Millions Like Us?’

³²¹ Martin Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp.90-117, p.92.

³²² Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism’ p.116.

sentiments, revealing a both a continued reverence for social hierarchy and a desire to escape the mundane.³²³ In the cultural circuit of male heroism, the elite soldier-hero continued to resonate as a powerful script, despite the official discourses of egalitarianism and self-restraint. The officer heroes of the RAF, the desert raiders of the SAS, and the leadership of chivalrous commanders like Archibald Wavell, offered a colourful alternative to the understated heroic masculinity of the ordinary Tommy.

In their analysis of representations of special-forces in wartime Britain, Connelly and Wilcox asserted that images of commandoes in popular media performed a ‘dual-function’ in embodying both the romantic tradition of the gentleman adventurer and the egalitarian spirit of the ‘People’s War.’³²⁴ This tension between the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘exemplary’, between ‘the everyday’ and the romantic, provides a useful framework within which to explore representations of the Chindits and the LRDG. Operating in smaller numbers to the large-scale manoeuvres of the regular army, raised and led by glamorous and eccentric commanders to employ unorthodox tactics behind enemy lines, both units suggest an individualism which cannot easily be accommodated within established conceptions of the ‘People’s War.’ This chapter analyses how the press celebrated the actions of heroic

³²³ For discussion of this issue see James Chapman, ‘British Cinema and the People’s War,’ in Hayes and Hill, *Millions Like Us?*, pp. 33-55. See also, Fox, ‘Millions Like Us?’, p.843; Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism’, p.114.

³²⁴ Connelly and Willcox, ‘Are you tough enough?’, pp.1-5

individuals and small bands of men while emphasising the necessity of collective sacrifice from all sections of society.

1. Orde Wingate and Romantic Toryism

Connelly and Wilcox excluded Wingate and the Chindits from their analysis of wartime reports of special-forces on the grounds that ‘neither had a particularly high profile in British wartime culture and society.’³²⁵ In fact the British press paid considerable attention to operation *Longcloth*, preparing the ground for the widespread coverage of Wingate’s death in the early stages of operation *Thursday* which will be examined in the next chapter.³²⁶ Indeed, although we might query the cost effectiveness or strategic gain of both Chindit operations, *Longcloth* was undoubtedly a propaganda triumph which positioned Wingate and the men under his command as leading actors in the Asian theatre of war.³²⁷ The operation was widely reported in the local and national press, it was the subject of a special BBC transmission, and it even spawned a national theatre tour in which two Chindits described their experiences to the public.³²⁸ Field-Marshal William Slim, although highly critical of

³²⁵ Connelly and Wilcox, ‘Are you tough enough?’, p.1.

³²⁶ Coverage of *Longcloth*: *Daily Express* 21/05/43, p.1; *Daily Express* 25/05/43, p.3; *Daily Express* 09/07/41, p.1; *Daily Express* 08/07/43, p.4; *Daily Express* 03/08/43; *Daily Telegraph* 21/05/43, p.1; *Daily Telegraph* 24/05/43, p.3; *Daily Telegraph* 08/06/43, p.4; *Daily Telegraph* 09/06/43 p.4; *Daily Mail* 21/05/43, p.1; *Daily Mail* 24/05/43, p.4; 25/05/43, p.2; *Daily Mail* 23/06/43, p.2; *Daily Mail* 26/08/43, p.1; *The Times* 21/05/43, p.4;. For coverage of Wingate’s death see chapter 4.

³²⁷ Daniel Todman, *Britain’s War: A New World, 1942-1947* (Oxford, 2020), pp.713-714.

³²⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, 09/07/43, p.3.

Wingate and *Longcloth* in his 1956 autobiography, nonetheless conceded that ‘by every means in our power we exploited [the operation's] propaganda value to the full.’³²⁹ The authorization of three journalists to accompany the Chindit columns marching from Imphal to the Chindwin River in the opening stages of *Longcloth* underlines that high command was keen to exploit the propaganda potential of the operation before the brigade had even entered the jungle. As has been argued in the previous chapter, Wingate himself was astutely aware of the value of publicity and consciously fashioned a heroic public persona throughout his career. While his actions in Ethiopia had been treated as a sideshow by the press, the military authorities lifted the censor which had been placed on reports of the Burma campaign.³³⁰ Wingate subsequently became one of the most famous soldiers of his day.

Stories in the British press about the colourful ‘guerrilla leader’ of irregular soldiers provided a welcome escape from routine accounts of the movements of Britain’s citizen army. We can map the operation of a cultural circuit in the press coverage of Wingate’s peculiarities, peculiarities which Wingate himself had carefully cultivated, as we have seen, particularly in his emulation of General Gordon. Reports consistently presented Wingate as an eccentric in the tradition of past imperial heroes. One reporter from the *News Chronicle* wrote how, ‘You may hear him chanting to himself in Arabic, which he speaks fluently, in his tent in the morning. Then for a few hours he will be silent and meditative... He has very

³²⁹ William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London, 1956), p.163.

³³⁰ Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London, 1995), p.257.

definite ideas on diet and frequently flabbergasts his visitors by pulling out a handful of raw onions and inviting his guests to join him.³³¹ Other publications were more direct in drawing comparisons between the brigadier and the great men of empire; the *Daily Express* likened him to Gordon, while the *Daily Mail* described him as a ‘Clive of India.’³³² Along with Field-Marshal Montgomery and Lord Lovat, the brigadier’s eccentricities marked him out as separate from the ‘ordinary’ soldier and further contributed to his popular appeal.³³³

Wingate’s personal charisma and physical appearance provided further scope for romantic representations. In addition to the martial virtues of the soldier-hero, journalists portrayed Wingate as possessing a fierce intellect and a visionary mind. The *Daily Mail* hailed the ‘long-haired, dreamy-eyed 40 years old soldier who organised the Abyssinian patriots in their revolt against the Italians, and before that formed bands of guerrillas to fight in Palestine.’³³⁴ The construction of the Chindit captain as romantic ‘dreamer’ was echoed in an *Illustrated London News* article which quoted a soldier who served under Wingate: ‘He is something more than a man of action. He dreams things - do you know what I mean? He dreams a dream and makes it come true. See him charge through a tract of elephant grass in that old pith helmet. Why you can’t help but follow him’.³³⁵ The image of a pith-helmeted Wingate ‘charging’ through elephant grass evokes the imperial adventurer, echoing

³³¹ *News Chronicle*, 21/03/43

³³² *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943, p.1; *Daily Mail*, 21/05/1943, p.1.

³³³ R.W. Thompson, *Churchill and the Montgomery Myth* (Plymouth, 1967), p.208; Royle, *Orde Wingate*, p.258.

³³⁴ *Daily Mail*, 21/05/1943, p.1.

³³⁵ *Illustrated London News*, 01/06/43, p.1.

Wingate's self-presentation in his Zerzura narrative. The depiction of Wingate as a visionary, almost mystical figure marked a further dimension of his heroic persona, echoing popular interpretations of Gordon.³³⁶ Wingate's status as exemplary hero was reinforced by this perception that he could see things in a way that 'ordinary' people could not. Such people could only 'follow him'.

The soldier's quotation captures the combination of strength and vision, of soldier-hero and intellectual, which was central to the Wingate's heroic persona following *Longcloth*. The *Daily Telegraph* published a similar portrayal of Wingate as a man of intellect.

Even before you have met him you realise you are in the presence of a remarkable personality. He has the lean face of an intellectual. His eyes are piercingly blue. His jutting chin is as aggressive as his bony nose. Though he is 38 his hair is already grey. But for his uniform you would put him down as a barrister destined for the bench.³³⁷

The brigadier's 'aggressive' features - the jutting chin, the piercing eyes - bely his intellectual qualities. The article went on to outline Wingate's virtues as soldier-scholar; 'he is a gunner by training and a student of war, but also a student of life and art... the brigadier quoted Shakespeare, Plato, Leonardo da Vinci and Grey's elegy.'³³⁸ Other publications offered similar descriptions of Wingate's intellectual pursuits. The *News Chronicle* noted his interest in 'philosophy, literature, art, music, politics, economics [and] international affairs', while the *Daily Express* described him as a 'soldier philosopher' who 'quotes the Greek classics in the

³³⁶ Max Jones, "'National Hero and Very Queer Fish:'" Empire, Sexuality and British Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918-72', *Twentieth Century British History* 26 (2015), pp. 175-202, p.183, p.197.

³³⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/1943, p.4.

³³⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/1943, p.4.

jungle,³³⁹ The emphasis upon Wingate as an aficionado of culture underlined his individualism in an army of ‘ordinary’ men, adding depth to his skills beyond those of a mere soldier. As with his great patron Archibald Wavell, who was also celebrated as a scholar and poet as well as a chivalrous soldier, perceptions of Wingate’s intellect added a further element to his heroic persona.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ *News Chronicle*, 21/05/1943, p.1; *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943, p.1. 3

³⁴⁰ Martin Francis, ‘Cecil Beaton’s Romantic Toryism’, p.115; John Connell, *Wavell: Scholar and Soldier* (London, 1964); Bernard Fergusson, *Wavell: Portrait of a Soldier* (London, 1961).

Fig. 3.1 Wingate of the Jungle “Follies”



Source: *Daily Mail*, 7 July 1943, p. 1.

The romance surrounding Wingate was further heightened by his unorthodox appearance, treated by journalists as a marker of his individualism. Photographs of the bearded Brigadier, often wearing his signature Wolseley helmet, were widely published in the

national and regional press.³⁴¹ Fascinated by his apparent disregard for the military conformity enforced upon the ‘ordinary’ British soldier, journalists frequently commented on Wingate’s clothing in their reports. The *Daily Express* hailed the ‘unconventional leader of men’ who ‘wore corduroy trousers, Tommy’s boots, torn bush shirt and an old-fashioned East African topee.’³⁴² Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* described the brigadier’s ‘torn bush shirt, russet corduroy trousers’ and ‘scuttle-shaped topee of East African pattern which look[ed] strangely old fashioned.’³⁴³ In his examination of contemporary representations of the SAS in popular culture, Newsinger noted the potency of images of the black-clad, elite soldiers.³⁴⁴ For observers of such images today, the soldiers’ distinct battledress and appearance immediately distinguishes them from their peers in regular military formations and signifies their elite status. For audiences in wartime Britain, Wingate’s flamboyant individualism contrasted with the stuffy conformity of other commanders and amplified the exoticism and glamour surrounding the operation.³⁴⁵ As argued in chapter one, there was a theatricality to Wingate’s appearance that underwrote the heroic persona he fashioned in his writings. *Longcloth* marked the moment at which this performance was picked up and broadcast to a

³⁴¹ *Daily Mail*, 21/05/1943; *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943; *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/1943; *The Times*, 21/05/1943; *Daily Record*, 07/07/43, p.4; *The Scotsman*, 07/07/43, p.5; *Northern Whig*, 07/07/43; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 07/07/43, p.2; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22/05/1943; *Illustrated London News*, 29/05/43; *The Sphere*, 17/07/1943.

³⁴² *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943, p.1;

³⁴³ *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/43, p.4.

³⁴⁴ Newsinger, *Dangerous*, p.80.

³⁴⁵ Wingate’s clothing was not, in fact, terribly singular. For further information, see Philip Hoare, ‘I Love a Man in Uniform: the Dandy in *Espirit de Corps*’, *Fashion Theory* 9 (2005), pp. 262-282. For broader debates about fashion and military culture, see Alison Matthews David, ‘Decorated Men: Fashioning the French Soldier, 1852-1914’, *Fashion Theory* 7 (2003), pp.3-37. For the symbolic significance of tropical dress among imperial explorers and officers, see Ryan Johnson, ‘European Cloth and “Tropical” Skin: Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83 (2009), pp.530-560.

national audience. The Chindit commander's striking appearance made narratives of his actions all the more distinct among the repertoire of stories and images in the cultural circuit of male heroism.

Portrayals of Wingate following *Longcloth* exemplified many tenets of 'romantic Toryism', described by Francis as providing a 'colourful and picturesque' alternative to wartime narratives of 'ordinariness'.³⁴⁶ As well as raising Wingate's profile the operation elevated his social standing considerably, allowing him access to elite circles within British society. His 'success' against an enemy considered unbeatable in the jungle reflected the finest qualities of the British officer class; his familial connection to T. E. Lawrence further underlined his pedigree as an elite soldier hero. Along with Wing-Commander Guy Gibson VC, the celebrated RAF hero of operation *Chastise* and Lord Lovat, the gentleman soldier who led commandos at Dieppe and on D-day, Wingate entered the pantheon of exemplary wartime officer-heroes.³⁴⁷ Winston Churchill, whose wartime rhetoric and romantic view of empire mark him as the archetypal Second World War romantic Tory, invited Wingate to sail with him to Canada on the ocean liner *Queen Mary* and to speak with Franklin Roosevelt at the Quebec conference. The prime minister assembled the most dashing leading men from the British military in a bid to impress his American counterpart. Wingate was joined by Gibson and Lord Louis Mountbatten, cousin of the king and the commander of *HMS Kelly*, on whose

³⁴⁶ Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism', p.95.

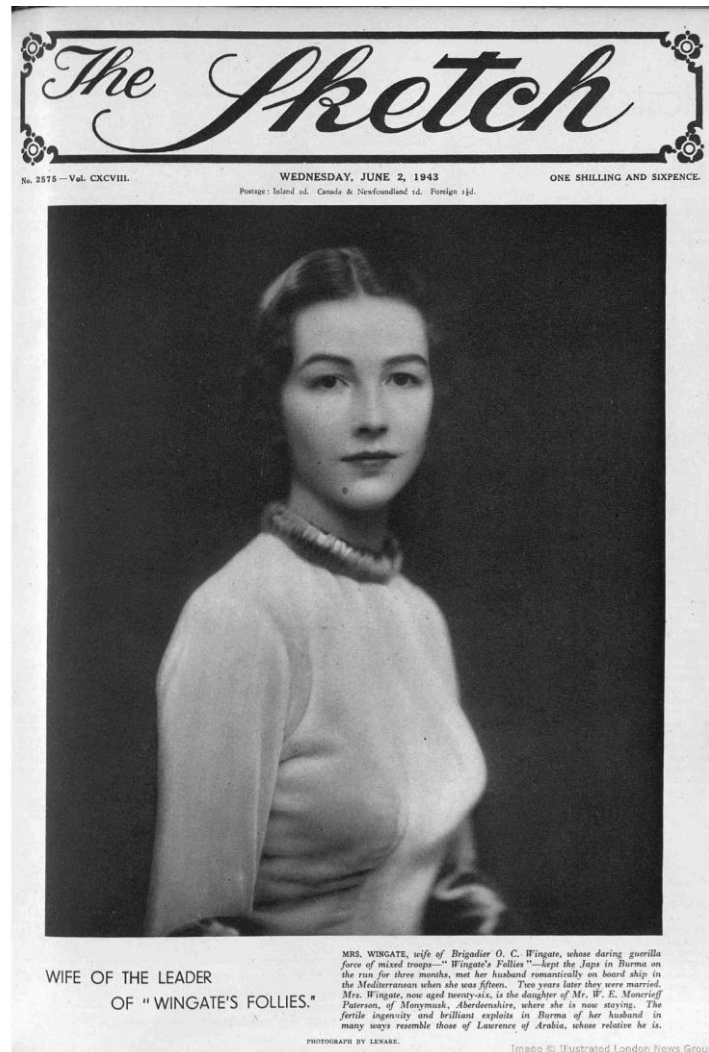
³⁴⁷ Martin Francis identified Lovat and Gibson as examples of Second World War soldier-heroes who fit the criteria as romantic Tory heroes

exploits the popular 1942 film *In Which We Serve* was based.³⁴⁸ Other passengers included the foreign secretary Anthony Eden, CIGS Sir Alan Brooke and Sir Charles Portal, chief of the Air Staff.³⁴⁹ Although Wingate had extensive family connections in the armed forces, the success of *Longcloth* gave him access to the most influential social and political networks.

³⁴⁸ John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Fire in the Night: Wingate of Burma, Ethiopia, and Zion* (New York, 1999), pp. 312-313.

³⁴⁹ Bierman and Smith, *Fire in the Night*, p.316.

Fig. 3.2 Wife of the Leader of "Wingate's Follies"



Source: The Sketch, 30/06/42, p.14.

Further indication of Wingate's newly acquired status as an exemplar of masculine heroism can be found in the celebrity that his new-found fame conferred on his young wife. Twenty-six years old and strikingly good-looking, Lorna Wingate heightened the sense of

glamour surrounding her husband. During the summer of 1943 she featured on the society pages of newspapers and magazines, notably photographed by glamour photographers Lenare studios for the front page of *The Sketch* (fig. 3.2), a publication devoted to the aristocracy and high society.³⁵⁰ Posed in a white dress against a dark background, Lorna Wingate's image appeared above a caption hailing her husband's 'fertile ingenuity and brilliant exploits in Burma.'³⁵¹ Understated and demure, the portrait is a study in elegance and functions as a feminine foil to the heroic individualism of Wingate. The merging of 'celebrity culture' and the technologies of mass media with romantic Toryism in this manner helped ensure its continued vitality in the mid-twentieth century.³⁵² The celebration of Wingate and his wife as members of elite wartime society reveals a reverence for social hierarchy which continued to have purchase in wartime Britain and subtly challenged official discourses of egalitarianism.

Yet the British press' narrative of *Longcloth* was not only a story of one man's heroism. Newspapers and magazines also described the men under the brigadier's command. While journalists presented Wingate as a romantic soldier-hero and exemplar of elite individualism, the Chindits themselves were resolutely portrayed as 'ordinary' men, who embodied the cheerful, understated masculinity of the 'temperate hero'. This contrast between the Chindit commander and his men exemplifies the tension between the competing discourses of wartime collectivism and heroic individualism identified by Rose and Francis.

³⁵⁰ Also see *The Sphere*, 17/07/43, p. 30; *Tatler*, 28/07/43, p.10; *The Sketch*, 02/06/43, p.1.

³⁵¹ *The Sketch*, 02/06/43, p.1.

³⁵² Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism', p.95.

In reports of *Longcloth*, the portrayal of Wingate as ‘romantic figurehead’ and the Chindit rank and file as ‘ordinary’ soldiers allowed the individual and collective components of wartime discourse to be presented as unproblematically compatible.³⁵³

No single figure of equivalently heroic stature to Wingate emerged from the LRDG, either during the Second World War or after. As a pre-war gentleman explorer of the Libyan Desert, Ralph Bagnold, the man responsible for establishing the unit, certainly met the criteria for romantic heroism. Bagnold was by no means unheard of in British society during the war; his profile as a respected desert explorer was well established and he featured occasionally in the reports of the LRDG examined below. Lacking Wingate’s flair for self-promotion however, Bagnold did not match the Chindit commander’s public profile. In his 1980 memoir, Lloyd Owen suggested that the natural modesty and inclination to understatement of the men of the LRDG prevented them from receiving the plaudits of the public.³⁵⁴ As the previous chapter has demonstrated, Lloyd Owen’s diary suggests a more complex wartime understanding of his own role in the conflict. It will be argued below that the wartime construction of the men of the LRDG contrasted with that of the Chindits, emphasising their status as elite soldiers rather than ordinary men.

³⁵³ A similar tension is identified by Stefan Collini in his examination of Victorian understandings of the idea of ‘character’; Stefan Collini, ‘The idea of character in Victorian political thought’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 35 (1985), pp.29-50, p.49.

³⁵⁴ David Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide: The Long Range Desert Group, 1940-1945* (London, 1980), p.5.

2. The Chindits and the LRDG in the Wartime Press

As soon as the censor was lifted on the reporting of *Longcloth* in May 1943, Martin Moore, a journalist who was permitted to march with the Chindit columns for the opening stages of the operation, published an account of his adventure in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Describing the soldiers under Wingate's command, Moore wrote

British troops in the unit are mostly North Country men. The majority belong to age groups between 28 and 35. They were not specially picked for this strenuous task, but trained for it. At home they were a coastal defence unit. When they came to India they were allocated to internal security duty, and in this type of soldiering most of them probably expected to remain for the rest of the war.³⁵⁵

Moore's portrayal neatly encapsulates the construction of the Chindits as 'ordinary' soldiers, echoing Wingate's own representations of the expedition examined in the previous chapter. Northern and older, the Chindits in Moore's (and Wingate's) description of *Longcloth* were not selected for the 'strenuous' operation because of their physical abilities. Implicit in Moore's description is the Chindits' apparent lack of suitability as front-line soldiers; they were old for combat, had therefore spent the war performing routine defence duties, were content to remain in this relatively safe role, and had not volunteered for more dangerous work. Prior to their allocation to Wingate's brigade then, the Chindits would not have struck Moore's readers as traditionally heroic figures. The construction of the 'ordinary' Chindits was succinctly summarised in a May 1943 Gaumont newsreel titled 'Secret Jungle Army in Burma'. Echoing Wingate's own self-representations, the narrator drew a distinction between

³⁵⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/43, p.4.

the Chindit commander and the men under his command, ‘He [Wingate] is a professional soldier, but there is nothing of the “red tape general” in his methods of waging war. And the men he trained and fought with were nearly all just soldiers for the duration. Before the war they had just been the bloke living next door.’³⁵⁶

The portrayal of the Chindits as unexceptional men was echoed across the British press. The *Daily Express* marvelled at the creation of a ‘commando force’ of ‘family men’ who ‘never expected to be jungle fighters’, while a journalist in *The Times* observed that the unit was made up of ‘married men... who would normally be called second-line troops.’³⁵⁷ The *Daily Herald* echoed Moore’s emphasis on the brigade’s composition of ordinary, conscripted troops rather than volunteers, describing the Chindits as ‘working men from Wigan and Manchester called up for the army in the ordinary way.’³⁵⁸ Articles in the regional press further underlined the status of the Chindits as ordinary recruits, emphasising the role of local men in operation *Longcloth*.³⁵⁹ The *Liverpool Echo* proudly announced that ‘Merseyside men played a prominent part in the expedition’, while the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* ran the headline ‘Birmingham man among the Wingate jungle warriors who returned.’³⁶⁰ The *Cheshire Observer* published extracts of a local Chindit’s letter to his wife,

³⁵⁶ Gaumont British Newsreel, ‘Secret Jungle Army in Burma’, 31/05/1943.

³⁵⁷ *Daily Express*, 21/05/43, p.1; *The Times*, 24/05/43, p.5.

³⁵⁸ *Daily Herald*, 21/05/43, p.4.

³⁵⁹ *Liverpool Echo*, 30/07/43; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 07/07/43, p.4; *Liverpool Echo*, 24/07/43, p.3; *Hawick News and Border Chronicle*, 16/07/43, p.4; *Liverpool Echo*, 06/08/43, p.4; *Nottingham Journal*, 18/08/43; *Shields Daily News*, 13/10/43, p.2; *Liverpool Echo*, 30/07/43, p.5; *Cheshire Observer*, 24/07/43, p.8.

³⁶⁰ *Liverpool Echo*, 30/07/43; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 07/07/43, p.4.

and the *Shields Daily News* reported the survival of the only two North Shields men who joined Wingate's brigade.³⁶¹ The focus upon Chindits from local communities provided readers with readily accessible examples of the 'type' of man conscripted into the unit, reinforcing their status as 'ordinary'.

In contrast with the Chindits, newspaper reports of the LRDG presented the men of the unit firmly within the romantic tradition of the elite soldier-hero.³⁶² Alan Moorehead, author and *Daily Express* correspondent, wrote in his 1943 book that 'if you had a taste for piracy and high adventure, then the LRDG was the unit to join.'³⁶³ Moorehead's portrayal of LRDG troopers as swashbuckling adventurers was echoed in other newspaper depictions of the unit. Reports of LRDG operations, in the words of *The Times*, 'read like a film "thriller."³⁶⁴ A far cry from the 'second-line troops' of the Chindits, British journalists presented the LRDG in terms of adventure and romance, drawing on a diverse range of narratives in the cultural circuit of male heroism. Thus, the *Daily Herald* proclaimed the LRDG the 'Dick Turpins of Libya', while the *Daily Mail* labelled the men of the unit 'desert pirates.'³⁶⁵ Representations of the unit regularly drew on tropes of maritime adventure, drawing comparisons between the vast sand sea of the Libyan desert and the ocean navigated by adventurer-explorers of an earlier era. In the *Manchester Guardian* the men were 'soldiers

³⁶¹ *Cheshire Observer*, 24/07/43, p.8 *Shields Daily News*, 13/10/43, p.2.

³⁶² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.19.

³⁶³ Alan Moorehead, *A Year of Battle* (London, 1943), p.266; *Observer*, 01/04/1945, p.3.

³⁶⁴ *The Times*, 14/02/1941, p.4.

³⁶⁵ *Daily Herald* 14/02/1941, p.6; *Daily Mail* 14/02/1941;

of Elizabethan descent', while in *The Times* the unit captured the 'Elizabethan spirit of adventure.'³⁶⁶ The men of the unit exemplified a British tradition of heroic individualism, their activities a new chapter in a long line of exploration and adventure. In newspaper reports, the men of the LRDG were not 'ordinary' men.

Popular narratives of the unit drew on a language of imperial adventure, as journalists looked to the cultural circuit for similarly exemplary figures. Graham Dawson has observed that the perception of Lawrence as the archetypal desert warrior continued to shape narratives of the soldier hero during the 1940s.³⁶⁷ As with Wingate, Lawrence provided a potent cultural reference point for the LRDG, and commentators enthusiastically highlighted the similarities between the soldiers. The *Daily Express* predicted that when told, the story of the LRDG would 'surpass that of Colonel Lawrence in the last war', while the *Yorkshire Post* described the unit as 'men of the breed of Doughty and Lawrence.'³⁶⁸ The two officers responsible for establishing the unit, Major Ralph Bagnold and Second-Lieutenant William Kennedy-Shaw, were crowned by the *Daily Gazette* as 'new Lawrences of Arabia.'³⁶⁹ As exemplary figures with extraordinary powers who performed feats of heroism beyond the abilities of ordinary men, the heroes of empire provided a context within which to understand the men of the LRDG.

³⁶⁶ *Manchester Guardian* 08/04/1945, p.3; *The Times* 25/03/1945, p.3.

³⁶⁷ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.168.

³⁶⁸ *Daily Express* 18/01/1943, p.2; *Yorkshire Post* 04/06/1941.

³⁶⁹ *Daily Gazette* 09/07/41, p.4.

The image of the LRDG as elite soldiers was reinforced by an emphasis on their status as men specially selected for the unit, in contrast to depictions of the inexperienced Chindits. Just as reports of *Longcloth* echoed More's assertion that the soldiers 'were not specially picked for this strenuous task', the phrase 'picked men' featured regularly in reports of the LRDG.³⁷⁰ The soldiers of the unit were, according to reports, among the best in the British army and were selected because they possessed qualities that ordinary soldiers did not. The readers of one article in *The Times* would have been left with the mistaken impression of the social composition of the unit, as the article reported that the unit was made up solely of 'picked officers.'³⁷¹ In a similar fashion, the *Daily Mirror* described the unit as a 'secret little party of officers.'³⁷² Such reports are revealing. They served to underline the elite status of the unit, presenting the men as a select band of officer-heroes. They also reveal the tradition of heroism that the LRDG were seen to embody. Although the unit was made up of officers and other ranks, all of the men embodied the masculinity of the officer-hero.

Popular accounts of the LRDG often presented a similarly misleading picture of its activities, focusing on daring raids on airfields and ambushes on enemy convoys, rather than the LRDG's primary and less glamorous role of monitoring enemy movements and gathering reconnaissance.³⁷³ An article in the *Daily Express* written by an embedded journalist

³⁷⁰ *The Daily Mail*, 14/02/1942, p.6; *The Times*, 14/02/1941, p.4; *The Times*, 01/04/1942, p.4; *The Sunday Times*, 27/08/44, p.7.

³⁷¹ *The Times*, 14/02/1942, p.4.

³⁷² *Daily Mirror*, 11/03/1941, p.7.

³⁷³ *Sunday Mirror*, 17/05/1942, p.5; *The Sunday Times*, 17/05/1942, p.5; *The Daily Telegraph*, 28/03/1942, p.1.

encapsulates this approach to the unit, providing an all-action account of the LRDG's 1942 raid on Barce airfield which, it claimed, was 'typical of many.'³⁷⁴ Readers were informed that 'the Guards had a glorious time shooting up the main army barracks and throwing hand grenades into the windows.' The article went on to quote an LRDG officer's description of the destruction, 'fourteen planes were destroyed... six others blazed beautifully and a dozen more were well alight by the time we had gone right around the field. I wish you could have seen them.' Through narratives such as these the image of the LRDG as a band of elite soldier-heroes, single-handedly defeating Rommel was reinforced. Stories of the heroics of small groups of soldiers were more thrilling than reports of the large-scale movements of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert and, unsurprisingly, became a focus for comic books after the war, as we shall see in chapter 5.

A further contrasting feature of reports of the Chindits and the LRDG was the celebration of the men of the desert unit as volunteers, rather than conscripts. Unlike the Chindits who were unexpectedly thrust into the role of irregular soldiers, articles about LRDG operations frequently emphasised the voluntary aspect of the unit's recruitment, amplifying the heroism of LRDG troopers. The *Daily Post*, for example, described the unit as comprised of 'audacious British volunteers... operating one of the most daring information

³⁷⁴ *Daily Express*, 21/04/1942, p.2. For a first-hand account the raid on Barce, see Michael Crichton-Stuart, *G Patrol: The Guards Patrol of the Long Range Desert Group* (London, 1958), pp.149-160. For a scholarly account of operation see John Sadler, *Ghost Patrol: A History of the Long Range Desert Group, 1940-1945* (Oxford, 2015), pp.128-135.

services ever attempted.³⁷⁵ The *Daily Express* praised the ‘daring’ soldiers who ‘lived in the enemy’s midst’ and were ‘all volunteers,’ while the *Sunday Express* labelled them ‘volunteers who all take their lives into their hands’.³⁷⁶ The *Sunday Times* hailed the LRDG as ‘the bravest, toughest... unit of the British army... all volunteers.’³⁷⁷ Juliette Pattinson has identified a Second World War discourse of masculine heroism which valorised soldiers who volunteered for special duties, shunning the relative comfort of ‘safe’ units in favour of danger on the front line.³⁷⁸ Pattinson asserted that the influence of relatives who volunteered for service in the Great War, and ‘proximity to a youth culture which valorised sacrifice, nobility and heroic impulsiveness,’ made young men ‘fully primed volunteers for roles of danger, pluck, and derring-do.’³⁷⁹ In interviews with members of the Jedburghs (an Allied special-forces unit tasked with stimulating guerrilla warfare in occupied France and the Netherlands) Pattinson identified British soldiers’ concerns that they might be perceived not to be performing a sufficiently heroic role in the conflict as a key influence on their decision to volunteer. Newspaper reports which celebrated the volunteers of the LRDG undoubtedly reinforced ideas about what constituted an acceptable wartime role, echoing First World War notions of martial service as a test of masculinity which allowed men to demonstrate their

³⁷⁵ *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28/03/42, p.1.

³⁷⁶ *Daily Express*, 21/04/43, p.2; *Sunday Express* 29/03/1942, p.4.

³⁷⁷ *Sunday Times*, 29/03/1942, p.5.

³⁷⁸ Juliette Pattinson, ‘Fantasies of the “Soldier Hero”, Frustrations of the Jedburghs’ in Linsey Robb, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* (London, 2018), pp.25-46, p.32-36.

³⁷⁹ Pattinson, ‘Fantasies’, p.36.

mettle.³⁸⁰ As men who voluntarily manoeuvred themselves into a hazardous wartime occupation, the soldiers of the LRDG embodied the elite masculinity of the soldier-hero.

The contrasting interpretations of the Chindits and the LRDG captured competing ideas in the wartime imaginary. The popular construction of the ‘ordinary’ Chindit, an unremarkable, family man conscripted into the military and trained to perform acts of heroism in the jungle, captures the democratic discourses of the ‘People’s War.’ Yet narratives of the ‘ordinary Chindit’ existed in tension with the image of Wingate as the ‘Jungle hero relative of Lawrence’.³⁸¹ Indeed, we might question whether the Chindits would have held such popular appeal without Wingate as a romantic figurehead. In a similar fashion, narratives of the LRDG subtly challenged official wartime discourses of egalitarianism, celebrating the elite status of the men of the unit. Depictions of the activities of the LRDG offered an escape from the mundane, ordinary heroism of the British Tommy. Indeed, commentators even bent the truth in order to heighten the glamour surrounding the unit, either by exaggerating the extent of their offensive role in the desert war, or by depicting the unit singularly as officers. The celebration of Wingate’s leadership and the glamorous individualists of the LRDG highlight the resilience of the ‘conservative structures of feeling’

³⁸⁰ Pattinson, ‘Fantasies’, p.33; Nicoletta Gullace, ‘White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War’, *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997), pp.178-206.

³⁸¹ *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943, p.1.

uncovered by Francis. Narratives of special forces reveal the continued potency of elitist and anti-egalitarian conceptualisations of Britain, alongside the rhetoric of ‘the people’s war’.

The contrast in press portrayals of the LRDG and the Chindits, and the different meanings projected onto each unit, is captured in two separate photographic articles published in the picture magazine weekly, *Illustrated*. First established as *Weekly Illustrated* in 1934 by Stefan Lorant, *Illustrated* was Britain’s first weekly photographic magazine. Lorant was a key figure in the development of European photojournalism who went on to establish *Illustrated*’s main competitor, *Picture Post*, in 1938.³⁸² *Weekly Illustrated* has been credited as a key influence on the famous American picture magazine, *Life*, which emulated the British magazine’s layout.³⁸³ While wartime circulation figures are difficult to determine as rationing of paper restricted commercial printing of newspapers, magazines and books, Audit Bureau of Circulation figures indicate both *Illustrated* and *Picture Post* had a 1940 circulation of 1,185,915.³⁸⁴ Readership figures are likely to have been much higher, as magazines were passed around between friends and family.³⁸⁵ A cheaply priced, popular publication, *Illustrated* used a photojournalism format that leant itself well to coverage of war issues, blending high quality, black and white images with sharp writing which resulted in an

³⁸² Damian Hughes, ‘Rural Labour: Photographic Representation of the English Countryside in the 1930s Socialist Press’, *History of Photography* 35 (2011), pp.59-75, p.69; Michael Hallett, *Stefan Lorant: Godfather of Photojournalism* (Lanham, 2006).

³⁸³ Hallett, *Stefan Lorant*, p.52.

³⁸⁴ Gary Champion, *The Good Fight: Battle of Britain Propaganda and the Few* (Basingstoke, 2009), p.152; David Reed, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States of America 1880-1960* (London, 1997), p.184.

³⁸⁵ Champion, *Good Fight*, p.152.

easily readable, effective style. The magazine employed its own photographers, including the legendary war photographer Robert Capa, but also purchased the rights to images and stories published in other magazines.³⁸⁶ Its large readership and prominent role in producing stories and images of the war for audiences at home make *Illustrated* an important site to examine the construction of special-forces soldiers in wartime popular culture.

Illustrated published the most enduring images of the LRDG and the Chindits, images which became iconic. In October 1942, *Illustrated* published a double-page spread featuring Cecil Beaton's images of the LRDG.³⁸⁷ A photographer of high fashion and society before the war, Beaton was commissioned by the Ministry of Information to take photos of politicians and soldiers during the conflict.³⁸⁸ While historians of photography have identified the war as a moment in which Beaton abandoned the frivolity of his pre-1939 work in favour of the 'egalitarian morality' which dominated in official discourses during the war, Martin Francis has explored a residual 'individualist, elitist and imperialist fantasizing of the war imaginary' in Beaton's wartime photography.³⁸⁹ In military culture, as in civilian society, Beaton was drawn to glamorous individualists, preferring the RAF pilot, the SAS soldier and the LRDG trooper to the understated heroism of the regular Tommy. In his memoir he

³⁸⁶ Richard Whelan, *Robert Capa: A Biography* (New York, 1985), p. 277.

³⁸⁷ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, pp.14-15.

³⁸⁸ Gail Buckland, *Cecil Beaton: War Photographs, 1939-1945* (London, 1981), p.2.

³⁸⁹ Hugo Vickers, *Cecil Beaton: The Authorised Biography* (London, 1985), pp.292-293; Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism', p.93.

described the LRDG's operations behind enemy lines as being 'as brightly coloured as any pirate story', echoing representations of the unit in the British press examined above.³⁹⁰

Figs. 3.3 – 3.7. Feature Article on the LRDG from *Illustrated* magazine

Source: *Illustrated*, 24 October 1942, pp.14-15.

Fig. 3.3 *Illustrated* Magazine Feature Article on the LRDG



The six photographs published in *Illustrated* exemplify the romantic construction of the LRDG. The central and largest image (Fig. 3.4), spread over two pages, shows a group of eight men sauntering through a square archway in the Western Desert.³⁹¹ All are wearing unorthodox military clothing. Some stripped to the waist, others wearing Arab headgear, all exuding a casual confidence; they are the very image of the romantic soldier-hero, if not quite piratical adventurers.

³⁹⁰ Cecil Beaton, *Near East* (London, 1943), pp.74-75.

³⁹¹ Quotations from the next three paragraphs taken from the feature on the LRDG in *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, pp.14-15.

Fig. 3.4 Men of the LRDG under a square archway



A caption underneath the image described how, ‘Some of the men whose dash and initiative when operating far behind enemy lines is giving the Axis forces in Libya so much cause to worry. These men who are drawn from many units are all seasoned troops who can endure the hardships of desert life to an extreme that is unusual.’ As ‘seasoned troops’ pursuing the war with ‘dash and initiative’ these men were the antithesis of the inexperienced, ‘second-line’ Chindits. Their innate ability to endure desert life ‘to an extreme that is unusual’ underlined their status as soldier-heroes, distinguished from the ‘ordinary’ British soldier.

That these men were different from regular soldiers is underlined by their appearance. One shot features a close up of a trooper with Arab headwear tied around his head (fig.3.5),

the caption above reading ‘dress is always a matter of personal taste with the men who venture far behind enemy lines. This man... is wearing a native tazfira around his head.’³⁹² Directly above is an image of a soldier sitting on the ground (fig. 3.6). The trooper’s sleeves are rolled up and he is wearing a dusty beret displaying the LRDG insignia with his hair protruding underneath in an unsoldierly fashion. The caption states ‘military haircuts are often impossible for weeks on end, but the men don’t let that worry them. They are used to living rough, and they can certainly play rough.’³⁹³ A further picture highlights the soldiers’ appearance as a marker of individualism, displaying a trooper with his arms folded, confronting the camera with his stare (fig. 3.7); his hair is tousled and he is unshaven. The caption beside reads ‘Another man of the LRDG is starting to grow a beard.’³⁹⁴

Fig. 3.5 LRDG wearing ‘native tazfira’



Fig. 3.6 LRDG insignia on soldier’s beret



³⁹² *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.15.

³⁹³ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.15.

³⁹⁴ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.14.

Fig. 3.7 'Another man of the LRDG is starting to grow a beard'



The individualistic appearance of the men serves as a marker of their elite status in a British army renowned for enforcing conformity. Implicit in such images and captions is the idea that as irregular soldiers the LRDG troopers are not subject to traditional markers of military discipline such as uniform or haircut. As elite soldiers selected for the unit because of their ability to operate in small teams and use their initiative rather than awaiting the instructions of a superior, the men of the unit have earned the right to a degree self-expression which would not be granted to ordinary soldiers. They are, as the *Illustrated* article notes, 'a law unto themselves in many ways, and an important branch of the Eighth Army.'³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.14.

In addition to their unorthodox appearance, the robust physical condition of the troopers distinguished them from the regular Tommy. In his memoir, Beaton recalled that the minister of state in Cairo instructed photographers to concentrate on physically fit soldiers, since ‘too often a freckled, spotty little chap, who may be as wiry and daring as damned, gets into the picture, and the impression he creates doesn’t do any good.’³⁹⁶ Beaton’s focus on the healthy bodies of the LRDG troopers is a further indication of their exemplary status in wartime society, and contrasts sharply with the images of the ‘ordinary’ Chindits. Arabs and indigenous peoples rarely featured in the visual iconography generated by the LRDG, providing support for Francis’s analysis of an ‘empty desert’ stage for performances of British heroism.³⁹⁷

In July 1943 *Illustrated* purchased the rights to a photo essay by *Life* photographer William Vandivert which documented the air evacuation of a group of injured Chindits during the closing stages of *Longcloth*.³⁹⁸ Vandivert was among the crew of an RAF Dakota tasked with dropping supplies to a retreating Chindit column. As the plane approached the drop zone, the pilot noticed that the message ‘plane land here now’ had been crudely marked out on the ground using parachute cloth.³⁹⁹ After some reconnaissance, the RAF decided to risk the landing. Vandivert’s photographs of the gaunt, hollow-eyed Chindits were published

³⁹⁶ Beaton, *Near East*, pp.40-41.

³⁹⁷ Martin Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema’ in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp.111-132,

³⁹⁸ *Illustrated*, 10/07/43, pp.5-15.

³⁹⁹ Bireman and Smith, *Fire in the Night*, pp.305-306.

around the world, becoming iconic images of the unit.⁴⁰⁰ The magazine devoted eleven-pages to Vandivert's fifty photographs and thrilling narrative of the operation, declaring it 'one of the greatest picture stories of the war.'⁴⁰¹ The article can be divided into three sections: the landing, the evacuation of the Chindits, and a short profile of Wingate. While the photographer's account of the Dakota's hazardous landing on an improvised airstrip behind enemy lines is an exhilarating read, it is the second two sections and the accompanying images that are relevant for this chapter.

Figs. 3.8 – 3.12 Feature Article on the Chindits from *Illustrated* magazine.

Source: *Illustrated*, 10 July 1943, pp.5-15.

Fig. 3.8 *Illustrated* Magazine Feature Article on the Chindits



⁴⁰⁰ *Life Magazine*, 28/06/1943; *Illustrated*, 10/07/43; *Times of India*, 28/06/43; *The Sphere*, 17/07/43; *Daily Mirror*, 07/07/43.

⁴⁰¹ *Illustrated*, 10/07/43, p.5.

If Beaton's focus on the healthy physique of LRDG troopers distinguished them from regular soldiers, Vandivert's chronicling of the broken bodies of the Chindits presented the men as the archetypes of the long-suffering British Tommy. The photographer described the condition of the soldiers and their ailments in graphic detail. He wrote that one 'ruptured soldier was barely holding himself together, biting his lips in agony... He suddenly leaned over, vomiting.' Vandivert went on to describe the commanding officer of the evacuees '...beneath his collar I could see deep, open jungle sores.' Another soldier 'dropped days before with dysentery [sic] and infected hips. It was only his great will...that had brought him hobbling in.' Those who survived to be evacuated were lucky compared to the men left in jungle, 'they began dropping like flies with hunger...one chum with jungle sores deeply infecting his legs just couldn't lift them again. He had dropped, softly saying "Well, I guess I've had it."'”⁴⁰²

Vandivert juxtaposed the soldiers' horrific injuries and experiences with their continued high spirits and good humour. The photographer described the evacuated Chindits' 'broad smiles' and the 'sheer joy' which 'radiated through the lot' as they 'joked happily' with the RAF aircrew.⁴⁰³ He admiringly records how one soldier with 'open jungle sores... drew a folded copy of *Punch*, and laughed helplessly – until a fit of coughing racked it short.'⁴⁰⁴ In a similar fashion, the photographs and captions which accompany the article

⁴⁰² Quotations in this paragraph from *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.11.

⁴⁰³ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.11.

⁴⁰⁴ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.11.

celebrated the soldiers' cheerful stoicism in the face of their injuries. A large image displayed an emaciated soldier with one hand bandaged and the other arm in a sling, grinning at the camera (fig.3.9). The caption underneath read 'Private John Yates of Manchester, despite desert wounds and jungle sores, still smiles.'⁴⁰⁵ The next page displayed an image of a smiling soldier with an open shirt holding a bullet up to the camera (fig. 3.10). The text explained that the slug had 'entered through his back...and come out, a purple spot on his belly. "Souvenir" he chuckled.'⁴⁰⁶ A further image featured two bearded soldiers waving a Japanese bank note with the caption 'throughout the journey the men, however sick, cracked jokes' (fig. 3.11).⁴⁰⁷ Directly underneath is a Chindit in mid laughter, revealing his missing teeth (fig. 3.12). The text noted that he had nearly given up on the previous day's march as 'ulcers had worn him thin.'⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.11.

⁴⁰⁶ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.11, p.13.

⁴⁰⁷ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.13

⁴⁰⁸ *Illustrated*, 24/10/42, p.13.

Fig. 3.9 Chindit smiles despite jungle sores.



Fig. 3.10 Smiling Chindit displays the bullet that injured him.



Fig. 3.11 ‘Throughout the journey the men, however sick, cracked jokes’



Fig. 3.12 A Chindit laughs despite his injuries.



As ordinary men bearing the hardships of war with good humour and fortitude, Vandivert's Chindits exemplify the 'temperate masculinity' described by Sonya Rose.⁴⁰⁹ The emphasis on the 'ordinariness' of the Chindits in the wartime British press echoed the propaganda message attached to the expedition and which Wingate himself had promoted: that under the correct leadership, the regular British soldier could match the Japanese in jungle warfare. The operation was billed as an experiment in a new theory of warfare and arguably achieved little else in terms of significant strategic advantage beyond its propaganda function.⁴¹⁰ In his official report, Wingate asserted that the primary objective of *Longcloth* was 'to demonstrate the correctness or incorrectness' of the theory of Long Range Penetration.⁴¹¹ Following the Allies' humiliating retreat from Burma in 1942 and the failure of the subsequent Arakan campaign, press coverage of *Longcloth* sought to bolster military morale and to provide reassurance to readers on the home-front who, by 1943, had grown accustomed to stories of British reverses at the hands of the Japanese. For audiences on the home-front, the Chindits' good humour and cheerful acceptance of their lot without

⁴⁰⁹ Rose, *Which People's War*, pp.151-196.

⁴¹⁰ Military historians and biographers of Wingate have extensively debated the achievements of *Longcloth*. Notable works critical of *Longcloth* include Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, especially p.162, pp.218-220; S. Woodburn Kirby et. al., *History of the Second World War, The War Against Japan Volume III: The Decisive Battles* (London, 1961), pp.219-222; Frank McLynn, *The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph 1942-1945* (London, 2010), pp.156-158. For defenders of Wingate and *Longcloth* Bernard Fergusson, *Beyond the Chindwin: Being an Account of the Adventures of Number Five Column of the Wingate Expedition into Burma, 1943* (London, 1945), pp.241-242; Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972), pp.54-68; David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (London, 1994), pp. 98-99; Philip Chinnery, *March or Die: The Story of Wingate's Chindits* (Shrewsbury, 1997), pp.95-98. Simon Anglim has provided a recent and balanced assessment of the successes and failures of *Longcloth* which reviews these assessments in *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior* (London, 2014).

⁴¹¹ Orde Wingate, 'Report of operations of 77th Infantry Bridge in Burma, February to June 1943', p.1, IWM Wingate collection, Chindit Box 1.

complaint, reflected the difficulties faced by ‘ordinary people’ in wartime and their ability to overcome them.

3. The Desert and the Jungle

Popular attitudes to the very different operational environments of the Long Range Desert Group and the Chindits provide a further explanation for the contrasting portrayal of the men of each unit. The extreme landscapes of the desert and the jungle regularly featured in the cultural imaginary of empire, often exposing the limits of the European civilising mission.⁴¹² The representation of these environments in nineteenth- and twentieth-century travel-writing and adventure novels saw the terms ‘desert’ and ‘jungle’ each become synonymous with their own ‘symbolic lexicon’ - a series of images, words and associations. Meg Furniss Weinburg has argued that ‘extreme landscapes’ were understood not only in terms of topographical and geographical features, but also as a set of ‘emotional and psychological’ characteristics which they were understood to embody.⁴¹³ Thus the ‘symbolic lexicon’ of the jungle encompassed not only the fertility and abundance of lush vegetation, but also the disease, debilitation and disorientation associated with dense tropical rainforests

⁴¹² For the significance of landscapes of imperial heroism see Meg Furniss Weisberg, ‘Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts: Intertextual Ecosystems’, *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Enquiry* 2 (2015), pp. 171-189, p.173; Max Jones, Berny Sèbe, John Strachan, Bertrand Taithe & Peter Yeandle, ‘Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42 (2014), pp. 787-825, p.801.

⁴¹³ Furniss Weisberg, ‘Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts’, p.173.

and poisonous swamps, in which Europeans could easily lose control of their minds and their appetites.⁴¹⁴ In Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* the jungle is, famously, a maddening space, its dangers manifested in fever-induced delirium, oppressive heat and unruly vegetation. In W. H. Hudson's 1904 novel *Green Mansions* the Guyana jungle is initially portrayed as a purifying and spiritual place, but by the conclusion of the narrative the forest has shifted into an 'earthly inferno' in which the malaria-ridden protagonist must fight 'against every imaginable obstacle, alternately sweating and freezing, toiling as no man has toiled before.'⁴¹⁵ Similarly, Leonard Woolf's 1913 *The Village in the Jungle* portrayed the Ceylon tropical rainforest as a place of 'evil', an oppressive malevolent natural force which confronts a village and ultimately engulfs it.⁴¹⁶

Drawing on this well-established repertoire of associations, press reports of *Longcloth* portrayed the Chindits' journey into the jungle as a battle against the environment itself, as well as against the Japanese. It is significant that with just one exception, the evacuated soldiers featured in Vandivert's photographs in *Illustrated* suffered from afflictions caused by the conditions they faced in the jungle rather than engagements with enemy soldiers.⁴¹⁷ The photographer noted that when questioned about the jungle, one 'ruptured' soldier could only

⁴¹⁴ Weisberg, 'Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts', p.173.

⁴¹⁵ Cited in Charlotte Rogers, *Jungle Fever: Exploring Madness and Medicine in Twentieth-Century Tropical Narratives* (Nashville, 2012), p.14

⁴¹⁶ Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* (London, 1913), p.3.

⁴¹⁷ The exception is fig. 3.10 of the soldier displaying the bullet which passed through him.

respond 'its bitter cruel.'⁴¹⁸ The *Evening Post* published an officer's description of the jungle which captured the dangers of the 'extreme landscape'

I only think of it as a depressing, dark, godless place, where everything is against you and nothing trying to help... The effects of the jungle on men are difficult to describe, but I think it certainly makes you too introspective to be good for you. The jungle always makes me feel puny and useless, for everything is so big, so all powerful, and you just can't do anything about it. You soon lose your temper if you are not very careful, for in the breathless, airless humid heat of the jungle your nerves become frayed and everything seems against you. You can see only a distance of a few yards and every creeper you pass knocks off your helmet... unless you get a firm grip on yourself you will soon begin to get furious and imagine all these creepers are deliberately trying to hinder you.⁴¹⁹

The theme of the 'civilised' European being driven to madness by the jungle recurs in European colonial literature.⁴²⁰ Echoing the tropical narratives mentioned above, the officer describes a jungle which is menacing, cruel and overpowering. As well as a physical challenge the forest threatens his sanity. In the innermost part of the wilderness, a process of introspection matches the physical voyage and the officer must 'get a grip' of himself or else succumb to feelings of powerlessness, rage and paranoia. Again we see the cultural circuit in operation as a Chindit officer's description of the jungle repeats a description of the jungle using the same vocabulary, imagery and tropes deployed by novelists and journalists.

Vandivert's images of gaunt Chindits with bandages covering their jungle sores highlight the debilitating effects of prolonged exposure to the jungle. Their unshaven faces and ragged uniforms are evidence of the soldiers' journey away from the 'civilised world'

⁴¹⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 24/10/42, p.13

⁴¹⁹ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 06/07/1943, p.4.

⁴²⁰ Rogers, *Jungle*, p.27, pp.175-176.

into the untamed wilderness. A number of newspaper reports of *Longcloth* went beyond such images to portray the effect of the jungle in inducing a lapse in ‘civilised’ behaviour, highlighting the unorthodox diet starving Chindits were reduced to foraging for.⁴²¹ The inclusion of the 2nd Battalion Burma Rifles among the Chindit columns provided British soldiers with comrades who were adept at living off the country in the Burmese jungle and who could instruct them on how to survive using whatever resources were available.⁴²² Press reports and photographs of the Chindits sometimes mentioned the Gurkhas, Nepalese troops who fought alongside the British and were renowned for their martial valour.⁴²³ Gurkhas often featured in British press narratives of the war in the Far East.⁴²⁴ The overwhelming focus in reports of the Chindits, however, was on the British contingent of the unit.

Vandivert observed that the evacuated soldiers had ‘begun eating jungle leaves and “succulent” bamboo’ two days before the rendezvous at the improvised airstrip. The *Daily Express* featured an image of four British soldiers beneath the headline ‘They ate python, buffalo, elephant: the jungle Chindits had to be tough.’⁴²⁵ In a similar fashion, the *Daily Mirror* described the Chindits’ diet of ‘mule heart and tongue’ and ‘python steaks, vulture

⁴²¹ *Daily Express*, 07/07/43, p.3; *Daily Mirror*, 21/04/43, p.8; *The Sphere*, 12/06/1943, pp. 18-19; *Daily Record*, 21/05/43, p.8; *Nottingham Journal* 21/05/43, p.1; *Newcastle Journal*, 24/05/43, p.4; *Aberdeen Press and Journal* 25/05/43, p.2.

⁴²² David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (London, 1994), p.78.

⁴²³ For example, *Daily Mirror*, 07/07/43, p.5. Chapter 5 will examine post-war representations of the Gurkhas and Burmese troops in comic books.

⁴²⁴ Newspapers often featured stories of Gurkha heroics. Among many examples, see ‘Victoria Cross Gurkha Killed 7 Japs in one-man charges’ (*Daily Mirror*, 06/10/44, p.8); ‘He Held Ridge Alone’ (*Daily Mail* 29/12/1944, p.3); ‘Gurkha Wins VC – Cleared Way for an Army’ (*Daily Mail* 16/06/1943, p.3).

⁴²⁵ *Daily Express*, 07/07/43, p.3.

cutlets, banana leaves...bamboo shoots, jungle pig and elephant.⁴²⁶ The *Sphere* reported that ‘a great variety of animal food’ was eaten on the expedition, ‘including vultures, elephants, pythons and mules.’⁴²⁷ The press’s gleeful fixation on the exotic diet that the soldiers were forced to adopt echoes tropes of the colonial adventurer ‘going native’ in a tropical environment, relinquishing European customs and adopting the habits of the native population.⁴²⁸ The Chindits’ wild appearance, their jungle-induced wounds and their primitive diet reinforced a perception of the tropical forest as environment which threatened to overwhelm the ‘civilised European’, maybe even cause his degeneration into savagery. Indeed, in a special BBC broadcast following the completion of *Longcloth*, Wingate himself likened the soldiers of his brigade to the uncivilised men of the jungle, rhetorically asking his listeners, ‘what was it, then, that made these ordinary, typical troops, born and raised for the most part for factory and workshop, capable of feats that would not have disgraced Tarzan?’⁴²⁹

If the jungle represented a space of entanglement, claustrophobia and savagery, the desert symbolised purity and sterility, immeasurable space, exoticism, adventure and romance.⁴³⁰ The French conquest of the Sahara at the end of the nineteenth century gave rise

⁴²⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 21/04/43, p.8.

⁴²⁷ *The Sphere*, 12/06/43, p.19

⁴²⁸ Rogers, *Jungle Fever*, p.27, pp.175-176.

⁴²⁹ Orde Wingate, BBC Broadcast, 22/05/1943, IWM Wingate collection, Chindit Box 1.

⁴³⁰ Furniss Weisberg, ‘Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts’, p.173; Jones et al, ‘Decolonising Imperial Heroes’, p.801; Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870-1939* (Manchester, 2013), p.84.

to a fascination with the desert as an arena in which French officers might perform heroic deeds and demonstrate their spiritual virtue.⁴³¹ Berny Sèbe has traced the development of a rich tradition of French popular literature which featured the desert heroics of the officer hero, reaching its climax during the interwar years.⁴³² Jones et. al. have suggested that British interest in the desert was more occasional, never reaching the same pitch as the *Saharomania* which Sèbe identifies as gripping France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴³³ Yet it is important not to underestimate the salience of the desert in the British imagination during this period. The travel writing of Richard Burton and Charles Doughty received popular acclaim among late Victorian readers, and Gordon's death in Sudan in 1885 saw him become 'the most renowned exemplar of imperial virtue.'⁴³⁴ A. E. W. Mason's 1901 desert adventure novel, *The Four Feathers*, spawned three cinematic adaptations (1921, 1929 and 1939) before the war, and influenced its even more popular descendant, P. C. Wren's 1924 *Beau Geste*.⁴³⁵ T. E. Lawrence's adventures leading a guerrilla army against the Ottoman Empire made him the most celebrated soldier of the First World War, while throughout the 1920s and 1930s the British explorers of the 'Zerzura Club' – including Wingate and the founding members of the LRDG examined in the first two

⁴³¹ Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists*, p.85; Jones et al, 'Decolonising Imperial Heroes', p.801.

⁴³² Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists*, p.85.

⁴³³ Jones et al, 'Decolonising Imperial Heroes', p. 802.

⁴³⁴ Andrew Long, *Reading Arabia: British Orientalism in the Age of Mass Publication, 1880-1930* (Syracuse, 2014), pp.31-76; Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.146; John M. MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths of Empire', in John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992), pp.125-30; Max Jones, "'National Hero and Very Queer Fish'".

⁴³⁵ Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siecle: Popular Fiction and British Culture* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 154.

chapters of this thesis - searched the Libyan Desert for the mythical lost oasis for Zerzura and regularly published their findings in the journal of the Royal Geographical Society.⁴³⁶ For the British then, like the French, the desert was a site of individual heroism, adventure and exploration.

During the Second World War, the campaign in North Africa was repeatedly represented and interpreted through the long established tropes of desert exploration and warfare in the British press.⁴³⁷ The nature of the conflict in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, in which many of the major engagements occurred in the vast empty terrain of the desert away from civilian populations, secured it the status of a ‘civilised’ war.⁴³⁸ While the Japanese soldiers whom the Chindits fought in the Burmese jungle were considered fanatical and barbaric by both the British army high command and the wartime press, German and Italian troops in North Africa were said to have conducted the conflict with a regard for the rules of war which was unmatched on any other Second World War battle front.⁴³⁹ The British press’s celebration of Rommel as a brilliant and chivalrous commander reflects this romantic conception of desert warfare, as does the admiring sobriquet of the ‘Desert Fox’.⁴⁴⁰ In

⁴³⁶ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.168; Saul Kelly, *The Lost Oasis: The Desert War and the Hunt for Zerzura* (London, 2002), pp.1-25.

⁴³⁷ Martin Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema’ in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp.115-133, p.116.

⁴³⁸ Francis, ‘Remembering War’, p.115.

⁴³⁹ Desmond Young, *The Desert Fox* (London, 1950); Basil Liddell Hart (ed.), *The Rommel Papers* (London, 1953); Colin Smith and John Brierman, *War Without Hate: The Desert Campaign 1940-1943* (London, 2004); Francis, ‘Remembering War’, p.115.

⁴⁴⁰ Jonathan Dimpleby, *Destiny in the Desert: The Road to El Alamein – The Battle that Turned the Tide* (London, 2012), p.84.

contrast with jungle warfare in which soldiers would labour through thick undergrowth, hampered by malaria and fighting close quarter skirmishes with the inscrutable, ‘othered’ Japanese, desert combat was characterised by mobility and pitched battles which continually swung the momentum of the campaign in favour of the Allies or the Axis. A 1943 article by *Daily Express* reporter Alaric Jacob captures the contrast in attitudes to the desert and jungle theatres of the war. Writing while on his way to Burma having previously covered the campaign in North Africa, Jacob deployed the metaphor of a game of billiards to describe the desert war: ‘it is kill or be killed in the open, ball striking ball on a smooth billiard table. And if you are made prisoner there is a fair chance of escape. In that immensity hundreds of men have got away.’ He went on to reflect on the prospect of jungle warfare, ‘yes, on one’s way to meet the wily Jap in the green wet wilds of Burma the recollection of sallying forth against the Boche in that world of waste and sunshine seems almost attractive.’⁴⁴¹ As an arena of expansive warfare with minimum civilian casualties fought between two chivalrous armies, the war in the desert lent itself to romance in a way that was more problematic in the jungle.

Using vehicles to travel vast distances across the desert and penetrate deep behind enemy lines, operating in small groups and adopting a method of warfare which demanded individual initiative and guile, the LRDG embodied the romantic conception of desert combat. The presence of a number of the pre-war adventurers of the Zerzura Club among the

⁴⁴¹ *Daily Express*, 18/01/1943, p.7.

officers of the LRDG (Ralph Bagnold, William Kennedy Shaw, Pat Clayton, Rupert Harding-Newman and Guy Prendergast) added further glamour the unit.

The particularity of the desert and the jungle was integral to wartime representations of the LRDG and the Chindits, and symbolic of the individual character of each unit. Celebrations of the men of the LRDG as officer heroes, gentlemen explorers and swashbuckling raiders echoed a discourse in which the desert was romanticised as a site of adventure and exploration. The depiction of the Chindits as ‘ordinary’ British men who had born the hardships of jungle warfare and emerged victorious reflected an understanding of the tropical rainforest as a corrupting and malevolent space which threatened Europeans with disease, decay and madness.

The centrality of the desert to the representation of the LRDG can be gauged by the unit’s disappearance from the wartime media upon the completion of the North African campaign. While the Chindits were disbanded soon after Wingate’s death during the second operation in 1944, the LRDG continued to operate in Greece, the Dodecanese, the Balkans and Yugoslavia after the Allied victory in the desert. Although the unit retained the name of Long Range Desert Group, its operations, when reported at all, were credited by the British press to the generic ‘commando.’ Removed from the romantic landscape of the desert, the unit had lost its iconicity. It is significant that the numerous LRDG memoirs and histories that were published both immediately after the war and in subsequent decades focused almost

exclusively on the unit's role in the desert campaign.⁴⁴² It was not until 1980 and the publication of Lloyd Owen's 'personal history' of the unit that its role in Europe was examined in any detail outside the official histories of the war.⁴⁴³ Although Lloyd Owen took command of the unit when it left the desert and was therefore in a position to offer a unique perspective on the LRDG's role in Europe, his first memoir, *The Desert My Dwelling Place* published in 1957, dealt only with his time spent as an officer with an LRDG patrol in North Africa.⁴⁴⁴ The romance of desert warfare held a greater allure for the author and readers alike, inspired alike by the legend of Lawrence of Arabia as we have seen.

Conclusion

Popular narratives of the Chindits and the LRDG marked the stage in the cultural circuit in which 'local' stories become 'public' narratives. Media representations transformed the men of both units into idealised figures, furnishing them with a particular set of ideas and associations and inviting further popular investment. The contrasting meanings projected on both units can be mapped onto divergent 'structures of feeling' in the British wartime imaginary. As ordinary men stoically enduring hardship with good humour, the Chindits

⁴⁴² William Kennedy-Shaw, *Long Range Desert Group* (London, 1945); David Lloyd Owen, *The Desert my Dwelling Place* (London, 1957); Michael Crichton-Stuart, *G-Patrol: The Guards Patrol of the Long Range Desert Group* (London, 1958).

⁴⁴³ Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide*.

⁴⁴⁴ Lloyd Owen, *Desert My Dwelling Place*.

exemplified the collectivist rhetoric of the ‘People’s War.’ This construction of British men exemplifies the ‘temperate masculinity’ identified by Sonya Rose as hegemonic in wartime Britain: the cheerful, wounded Chindits of William Vandivert’s photographs are model ‘temperate heroes’. Yet press coverage of the Chindits almost always featured their charismatic commander, whose reputation revolved around his status as an exceptional and eccentric figure. Photographs of the helmeted commander regularly featured in local and national newspapers, and in illustrated weeklies, with the Chindits variously described as ‘Wingate’s Follies’, ‘Wingate’s Circus’ and ‘Wingate’s mob’.⁴⁴⁵ The widespread celebration of Orde Wingate reveals the persistence of conservative images of elite heroism alongside representations of temperate heroes, the persistence of a romantic vision of war centred on heroic leadership and dashing individualism.

Representations of the LRDG also disrupted popular discourses of egalitarianism and emotional restraint. Popular depictions of the unit drew on images of glamour that continued to have purchase in the symbolic economy of wartime Britain, complementing similar expressions across other genres of the arts and entertainment. The imperial romances of Alexander Korda, the melodramas of Gainsborough studios, and indeed the wider photography of Cecil Beaton analysed by Martin Francis, reflect a similar yearning for the spectacular, the colourful, the extraordinary. Reporters interpreted the unconventional dress

⁴⁴⁵ *Daily Mail*, 21/05/1943; *Daily Express*, 21/05/1943; *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/1943; *The Times*, 21/05/1943; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22/05/1943; *Illustrated London News*, 29/05.1943; *The Sphere*, 17/07/1943;

and behaviour of LRDG servicemen as markers of their exceptional status. Yet these elements of romantic Toryism coexisted alongside the familiar tropes of ‘temperate masculinity’, as accounts of the LRDG consistently emphasised the cheerful stoicism displayed by British soldiers in the hostile desert, just as with representations of the Chindits in the jungle.

Reporters’ frequent comparisons of Wingate with Gordon and Lawrence offer a striking illustration of the cultural circuit in action: an individual consumed the cultural scripts which surrounded him in his youth; fashioned his gendered self in relation to these scripts and self-consciously projected this self to different audiences; and was in turn represented by others who had consumed both the same scripts and the individual’s own writings and speeches. Wingate would have been proud to be mentioned alongside Gordon, but exasperated by comparisons with Lawrence, comparisons which the next chapter shows grew even louder after his unexpected death.

Chapter 4: Empire, Faith and Nation in Responses to the Death of Orde Wingate in Britain and Palestine

On 27 March 1944 all units of Special Force in Burma received an Order for the Day from Orde Wingate's chief of staff: 'I regret to inform you that General Wingate is missing believed killed in an aircraft crash on 24th March ... All ranks will agree that the most fitting memorial will be the early achievement of his purpose.'⁴⁴⁶ The news was considered so shattering that Supreme Commander South East Asia, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, telegraphed the Prime Minister to recommend censoring it on the grounds that it would be bad for Chindit morale.⁴⁴⁷ Mountbatten proposed instead a 'whispering campaign that Wingate [was] still alive and engaged in secret operations.'⁴⁴⁸ Unwilling to complicate matters, Churchill declined to follow Mountbatten's advice. By 1 April the news had reached Britain. The press reacted with dismay, treating the death of the Chindit commander as a severe blow to the war effort. The *Observer* declared it a 'national tragedy', while the front page of the *Daily Mirror* lamented the loss of 'Britain's most audacious soldier.'⁴⁴⁹ The *Daily*

⁴⁴⁶ Signal by Derek Tulloch, 27/03/1944, IWM Wingate collection, Box 5.

⁴⁴⁷ Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier* (London, 1995), p.313.

⁴⁴⁸ Cited in Royle, *Orde*, p.314.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Sunday Observer*, 02/04/1944, p.4; *Daily Mirror*, 01/04/1944, p.1.

Herald described the news as ‘a sore blow for the united nations’ and the *Daily Telegraph* announced that ‘the allies have suffered a heavy loss with his death.’⁴⁵⁰

The timing of the crash was unfortunate. The ‘success’ of the 1943 Chindit operation, *Longcloth*, had finally provided Wingate with a much sought-after opportunity to apply his theory of Long Range Penetration (LRP) on a large scale. Codenamed *Thursday*, the 1944 Chindit operation saw 20,000 troops under Wingate’s command.⁴⁵¹ With the support of the US Army Airforce, Wingate proposed to use gliders to insert troops deep behind Japanese lines in the Burmese jungle and establish air-supported strongholds.⁴⁵² These bases would allow the Chindits to carry out an extensive campaign of harassment of the Japanese provoking an attack. Operation *Thursday* would help support Chinese forces under American General Joseph Stillwell as they advanced into central Burma in an attempt to restore land communications with China.

The initial phase was a success. The Chindits were inserted into the jungle and established three strongholds on 5-20 March. Wingate did not live to direct the remainder of the operation, killed on 24 March as he was flying back to headquarters in India, following an inspection of the new bases. In his absence, much of the original plan was abandoned, the

⁴⁵⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, 01/04/1944, p.2; *Daily Herald*, 01/04/1944, p.2.

⁴⁵¹ For operation *Thursday* see, among many, Shelford Bidwell, *The Chindit War: The Campaign in Burma, 1944* (London, 1979); Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War, 1941-1945* (London, 1994), pp. 197-202; Andrew Wax, *Behind Enemy Lines in the China-Burma-India Theatre of Operations* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.73-118.

⁴⁵² For the strategy behind *Thursday* and the concept of the ‘stronghold’, see Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate: Unconventional Warrior* (Barnsley, 2014), pp.183-204; Simon Anglim, ‘Orde Wingate and the Theory Behind the Chindit Operations: Some Recent Findings’, *The RUSI Journal* 147 (2002), pp.92-98.

Chindits eventually falling under Stillwell's command. The American general opted to use the troops as conventional infantry, and by January 1945 the surviving elements of the Chindit had been absorbed into the newly-raised 44th Indian Airborne Division.

Historians have extensively debated Wingate's legacy and his LRP theories, but have not previously looked in any detail at the response to his sudden death.⁴⁵³ The announcement of Wingate's death produced an outpouring of grief in Britain and abroad; journalists, politicians, clergymen and others hailed Wingate as a hero. This chapter presents the first systematic examination of the commemoration of Orde Wingate during the Second World War. In doing so, the chapter develops two principal arguments. First, it explores the different communities that celebrated the Chindit commander, highlighting the fluidity of Wingate's heroic reputation. While heroes of the past may be harnessed to nationalist and imperialist projects, they also served purposes beyond the interests of the nation-state. Second, this chapter explores the relationship between Wingate's self-fashioning and the public narratives of his life featured in commemoration after his death. It assesses the purchase of the heroic persona that Wingate himself had fashioned during his lifetime, highlighting the operations of the cultural circuit between Wingate's personal testimonies, narratives of male heroism and public representations of his life.

⁴⁵³ For these debates see the thesis Introduction. Simon Anglim, *Orde Wingate, Unconventional Warrior: From the 1920s to the Twenty-First Century* (Barnsley, 2014) provides a useful overview.

The use of heroic reputations as instruments of nationalist and imperialist ideologies was the focus of early scholarship on modern British heroes.⁴⁵⁴ In an influential collection of essays published in 1983, Eric Hobsbawm and others explored how stories of heroic figures supported the processes of European nation-building in the age of empire. Such individuals provided a focal point for national ceremony, education and the erection of monuments, making new political configurations appear ancient and natural.⁴⁵⁵ John MacKenzie has adopted a similar approach to propagandistic uses of the reputations of British imperial heroes. MacKenzie highlighted how the actions of figures like Henry Havelock, David Livingstone and General Gordon were deployed to provide moral justification for the maintenance and expansion of the British Empire.⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Robert Macdonald has explored the ‘metaphorical construction of empire’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting how glorious myths of the past served to justify imperial conquest in the present.⁴⁵⁷ Edward Berenson has offered an alternative perspective on the instrumental uses of heroes of empire, drawing on Max Weber’s concept of charisma to reveal how charismatic individuals gave imperialism a recognisable face, allowing observers to understand imperial expansion as a series of adventures undertaken by extraordinary

⁴⁵⁴ Max Jones et. al., ‘Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42 (2014), pp.787-825, p.790.

⁴⁵⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

⁴⁵⁶ J. M. MacKenzie, ‘Heroic Myths of Empire’, in J. M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992), pp.109-137.

⁴⁵⁷ Robert H. Macdonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918* (Manchester, 1994), pp.1-17.

individuals.⁴⁵⁸ These works have highlighted the function of heroes as tools of propagandists, but in their narrow focus on the instrumental use of heroic reputations, they risk obscuring the range of meanings – sometimes contested – that are ascribed to heroic individuals.

Other scholars have stressed the contested nature of heroic reputations, and the range of factors which shaped their public reception.⁴⁵⁹ Graham Dawson's examination of the public reputation of Henry Havelock revealed competing interpretations of the 'hero of Lucknow.' Besides the symbol of civilised, Christian imperial power described by MacKenzie, Havelock was portrayed in some quarters as representing the working-class virtues of hard work and perseverance, in others, as the embodiment of the superiority of the British middle-class.⁴⁶⁰ In his examination of the commemoration of Captain Scott, Max Jones has highlighted the variety of meanings ascribed to the death of the explorer and his companions. In the weeks following the disaster, the men of the expedition were simultaneously hailed as icons of manliness, national saviours and martyrs of science.⁴⁶¹ Jones explored the ways in which a range of collective identities – familial, professional, local, regional and national – were expressed in narratives of the disaster. Work on masculinity has proven particularly influential. Dawson's examination of cultural representations of soldier-heroes revealed how images of heroic men embody an idealised

⁴⁵⁸ Edward Berenson, *Five Charismatic Men of Empire and the Conquest of Africa* (London, 2011).

⁴⁵⁹ Jones et. al., 'Decolonising', p.791; Max Jones, 'What Should Historians Do With Heroes? Reflections on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Britain', *History Compass* 5 (2007), pp.439-454.

⁴⁶⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.110; Jones, 'What Should Historians Do?', p.444.

⁴⁶¹ Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford, 2003), p.163.

form of manliness, internalised by men and boys. Such images ‘fashion in the imagination’ masculinities which are ‘lived out in the flesh.’⁴⁶² John Tosh has argued that in its imperial manifestations, masculinity served as an ‘external code of conduct’ to be ‘policed by one’s peers,’ extolling the virtues of physical vigour, courage, energy and resourcefulness.⁴⁶³

Moving away from an interpretation of heroic figures as instruments of ideology, these works suggest that heroes of the past should be interpreted less as tools of propaganda than as ‘sites through which a range of imagined communities are capable of expression.’⁴⁶⁴

The four sections of this chapter draw on the different approaches outlined above to highlight the fluidity of Wingate’s heroic reputation in the weeks following his death. Section one examines commemorations endorsed by the state and disseminated in the British press. These commemorations drew on a language of Christian imperial heroism and projected Wingate as a national hero and servant of empire. These reports demonstrate the continued resonance of narratives of imperial heroism and reflected aspects of the image that Wingate consciously fashioned for himself. A shorter section two focuses on a small collection of condolence letters in the IWM collection sent to Lorna Wingate after the death of her husband, showing how soldiers, civilians, and mothers made distinctive emotional investments in Wingate. Section three examines competing representations of Wingate as a

⁴⁶² Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.1.

⁴⁶³ John Tosh, ‘Manliness in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), pp.330-342, p.335.

⁴⁶⁴ Max Jones, ‘Our King Upon His Knees: The Public Commemoration of Captain Scott’s Antarctic Expedition’ in Geoffrey Cubitt and Alan Warren (eds.), *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000), p.106.

hero projected by the Jewish community in Britain. Their construction of the Chindit commander contrasted sharply with non-Jewish commemoration by emphasising Wingate's support for Zionism rather than his adventures in the Burmese jungle. Focusing on Wingate's disapproval of government policy towards Palestine, Jewish commemorations emphasised Wingate's affection for the Jewish people, rather than his national affiliation. Finally, section four provides the first detailed examination of commemorations for Wingate in British-mandated Palestine, utilising Hebrew language newspaper reports specially translated for this project.⁴⁶⁵ Although remembrance among the Jewish community in Palestine echoed British Jewish commemoration in its emphasis on Wingate's Zionism, many commentators took the opportunity to criticise the national character of Britain, raising Wingate as the embodiment of a set of national ideals that his country had failed to uphold. Just as in Britain, commemorations in Palestine drew on Wingate's self-fashioning, but differed by focusing on his self-representation as a soldier in the tradition of the biblical figure of Gideon.

A range of commemorative activities were undertaken in the months following Wingate's death. In India, a party of officers and men who had served under Wingate joined their Chaplain, Rev. Christopher Perowne, in a hazardous ten-day-march to conduct a service at the place Wingate died.⁴⁶⁶ In Britain, newsreel footage paid tribute to the 'brilliant officer',

⁴⁶⁵ The IWM Wingate Collection contains a folder of reports from Hebrew language newspapers which were translated for this project. References below include dates, but many page numbers are missing. Lorna Wingate maintained connections with the Zionist movement after her husband's death which most likely explains the provenance of the collection.

⁴⁶⁶ Perowne wrote to Lorna Wingate to describe the ceremony, 15 July 1944, IWM Wingate Archive, Black Folder.

broadcasting to observers on the home front images of Wingate captured days before his death.⁴⁶⁷ A further newsreel displayed silent footage of a small memorial ceremony held in India, attended by Mountbatten and other soldiers.⁴⁶⁸ Two books were published in 1944 that told the story of Wingate's operations: Charles Rolo's *Wingate's Raiders* and Alaric Jacob's *A Traveller's War*.⁴⁶⁹ A third, Wilfred Burchett's *Wingate's Phantom Army*, was swiftly republished immediately after Wingate's death, having initially been published only four months earlier.⁴⁷⁰ In Palestine a commemorative exhibition of photographs of Wingate's time spent in the Jezreal Valley was opened to the public in 1944, and a forest was planted in his honour on the southern slopes of Mt. Gilboa.⁴⁷¹ Memorial gatherings were organised by a range of organisations, including the Labour Federation Council, Mapai political party and various settler communities.⁴⁷²

No memorial to Wingate existed in Britain until 1951, when a plaque was unveiled at his former school, Charterhouse, with a tribute written by Churchill for the occasion read out at the ceremony with Mountbatten in attendance.⁴⁷³ A second memorial to Wingate and the Chindits was erected in Victoria Embankment Gardens in 1990. Wingate and Finchley football club, originally formed as a Jewish side in 1946 to battle antisemitism and named in

⁴⁶⁷ British Movietone, 'General Wingate- Last Picture', 31/12/1944, ref BM44792.

⁴⁶⁸ Wingate Memorial Service, India Public Relations Film Unit, 1944, IWM Film Archive Ref: MWY22.

⁴⁶⁹ Charles Rolo, *Wingate's Raiders* (London, 1944); Alaric Jacob, *A Traveller's War* (London, 1944).

⁴⁷⁰ Wilfred Burchett, *Wingate's Phantom Army* (London, 1944).

⁴⁷¹ *Hatzofe*, 07/04/1944; *Mishmar* 13/04/1944; *Haaretz* 13/04/1944; *Davar* 04/04/1944.

⁴⁷² *Davar*, 04/04/1944; *Haaretz*, 13/04/1944.

⁴⁷³ *The Times*, 12/03/1951, p.6.

honour of the Chindit commander, continues to bear his name today. In Israel, memorials to Wingate came in 1953 with the naming of Yemin Orde Youth village in Haifa, and the establishment of the Orde Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sports in Nentanya in 1957.⁴⁷⁴ We see in these British and Palestinian commemorative projects a range of professional, familial, and local communities harnessing Wingate's reputation for their own purposes; every memorial has its own distinctive history. The focus of this chapter, however, is the rich language that circulated after Wingate's death in newspaper obituaries, with particular reference to the eulogies from three central memorial services held for Wingate in Britain and Palestine, which were widely reported in the press. The chapter outlines how the memorial addresses drew on the heroic identity that Wingate fashioned during his lifetime, and how his words were recycled in newspaper narratives of his life.

1. Orde Wingate's Heroic Reputation in Britain: Christian Hero of Empire

MacKenzie has identified common characteristics between the reputations of British imperial heroes.⁴⁷⁵ Figures like David Livingstone, Henry Havelock and Charles Gordon were celebrated as men of indomitable courage, with extraordinary abilities and unshakeable

⁴⁷⁴ Alice Ivy Hay, *There Was a Man of Genius: Letters to my Grandson, Orde Jonathan Wingate* (London, 1963), pp.113-121.

⁴⁷⁵ John M. MacKenzie, 'Nelson Goes Global: The Nelson Myth in Britain and Beyond' in D. Cannadine (ed.), *Admiral Lord Nelson: Context and Legacy* (2005, Basingstoke), pp.144-165, p.145; John M. MacKenzie, 'Afterword', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42 (2014), 969-979, p. 970.

convictions. The heroic status of each was secured by their death at a crucial point in their activities, heightening their mythic power through. According to MacKenzie, the myth surrounding the hero of empire required an identifiable and moving icon, most often consolidated in the moment of their heroic death: Captain Scott and his men bravely facing the end in the polar wasteland; Havelock on his deathbed, succumbing to fatigue once victory was secured at Lucknow; Gordon, calm before the spears of the Mahdi's dervishes.

Invariably, the death of the imperial hero was followed by a surge of commemorative activity that promoted his reputation. The reputations of such men were shaped and propagated not only by journalists, politicians, pamphleteers and writers, but also by the 'waves of popular emotion' which followed the hero's death.⁴⁷⁶ In 1992 MacKenzie argued that Lawrence was the one 20th-century hero who fulfilled many of the requirements of the nineteenth-century heroic myths of empire.⁴⁷⁷ Without quibbling over the exact qualifications required to be a heroic myth of empire, there can be no doubt that, after *Longcloth*, Wingate achieved the status of a major national hero, which MacKenzie himself later acknowledged.⁴⁷⁸ Yet, in contrast to the secular Lawrence, religiosity remained at the heart of Wingate's reputation. His commemoration during the war points to the persistence of the

⁴⁷⁶ MacKenzie, 'Afterword', p.970.

⁴⁷⁷ MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths of Empire', p. 130.

⁴⁷⁸ MacKenzie, 'Afterword', p.976.

Christian hero of empire exemplified by Wingate's own hero General Gordon at least until 1945.

The events of Wingate's life and career certainly lent themselves to the construction of the Chindit commander as a hero of empire, echoing the characteristics of his imperial forebears. His intense religious faith and unassailable confidence in his ideas; the perception of his extraordinary abilities as military strategist and leader; his death at the peak of his powers during the second Chindit operation – taken together, Wingate mobilised many of the features of imperial heroism described by Mackenzie. It is true that Wingate's death did not provide a visual image of equal potency to that of or Gordon on the stairs of the palace at Khartoum. Nevertheless, one can detect a similar sense of tragic drama in the timing of the crash on the eve of the Chindit commander seeing his ideas implemented on a large scale in Burma.

In an Order of the Day sent to Wingate's men shortly after the incident, Mountbatten mourned the loss of 'a personal friend' who was 'killed in the hour of his triumph.'⁴⁷⁹ Written while *Thursday* was still in operation, Mountbatten could not have known that much of the original plan would ultimately be abandoned and that several senior commanders, as well as rank-and-file Chindits, would question whether the operation might be considered a 'triumph'. Mountbatten's message was widely reproduced in newspapers across Britain, and

⁴⁷⁹ Signal held in IWM archive

was not unique in noting the poignant timing of Wingate's death.⁴⁸⁰ *The Daily Express* bemoaned his loss 'on the eve of a greater triumph, more magnificently conceived', while *The Tatler* noted that it was 'tragic that on that on the threshold of greatness he should die.'⁴⁸¹ Similar sentiments were expressed by the Prime Minister, who famously declared in the House of Commons Wingate 'was a man of genius, who might well have become a man of destiny.'⁴⁸² Through such panegyric, Wingate's death was transformed from unfortunate accident to dramatic martyrdom on the cusp of victory.

The similarities between Wingate and the Victorian heroes of empire did not escape the notice of commentators. Frequent comparisons were drawn between Wingate and famous explorers, colonial administrators and soldier heroes. That Wingate evoked such figures in the popular imagination is, in part, a reflection of the heroic persona that he fashioned during his lifetime, explored in chapters one and two. The same repertoire of narratives and images of masculine heroism that Wingate drew on formed the basis of public narratives of his life. Military and civil commemorations of the Chindit commander emphasised three key elements of his persona consistent with the established tropes of British imperial heroism: his intense religiosity; his ability to organise and lead men of other races; and his standing as a visionary military genius.

⁴⁸⁰ *Aberdeen and Press Journal*, 03/04/44, p.1; *The Scotsman*, 03/04/44, p.5; *Belfast News-Letter*, 03/04/44, p.5; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 03/04/44, p.1; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 06/04/44, p.10; *Dundee Courier*, 03/04/44, p.3; *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 03/04/44, p.1; *Daily Record*, 03/04/44, p.8;

⁴⁸¹ *Daily Express*, 01/04/44, p.2; *The Tatler*, 12/04/44, p.5.

⁴⁸² <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1944/aug/02/war-situation> [Accessed on 01/05/2018]

A memorial service was held at St Margaret's Church in Westminster two weeks after news of Wingate's death reached Britain. A fashionable society church, with strong links to the House of Commons, St Margaret's was more accustomed to staging weddings for high society (Churchill, Harold Macmillan and Lord Mountbatten were all married there) and memorial services for distinguished members of parliament. That the church should host the service for Wingate reflected his elevated status among the wartime elite.⁴⁸³ Records exist of only four other memorial services held for military personnel at St. Margaret's during the Second World War, and of those, only Flying Officer John Rathbone served in the 1939-1945 war.⁴⁸⁴ Rathbone's status as a Conservative politician, as much as his death as a fighter pilot in 1940, made him a suitable candidate for a memorial service at St. Margaret's. As one publication commented, 'for a General of young middle age to be commemorated in St Margaret's Westminster is no small honour.'⁴⁸⁵ In keeping with the high-profile venue, society journal the *Tatler* published photographs of some of the mourners.⁴⁸⁶ Among the congregation were Clementine Churchill, Lady Mountbatten, several senior figures from the

⁴⁸³ I was unable to determine who organised the service. No documents relating to the planning of the ceremony survive. Westminster Abbey advised me that records for this period are incomplete, and that they do not hold any papers relating to the service. The church's links to Parliament, and the admiration of influential ministers like Leo Amery and the Prime Minister, suggests that the service was organised by the government. Wingate's wife specifically requested a memorial service be held in the London synagogue, examined below.

⁴⁸⁴ Confirmed in correspondence with Assistant Keeper of Muniments, Westminster Abbey library, 01/05/2018. The other services were for Lt. Col Anthony Muirhead, Col. Rookes Crompton and Col. Sir Henry Lyons.

⁴⁸⁵ J. Linton, H.M. Burton, 'Obituary: Major-General O.C Wingate, DSO and 2 Bars', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 31 (1944), pp.225-228, p.225.

⁴⁸⁶ *The Tatler*, 26/04/1944, p.13.

armed forces and official representatives from the British and Abyssinian governments and the U.S military.⁴⁸⁷

At the climax of the service the congregation rose to sing Wingate's favourite hymn.

⁴⁸⁸ The words of John Bunyan's 'To be a pilgrim' encapsulate the conception of Christian and military valour that shaped the heroic identity Wingate fashioned during his career:

Who would true valour see
Let him come hither
One here will constant be
Come wind, come weather
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim

J. R. Watson has explored the coincidence of the popularity of hymns which adopted the language and imagery of warfare and the veneration of Christian soldier-heroes like Hedley Vicars, Henry Havelock and General Gordon in mid-nineteenth century Britain.⁴⁸⁹ The rhetoric of hymns which celebrated soldierly virtues – courage, loyalty, discipline, endurance – and exhorted believers to 'fight' a spiritual war became a reality in such figures.⁴⁹⁰ Bunyan's hymn typified the virtues ascribed to Wingate, positioning him as a specifically Christian soldier in the tradition of the nineteenth-century imperial hero. The militant tone

⁴⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 15/04/1944, p.2.

⁴⁸⁸ Wingate selected the hymn for his wedding in 1935.

⁴⁸⁹ J.R Watson, 'Soldiers and Saints: the Fighting Man and the Christian Life' in Andrew Bradstock; Sean Gill; Anne Hogan; Sue Morgan (eds.), *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 10-26, p.18.

⁴⁹⁰ The founding of the Salvation Army in 1878 is another example of the conjunction between Christian and battlefield heroism.

blurs the distinction between Christian and battlefield heroism, echoing Wingate's own religious rendering of the operations he led in Palestine and Ethiopia examined in chapters 1 and 2. With a proclivity for quoting the bible in military reports and sending lines of scripture by radio while on operations, it is unsurprising that the Chindit commander had a fondness for Bunyan's hymn. It remains a popular choice among today's armed forces; it has even been suggested that the Special Air Service has adopted it as their own 'battle anthem.'⁴⁹¹ The singing of 'To be a Pilgrim' at Wingate's memorial service was widely reported in the British press.⁴⁹² Indeed, in a number of publications the choice of hymn was the single detail reported about the ceremony.⁴⁹³

The significance of Bunyan's hymn was made explicit in a tribute to Wingate which was written by Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India and Burma, and read out at the service by St Margaret's Canon A. C. Don. Amery portrayed Wingate as a simultaneously religious and military figure, emphasising the spiritual quality of his actions,

Orde Wingate was one who had in him, to quote the words of the hymn we are about to sing, the "true valour" and unrelenting and undiscouraged "intent" of a "pilgrim." He was one whose life was

⁴⁹¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sas-comes-out-fighting-as-details-of-top-secret-missions-are-exposed-1962552.html> [Accessed on 10/05/2018]

⁴⁹² For example, *Daily Express*, 15/04/44, p.3; *Daily Mirror*, 15/04/44, p.5. For the local press see *Yorkshire Post*, 15/04/44, p.5; *Birmingham Daily Gazette* 15/04/44, p.2; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 21/04/44, p.6; *Larne Times*, 20/04/44, p.8; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14/04/44, p.5; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 15/04/44, p.3; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 15/04/44, p.2; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 15/04/44, p.2; *Birmingham Mail*, 14/04/44, p.4; *Newcastle Journal*, 15/04/44, p.1; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14/04/44, p.1; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 14/04/44, p.1; *Liverpool Evening Express*, 14/04/44, p.1

⁴⁹³ *Daily Express*, 15/04/44, p.3; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14/04/44, p.10; *Larne Times*, 20/04/44, p.8; *Ballymena Weekly Telegraph*, 21/04/44, p.6; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14/04/44, p.5; *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14/04/44, p.1; *Liverpool Evening Express*, 14/04/44, p.1.

dedicated to a succession of quests, which for him were as much adventures of the spirit as of mere action.⁴⁹⁴

Amery's eulogy transformed the Chindit commander from an ordinary soldier into a godly knight errant, a pious Christian soldier and exemplar of 'muscular Christianity'.⁴⁹⁵ Written by a cabinet minister and read before senior politicians and military commanders, Amery's tribute exemplified the portrayal of Wingate as a national hero and dutiful servant to his country. His tribute was widely quoted in reports of the service, and even reproduced in full in several publications.⁴⁹⁶

Amery went on to draw parallels between Wingate and other British Christian imperial heroes:

He came from an old Scottish family which for generations had produced men who, not without distinction, had served God in church and State, as the old phrase has it, and from a home inspired by deep and earnest religious convictions. In his upbringing, in his fundamentally religious and almost mystic temperament, as indeed in his handling of all races, he was thus very like his fellow countrymen and fellow pilgrims of an earlier generation, David Livingstone and General Gordon.⁴⁹⁷

Amery's conflation of the service of God and the state conferred moral authority on Britain's role in the conflict, portraying Wingate's military actions as a crusade motivated by 'deep

⁴⁹⁴ Leo Amery, transcript held by IWM; Amery had hoped to do the reading himself but was called away on urgent government business.

⁴⁹⁵ See Olive Anderson, 'The Growth of Christian Militarism in Victorian England', *The English Historical Review* 86 (1971), pp. 46–72; Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge, 1985); J.A Mangan and James Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1987); Donald E Hall (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, 1994); Watson, 'Soldiers and Saints'.

⁴⁹⁶ *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 15/04/44, p.2; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 15/04/44, p.3; *Birmingham Daily Post* 15/04/44, p.2; *Liverpool Daily Post* 15/04/44, p.2; *Yorkshire Post*, 15/04/44, p.5; *Western Mail*, 15/04/44, p.2; *Northern Whig*, 15/04/44, p.1; *Scotsman* 15/04/44, p.4.

⁴⁹⁷ Leo Amery tribute, IWM.

and earnest religious conviction' as much as the demands of geopolitics or military strategy. The cabinet minister's decision to invoke Livingstone and Gordon is instructive. As archetypal Christian servants of empire raised to the status of imperial saints, both encapsulate MacKenzie's formulation of imperial heroism.⁴⁹⁸ Geoffrey Cubitt has observed that a common feature in the construction of heroic reputations is the 'rhetorical linking or assimilating or comparing of new with old.'⁴⁹⁹ Lowell Thomas, for example, cited 'Raleigh, Drake, Clive and Gordon' when anointing T. E. Lawrence a national hero.⁵⁰⁰ Among the figures with whom Captain Scott was frequently compared were Livingstone, Nelson, Wolfe and Cook.⁵⁰¹ Gordon himself was raised as a reincarnation of Arthurian chivalry, a 'Lancelot and a Galahad both in one.'⁵⁰² This practise of cross-reference in the heroic mode links contemporary individuals to the historic figures of their own communities, or transmits the ideas or models of conduct of a 'golden age' of heroism or virtue.⁵⁰³ In his religious devotion, his dashing heroism and his perceived ability to win on the battlefield against the odds, Wingate recalled the romance and glory of the heyday of empire. At the time of his death, defeats at the hands of the Japanese in Burma, Malaya and Singapore had shaken faith in the abilities and fighting spirit of the British army, fuelling concerns that British men no longer

⁴⁹⁸ J.M Mackenzie, 'David Livingstone: The Construction of the Myth' in G.Walker, T. Gallagher (eds.) *Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp.24-42; Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, pp.83-121.

⁴⁹⁹ Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives' in Cubitt and Warren, *Heroic Reputations*, pp. 1-26, p.5.

⁵⁰⁰ Lowell Thomas, *With Lawrence in Arabia* (New York, 1926), p.6.

⁵⁰¹ Jones, "'Our King'", p.116.

⁵⁰² Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, p.112.

⁵⁰³ Cubitt, 'Introduction', p.5;

possessed the fortitude to prevail over a determined foe.⁵⁰⁴ In an age of mass industrial warfare with limited scope for military leaders to display individual heroism, narratives of Wingate's exploits reassured commentators against such fears of degeneration.

The cross-referencing of Wingate with other heroic figures also provides some indication of the impact of his own heroic self-fashioning. As chapters one and two have demonstrated, key aspects of Wingate's self-representation drew on a tradition of Christian and imperial heroism. Many of the figures with whom he was compared after his death were his own heroes, the men he strove to emulate in life. Thus, the man who played at being Cromwell as a child and often cited the Puritan general's theory of leadership, was compared with Cromwell. The soldier with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the life of General Gordon, who quoted Gordon in his *Longcloth* report, was compared with Gordon. The officer who named the army under his command 'Gideon Force' and attempted to re-enact episodes from the story of Gideon was, in death, described as a 'modern Gideon.' Through such comparisons Wingate's self-image was affirmed.

Nevertheless, evidence of the limitations of Wingate's self-fashioning can be found in reports which compared him with heroes he had not referred to and had even disparaged. British commemorations frequently presented an amalgam of Wingate's chosen heroes with

⁵⁰⁴ See Mark Connelly, 'The Issue of Surrender in the Malayan Campaign, 1941-42' in Holger Afflerbach and Hew Strachan (eds.), *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender* (Oxford, 2012), pp.341-350; Philip Woods, *Reporting the Retreat: War Correspondents in Burma* (Oxford, 2016).

other figures from history, some of them unwelcome. For many, T. E. Lawrence exemplified the same tradition of romantic heroism, despite Wingate's disapproval of his distant cousin and his attempts to contrast his approach to leadership with that of Lawrence. For many, the distinctions between the two were irrelevant: Wingate embodied the same tradition of imperial heroism, a point examined further in the final section of this chapter.⁵⁰⁵

Obituaries and reports of Wingate's death in the British press bound together different elements in the lexicon of Christian and imperial heroism, drawing together different strands of the Chindit commander's self-image. An article published in the *Daily Mail* trumpeted Wingate's exemplary virtues, surveying the pantheon of British heroism for equally extraordinary figures:

Take the fanatic faith of Oliver Cromwell, the reckless initiative of Lawrence of Arabia, the lust for odds against him of Robert Clive. Fuse them together in the fire of enthusiasm and the answer is Orde Charles Wingate.⁵⁰⁶

A BBC broadcast referenced a similar roll-call of heroes to highlight Wingate's originality and unorthodox military strategies: 'he was definitely an eccentric, but we've always found room for eccentrics in the fighting services – Nelson, Gordon, Lawrence.'⁵⁰⁷ Wingate's 'adventurous spirit' was the focus of a *Yorkshire Post* obituary which described him as a 'born scout with many of the characteristics of Baden Powell.'⁵⁰⁸ Ashley Jackson has argued

⁵⁰⁵ For comparisons to Lawrence see, among many, *Daily Mail* 01/04/1944; p.2; *The Times*, 01/04/1944, p.4; *Daily Express*, 01/04/1944, p.4.

⁵⁰⁶ *Daily Mail*, 01/04/44, p.2.

⁵⁰⁷ *The Listener* 795, 07/04/44, p.377.

⁵⁰⁸ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 01/04/44, p.4.

that the Second World War was viewed at the time as an imperial struggle, not only by politicians and military strategists but also by many ordinary people around the world.⁵⁰⁹ The heroic figures of the British Empire were recognisable as exemplars of national virtue, but also as men who, like Wingate, had fought to defend Britain's overseas possessions.

Wingate's predecessors provided a context in which the full range of patriotic meanings of his own actions might be understood.

Many commemorations hailed a military genius, responsible for developing an entirely new approach to warfare. Amery's tribute noted that Wingate

not only knew the military art in practice but thought deeply about its modern developments. This last campaign of his, whatever its immediate outcome, may well live in history, not only for the care and perfection of its planning and initial execution, and for the boldness of its conception, but as the opening of a new chapter in the art of war, destined to affect all future strategy.

Portraying Wingate as a cutting-edge military strategist, Amery echoed the discourse surrounding the first Chindit operation examined in chapter three, in which Wingate had been hailed for developing a new approach to jungle warfare. The same ideas were restated and amplified in obituaries. The *Manchester Evening News*, for example, proclaimed him a 'genius shaper of modern warfare', while the *Daily Express* credited him with 'developing the technique of warfare that will defeat the Japs.'⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London, 2006), pp.1-11.

⁵¹⁰ *Manchester Evening News*, 01/04/44, p.3; *Daily Express*, 25/05/1943, p.3.

Such comments expressed the image which Wingate had carefully cultivated in his writings. For example, in his 1940 proposal to lead a reconnaissance force operating from the Tibesti Mountains, Wingate had written that his plan should be carried out under his command, 'not only with wisdom and knowledge but with dynamic energy.'⁵¹¹ Similarly, Wingate introduced his 1941 report on the Ethiopia campaign as an 'Apology for the ideas which made the campaign a success'; in the same report he dismissed his 'old fashioned' superiors as 'military apes.'⁵¹² Elsewhere, in an operational order for the 1944 Chindit mission, he described his proposal for the attachment of close air support to the Chindit columns as 'unique in conception', claiming that it would 'help us apply revolutionary methods.'⁵¹³ Simon Anglim has persuasively argued that Wingate's theory of long range penetration was not, in fact, a radical departure from British army doctrine.⁵¹⁴ Rather than a uniquely original military strategist, the Chindit commander was 'an astute cherry-picker and synthesiser of existing ideas who had no compunction about passing them off as his own.'⁵¹⁵ It is striking that in none of the major writings on military strategy which I have examined during my doctoral research did Wingate acknowledge a single influence shaping his ideas, a silence which underlines his desire to be considered a brilliant tactical innovator. Wingate's

⁵¹¹ Orde Wingate, 'The Reconnaissance of Tibesti: First Step in the Reconquest of North Africa', p.1. IWM Wingate Collection, Ethiopia Box 5.

⁵¹² Orde Wingate, 'The Ethiopia Campaign', p.1, IWM Wingate collection, Ethiopia Box 5.

⁵¹³ Orde Wingate, 'Operational Order, Thursday', IWM Wingate collection, Chindit Box 2.

⁵¹⁴ Anglim, *Orde Wingate*, p.208.

⁵¹⁵ Simon Anglim, 'Orde Wingate and Combat Leadership' (2015). Online article, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2015/2/13/orde-wingate-and-combat-leadership> [Accessed on 07/01/2021]

death further mobilised the self-image that he cultivated throughout his career as a military innovator.

The theme of ‘Wingate versus the British army’ featured prominently in an obituary in the *Observer*. The article emphasises Wingate’s struggles against his superiors in the bureaucratic political and military establishment, an aspect of Wingate’s writing largely absent from other mainstream British commemoration. Echoing popular celebrations of the Chindit commander as an unparalleled strategist, the article described his death as a ‘national tragedy’, before declaring that ‘he belonged to the few who are irreplaceable. His military genius wedded to his humanist sympathies have left their mark on this war.’⁵¹⁶ In an apparent swipe at ‘official’ narratives of Wingate’s career in circulation, the article went on to inform readers that ‘he was not – as is now suggested – the genius immediately recognised by the War Office and by commanding Generals. On the contrary, Wingate’s exploits in the jungle and the wilds of Harrar almost pale before the eight-year battle he had to fight against Whitehall.’ Describing Wingate’s rejected proposal for a force in North Africa, the piece noted that ‘Wingate was not popular in Whitehall during that winter 1941.’ Attempts to station Wingate in Gibraltar, where ‘he would be safely out of the way,’ were sarcastically attributed to Whitehall’s ‘impeccable eye for unorthodox men’. This construction of Wingate

⁵¹⁶ *Observer*, 2nd April 1944, p.5.

endorsed not only his self-image as a pre-eminent commander, but also his own criticisms of his superiors.

Emphasis on Wingate's religiosity, already widespread in reports of the *Longcloth* operation, was not confined to reports of the memorial service, but instead pervaded interpretations of his death. Wingate was, according to the *Daily Mail*

one of the Puritan Generals – Cromwell and Montgomery, Roberts and Dobby were, and are, others – who have written superb chapters in the history of British arms. He knew his bible well, and even used passages from the Scriptures to communicate by radio to the leaders of other columns.⁵¹⁷

Wingate's relationship with the Bible and his knowledge of scripture were frequently emphasised in the press.⁵¹⁸ *The Times*, for example, reported that 'he was rarely without his bible, and his military proclamations were often full of tags and biblical quotations', while the *Sunday Express* observed that the men under his command lived and fought according to Wingate's favourite biblical slogan, 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.'⁵¹⁹ When the *Daily Express* serialised the story of Wingate's life in the hope that it would 'be an inspiration to the youth of Britain,' Christianity was central to the narrative.⁵²⁰ Readers were informed that the commander 'declared himself a strong believer in prayer' while a young man at the military academy, and that whenever company bored him, he

⁵¹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 01/04/44, p.2.

⁵¹⁸ *Daily Express*, 01/04/44, p.4; *Daily Mirror*, 01/04/44, p.1; *The Scotsman*, 01/04/44, p.4; *Western Morning News*, 01/04/44, p.3; *Belfast News-Letter*, 01/04/44, p.2; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 01/04/44, p.1; *Manchester Evening News*, 01/04/44, pp.3-4; *Sunday Post*, 23/04/44, p.5; *Daily Herald*, 01/04/44, p.4;

⁵¹⁹ *The Times*, 01/04/44, p.8; *Sunday Express*, 02/04/44, p.8.

⁵²⁰ *Daily Express*, 02/04/44, p.10

‘would pull forth a Bible from his pocket and [lose] himself in the pages.’ In Palestine ‘with a revolver in his hand and a Bible in his pocket he would lead his men with cat-like certainty through the night’, and in Ethiopia he ‘led a Christian Emperor back to his throne.’⁵²¹ During his time in the Sudan defence force readers were told that Wingate followed the trail of ‘another Bible-reading soldier, General Gordon. Something of the same asceticism burned in Wingate ... always he was to be goaded by his Bible, as was Gordon, into strange adventures.’⁵²²

Gordon provided a particularly potent model of comparison to the Chindit commander, and his frequent invocation in the discourse surrounding Wingate’s death offers further evidence that the impact of Lytton Strachey’s dismissive assessment of Gordon in his *Eminent Victorians* has previously been overstated.⁵²³ Gordon remained a potent cultural reference point. Like Wingate he was hailed as a pious Christian soldier and master of irregular warfare.⁵²⁴ Both men were noted for their unorthodox appearance, striking features, and unusual behaviour.⁵²⁵ Like Wingate, Gordon was venerated as a great general who martyred himself on behalf of his country. Berenson, MacKenzie and Macdonald have argued that Gordon’s life resolved the moral ambiguities of the imperial programme for Victorian

⁵²¹ *Daily Express*, 11/04/44, p.2.

⁵²² *Daily Express*, 10/04/44, p.2;

⁵²³ See Max Jones, ‘National Hero and Very Queer Fish’: Empire, Sexuality and the Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918-72’, *Twentieth Century British History* 26 (2015), pp.175-202.

⁵²⁴ Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, p.84.

⁵²⁵ Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, p.89.

and Edwardian observers.⁵²⁶ Although a soldier and colonialist, the legend which grew around him portrayed him as guided by religious and civilizing motives, rather than a lust for personal glory or mercenary gain. In this analysis the allegedly benevolent intentions of colonisers served to justify the militarism of the imperial cause.

Fighting to defend its overseas empire from foreign aggression during the Second World War, Britain's self-image as a paternalistic imperial power was a key component of popular and official discourse.⁵²⁷ While the nineteenth-century tensions between evangelical morality and military spirit were less pronounced during the conflict, Sonya Rose has argued that American criticism of Britain's empire, burgeoning independence movements among subject peoples, and racial tensions threatened to undermine Britain's self-perception as a virtuous imperial power.⁵²⁸ Emphasis upon Wingate's fervent Christian faith provided reassurance of the sanctity of Britain's cause and the inevitability of eventual victory. Indeed, it is notable that similar attention was paid to the Christian faith of other generals charged with defending British colonies, principally Montgomery in North Africa and Dobbie and Gort in Malta.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire*, pp.83-86.

⁵²⁷ Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2006), pp.239-285; Jackson, *British Empire*, pp.1-11; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonisation in African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996), p.112.

⁵²⁸ Rose, *Which People's War*, p.239; Daniel Marston, *The Indian Army and the End of the Raj* (Cambridge, 2014), pp.45-115.

⁵²⁹ Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (Oxford, 2005), pp.72-79.

The presentation of Wingate as a specifically Christian soldier exposes the persistence of Christian faith in public life during the war. Scholars investigating the secularisation of British society have debated the nature, timing, and cause of the decline of the influence of Christian culture and institutions.⁵³⁰ Some historians of religion have pointed to quantifiable factors – such as the gradual decline in church attendance – to emphasise incremental change.⁵³¹ Yet Callum Brown’s influential research has argued for a more rapid decline in the second half of the twentieth century, suggesting that Christian beliefs and practices remained at the heart of public life before declining sharply as a result of social and cultural changes during the 1960s.⁵³² Matthew Grimley has drawn on Brown’s concept of ‘discursive Christianity’ to emphasise the importance of Christianity to English national identity during World War Two. Grimley argued that representations of England as a Christian country continued to resonate with a public that ‘still saw itself as Christian’ during the conflict.⁵³³ The emphasis on Wingate’s Christianity in 1944 commemorations offers another component for the ‘discursive Christianity’ described by Brown. MacKenzie has argued that the secular T. E. Lawrence was the one figure who came closest to the Christian imperial heroes of

⁵³⁰ For these debates, see Steve Bruce, Tony Glendenning, ‘When Was Secularisation? Dating the Decline of British Churches and Locating its Cause’, *British Journal of Sociology* 61 (2010), pp. 107-126; Jeremy Morris, ‘The Strange Death of Christian Britain: Another Look at the Secularisation Debate’, *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003), pp.963-976.

⁵³¹ For an example of a statistical approach to church attendance see, among many Robert Curry et al, *Churches and For a summary of quantitative approaches to secularisation, see Bernice Martin, ‘Beyond Measurement: The Non-quantifiable Religious Dimension in Social Life,’* in Paul Avis (ed.) *Public Faith? The State of Religious Belief and Practice in Britain* (London, 2003), pp.1–18.

⁵³² See Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800- 2000* (London, 2001), pp.175-192; Callum Brown, ‘The Secularization Decade’ in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge, 2003), pp.29-46; Callum Brown, ‘What was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?’, *Journal of Religious History* 34 (2010), pp.468-479.

⁵³³ Matthew Grimley, ‘The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism and “National Character”, 1918-1945’, *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007), pp.884-906, p.906.

Queen Victoria's reign after 1918. Wingate's heroic reputation demonstrates the persistence of a nineteenth-century conception of Christian military heroism into the middle of the twentieth century.⁵³⁴

The celebration of Wingate as a natural leader and organiser of colonial soldiers in British commemoration further reinforced ideas of the benevolence of British imperial rule.⁵³⁵ Leo Amery's comparison of Wingate to Livingstone and Gordon 'in his handling of all races' was not an isolated sentiment. A *Daily Mirror* obituary declared the Chindit commander 'a born leader with a flair for forming men of different races into superb fighting forces', and went on to describe his 'flair for strange races.'⁵³⁶ After listing the diverse troops under his command in Ethiopia, a *Daily Express* article claimed that Wingate's 'real genius' lay in his ability to 'wrest the finest, and even the last ounce of endeavour, out of the very mixed human material at his disposal.'⁵³⁷ One obituary which announced that the Chindit commander was a 'born leader' with a 'genius for merging men of different races into one force and inspiring them to follow him devotedly,' was duplicated in several local newspapers across the country.⁵³⁸ The presentation of the British officer as the natural leader of other races reinforced long-established colonial hierarchies of race and class.⁵³⁹ The

⁵³⁴ MacKenzie, 'Heroic Myths of Empire', p.134.

⁵³⁵ Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.66-112.

⁵³⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 01/04/44, p.5.

⁵³⁷ *Daily Express*, 11/04/44, p.2.

⁵³⁸ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 01/04/44, p. 1; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 01/04/44, p. 5; *Western Morning News*, 01/04/44, p.3; *Dundee Courier*, 01/04/44, p.3; *Scotsman*, 01/04/44, p.4; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 01/04/44, p.1;

⁵³⁹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*. (Oxford, 2001), 124–125; Tarak Barkawi, *Soldiers of Empire: Indian and British Armies in World War II* (Cambridge, 2017), pp.17-48.

assumed devotion of colonial troops to Wingate underscored contemporary understandings of the English gentleman as not only superior to those of other races, but also able to win their loyalty by force of character, again mobilising comparisons with Gordon in Sudan and Lawrence in Arabia.⁵⁴⁰

Once again, we can see the influence of Wingate's self-fashioning in public constructions of his heroic reputation. His theory of leading indigenous soldiers, recorded in his 'Appreciation of the Ethiopia campaign' and explored in chapter two, outlined the need for commanders to inspire devotion in local troops. Officers must

first convince the Ethiopian, suspicious as he was of all white men, of our *bona fides*. This meant he must see us fighting not by his side but in front of him. His contact must convince him that... we were not only brave soldiers but devoted to the cause of his liberties.⁵⁴¹

Wingate's insistence that British officers leading indigenous soldiers must 'teach self-sacrifice and devotion by example instead of by precept' tacitly attributed to himself the qualities of the exemplary commander. It is surely significant that Wingate sent Amery a rough copy of his 'Appreciation' shortly after the Ethiopia campaign, and the politician duly recommended some stylistic changes before distributing the document to the influential Chiefs of Staff Committee.⁵⁴² Amery's portrayal of Wingate as equal to Gordon and Livingstone in his 'handling of all races' enacted the Chindit commander's self-fashioning as an exemplary leader. Amery's portrayal of Wingate was picked up, embellished and

⁵⁴⁰ Macdonald, *Language*, p.87.

⁵⁴¹ Orde Wingate, 'Appreciation of the Ethiopia Campaign', p.6, IWM Wingate collection, Ethiopia Box 1.

⁵⁴² Royle, *Orde Wingate*, p.227.

disseminated by the British press. Wingate's personal testimony succeeded in shaping his heroic reputation after his death.

The construction of Wingate as imperial hero was widely disseminated by the British press and endorsed by politicians and military commanders at his memorial service. Heroic figures from British history, primarily heroes of empire, provided potent models of comparison to Wingate's activities during the Second World War. These comparisons appeared all the more natural because they matched Wingate's own self-representation as belonging to this tradition of heroism. If one function of the heroic reputations of imperial heroes was to legitimise the expansion of empire, narratives of Wingate's heroism bestowed moral authority upon Britain's defence and reconquest of her imperial possessions and provided reassurance of eventual victory.

2. Orde Wingate's Heroic Reputation in Britain: Condolence Letters and Emotional Investments

Analysing the processes of construction reveals little about how ordinary people responded to such images. A striking example of the reception of Wingate's heroic self-fashioning came in a letter published in the *Sunday Express*. Moved by Churchill's tribute to Wingate as a 'man of genius who might well have become a man of destiny', the father of a soldier who served under Wingate forwarded an extract of a private letter from his son to the

‘readers’ letters’ page of the newspaper. The soldier had written to his father after reading an article about the Chindit landings, keen to know if his father had followed the reports of Wingate’s death. Evidently proud of his own role in operation *Thursday*, the soldier endorsed the heroic construction of the Chindit commander circulating in newspapers, describing him as ‘the greatest man I shall ever see.’⁵⁴³ The letter went on to dismiss the frequent comparisons made with Lawrence. ‘Another Lawrence my foot – Lawrence would be lucky to be called another Wingate.’ The letter captures the process by which Wingate’s self-representation helped shape his own reputation. The characterisation of Wingate as a ‘great’ commander, the deliberate contrast with Lawrence: both reflected the heroic identity that Wingate himself had fashioned and projected during his career.

The soldier’s letter to his father, written in response to a newspaper article and itself published in a national newspaper, encapsulates the cultural circuit in operation between public and private narratives of masculine heroism. In his self-fashioning Wingate drew on a cultural repertoire of narratives and images of male heroism. After Wingate’s death, his self-image became part of that repertoire; it was picked up by the British press and broadcast to a wider audience. These public representations altered and modified Wingate’s own self-representations, positioning him alongside other narratives of male heroism. Narratives of

⁵⁴³ *Sunday Express*, 06/08/1944, p.3.

Wingate's life might then be re-appropriated by individuals, like the letter writer's son, prompting further investment in his public image.

Edward Berenson has pointed to the 'stacks of adulatory letters' that were written to heroic figures by ordinary people as a way of gauging their reception.⁵⁴⁴ Letters of condolence from ordinary people accompanied the numerous missives that his widow received from senior politicians, military commanders, and members of British high society. The IWM collection contains around twenty such letters that offer a tantalising snapshot into the operation of the cultural circuit. The men and women who wrote to Lorna Wingate express their emotional investment in the Chindit commander, with individuals appropriating the aspects of his heroic reputation which resonated most deeply with their own lives.⁵⁴⁵ Some letters drew directly on press reports, while in others the influence was less transparent. The diverse backgrounds of - and sentiments expressed by - the letter-writers give some indication of Wingate's broad appeal.

Several of the letters were from soldiers. Lance Corporal Salzbach felt moved to write after reading the obituary in the *Observer* examined above. Salzbach enthusiastically endorsed the 'beautiful article' which depicted Wingate as a 'military genius', concurring with its description of the Chindit commander's death as a 'national tragedy.'⁵⁴⁶ Underlining

⁵⁴⁴ Berenson, *Five Charismatic Men*, p.5.

⁵⁴⁵ Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Introduction: Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives', p.3.

⁵⁴⁶ H. Salzbach to Lorna Wingate, 02/04/1944, IWM Wingate collection, Black Folder

the role of the press in fostering readers' emotional investments in heroic figures, he wrote that Wingate 'was for us a man you admired and loved even only reading of him.' Salzbach's sense of attachment to the commander whose career he had followed in newspaper reports was so strong that he pressed the grieving widow to send him 'a little picture of General Wingate.' Numerous photographs of Wingate from various stages of his career accompanied the many articles that were published after his death and would presumably have been freely available to Salzbach. His desire to own a private image of Wingate suggests a need for a more intimate connection with his hero, a personal relic. Seeking to explain Wingate's significance, Salzbach reflected, 'perhaps we refugees from Germany who have the privilege to serve in the Army, feel more than others, still [underlined in original] more, the irreplaceable loss of this great man.' In Salzbach's letter we see the internalisation of the heroic construction of Wingate in public narratives of his life. Consumed and put to work by individuals like Salzbach, these narratives were related to the particular circumstances of their own lives.

Further evidence of the impact of the press can be found in a communication from Charles Hutchinson, who, along with his letter, enclosed his personal collection of newspaper reports of Wingate's actions. Although only the letter survives in the IWM archive, that he should feel compelled to collect the newspaper cuttings is an indication of the resonance of such reports. Explaining his own investment in Wingate, Hutchinson wrote 'Now 18, I am about to enter military service myself, and one of my deepest wishes is that I shall be privileged to serve under an officer only a fraction of the character and ability of your

husband.’⁵⁴⁷ The virtues of ‘character and ability’ ascribed to Wingate echo newspaper reports of the Chindit commander in circulation at the time, as well as reflecting the ethos of leadership Wingate outlined in his Ethiopia ‘Appreciation.’ For a young man about to enter the military, the construction of Wingate’s qualities as a soldier and leader shaped his own aspirations around his impending service.

Not only servicemen wrote to Lorna Wingate; the IWM collection includes a letter from Derwent Pickering, a self-described ‘humble miner’ from Cumbria.⁵⁴⁸ Like Salzbach and Hutchinson, Pickering emphasised the role of the press in nurturing popular veneration for Wingate. He informed Mrs Wingate that he had ‘followed with patriotic pride through various reports the conduct of your dear, lamented husband in his prosecution of duty for honour and freedom.’ The miner felt Wingate’s loss so deeply that he ended his letter with a short, florid poem written in the voice of the dead comforting the living. Perhaps for Pickering, a man not serving on the front line and to whom the masculine ideal of the soldier hero was unavailable, narratives of soldierly heroism resonated all the more deeply.

Similar sentiments came in a letter from the Liverpool branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union; a high proportion of the Chindits came from Northwest England. Union members wrote to convey their ‘great admiration of the exploits and valuable work carried

⁵⁴⁷ Charles Hutchinson to Lorna Wingate, 02/06/1944, IWM Wingate collection, black folder

⁵⁴⁸ Derwent Pickering to Lorna Wingate, 04/04/1944, IWM Wingate collection, black folder

out by General Wingate and [their] sense of loss at this untimely death.’⁵⁴⁹ The letter reveals an alternative reading of Wingate’s heroic reputation, focusing not on his status as an exceptional individual, but on his willingness to share the privations experienced by his men. ‘This splendid officer endeared himself to his men and to the British people not only by his leadership but also by the fact that he shared their life, suffered the same hardships, discomforts and dangers.’ While echoing the construction of Wingate as an inspirational leader, this interpretation of his heroic reputation closely aligned the Chindit commander with the egalitarian rhetoric that underpinned the ‘people’s war’. The union’s letter appeared to imply a distinction between Wingate and other senior figures in the military. ‘Throughout their difficult campaign he was always at the head of his men and we consider him an example of all that an officer and leader should be.’ This trade union tribute highlights the malleability of narratives of individual heroism, allowing different communities to adapt and emphasise the elements of the story that expressed their own values.

The news that Lorna Wingate was pregnant with her first child heightened the sense of tragedy that surrounded her husband’s death. A number of letters came from women seeking to comfort the grieving widow, urging her to find solace in motherhood. One mother advised that ‘you must be brave dear as it is just now that you will need all your strength and courage. You have got a happy event coming and it will help to pay you for the other sad

⁵⁴⁹ H. Taylor to Lorna Wingate, 25/04/1944, IWM Wingate collection, black folder

loss.⁵⁵⁰ The wife of a private who had served under Wingate in Burma informed Lorna that she had lost a baby prior to her husband's deployment, but she was proud that 'her baby's daddy had such a fine ideal of a man to follow.'⁵⁵¹ Neatly summarising the newspapers' construction of Wingate as a Christian soldier, she continued 'I as one soldier's wife to another can only add he died like a soldier and lived like a man of God.' The letter ends with a prayer for 'Wingate the second, may he follow in his father's footsteps and keep his father's record unblemished.' Similar sentiments were expressed by Lilian Burton: 'God bless you and your son for I feel so glad that you have got now a little Orde although your big one has finished his duty. I pray may your son grow as fine and brave a man as his father.'⁵⁵² If Orde Wingate exemplified the qualities of the exemplary soldier and leader, for the writers of these letters, Lorna Wingate embodied the plight of wives and mothers whose lives had been disrupted by the war.

3. Orde Wingate's Heroic Reputation in Britain: Friend of Zion

The ceremony at Saint Margaret's was not the only memorial service held for Orde Wingate in April 1944. On the evening of 25 April, crowds assembled outside the ruins of the bomb-damaged Great Synagogue in Duke's Place. So great was the crush that many members

⁵⁵⁰ V.M Rands to Lorna Wingate, 05/04/1944, Black Folder, IWM Archive.

⁵⁵¹ Rebecca Orrell to Lorna Wingate, 03/04/1944, Black Folder, IWM Wingate Archive.

⁵⁵² Lilian Burton to Lorna Wingate, 12/05/1944, IWM Wingate Archive, Black folder

of London's East-End Jewish community had to be turned away from the temporary structure erected to house the ceremony.⁵⁵³ On only two occasions in the previous twenty years had similar memorial services been held for a gentile, for Lord Balfour and for King George V.⁵⁵⁴ Inside, every stratum of Jewish life in Britain was represented, from academics and politicians to ordinary working-class Jews.⁵⁵⁵ Indeed, the venue had been selected at Wingate's widow's request in order to allow as many 'ordinary' Jewish mourners to attend as possible.⁵⁵⁶ The diverse congregation was commented upon by the *Daily Mail*. Under the headline 'They Prayed for a Gentile in a Synagogue', the paper noted the presence of Lady Mountbatten alongside 'the old bearded Jews, with the young Jewesses from the Mile-end road, with the shopkeepers of Petticoat-lane, and with well-dressed business men and women.'

The ceremony was organised at the request of Wingate's widow by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, an offshoot of the World Zionist Organisation and the movement's executive arm in Palestine.⁵⁵⁷ Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz led the service. Hertz was no stranger to embracing national heroes in Britain – in 1913 he had hailed Captain Scott as a hero for pacifists, declaring his hope that 'military virtues would no longer be glorified.'⁵⁵⁸ In 1944,

⁵⁵³ *Daily Mail*, 26/04/1944, p.3.

⁵⁵⁴ *Daily Mail*, 26/04/1944, p.3.

⁵⁵⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 26/04/1944, p.13; *Daily Mail*, 26/04/1944. p.3.

⁵⁵⁶ *Daily Mail*, 26/04/1944. p.3.

⁵⁵⁷ Letter from Chaim Weizmann to Lorna Wingate, 02/4/44, Shapell Manuscript Foundation, <https://www.shapell.org/manuscript/order-wingate-memorial-chaim-weizmann/> [Accessed on 01/12/2020].

⁵⁵⁸ Jones, *The Last Great Quest*, p.226. Such hopes were dashed during the First World War, and Hertz was a leading voice in encouraging Anglo-Jewry to join the armed services. See Colin Eimer, 'Joseph Hertz: A Chief Rabbi at War', *European Judaism: A Journal for New Europe* 48 (2015), pp.23-32.

the rabbi delivered an eloquent address which hailed Wingate as a friend of Judaism, a champion of Zionism and a hero of Israel. In contrast with the state commemorations and newspaper articles examined above, Hertz's tribute placed Wingate's activities in Palestine at the centre of his heroic reputation. Reviewing his career, the rabbi provided a lengthy description of Wingate's role at the head of the Special Night Squads (SNS), outlining the Arab unrest he had faced in Palestine and his affection for the Jewish men under his command. Of Wingate's work in Burma, he merely added:

The last scene of his all-too-short life was enacted in the jungle in Burma. It was brilliant work that he performed there, and invaluable work; work which Orde Wingate alone could have set in motion; but every day he grieved that it was not work in Palestine. In one of his last letters written from Burma he quotes, in Hebrew, the sacred words, "if I forget thee O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning." This was no figure of speech; it was a cri du coeur.⁵⁵⁹

Through his cursory acknowledgement of the Chindit campaigns and his foregrounding of Palestine, Hertz sought to elaborate an alternative understanding of the significance of Wingate's career. In doing so he refashioned Wingate's heroic reputation to suit the purposes of a different 'imagined community' to that of the British nation-at-war.

For Amery, religious conviction had guided Wingate to the service of the state. In contrast, for Hertz faith drove the Chindit commander to pursue above all else the return of the Jewish diaspora to the Holy Land. The rabbi amplified Amery's emphasis upon the spiritual note in Wingate's character, portraying him in biblical terms:

⁵⁵⁹ IWM Wingate Collection, Black Folder. A number of phrases are underlined in the transcript held by the Imperial War Museum, presumably to mark points of emphasis in Hertz's delivery. All emphases are original.

I recall the fact that most of the years he lived in the Holy Land he spent on Mount Carmel. With the Holy Scriptures as his constant companion, he must many a time have brooded over the story of the Titanic figure of Elijah, the storm-compelling Prophet who on those heights made Israel take that eternal decision, 2,700 years ago, in favour of monotheistic religion, and who thereafter continued his unwearied warfare for social justice. The folds of that timeless Prophet's mantle seem to have touched the soul of Orde Wingate: he came to share his fearlessness, his love of truth, his passion for justice.

Through such rich, biblical language Hertz elevated Wingate beyond the level of a mere soldier. He was a 'prophet in uniform' whose 'prophetic qualities' – fearlessness, truth and justice – guided his support of the Jewish cause in Palestine. The rabbi went on to make clear the political implications of Wingate's faith, invoking the Balfour declaration as a 'messianic announcement' which promised to correct 'the greatest of historical tragedies, the dispersal of the Jew to the four winds of heaven.' He lamented the 'bestial extermination that faced every Jew in Nazi-controlled lands' and noted that Britain's mandate in Palestine had obliged the government to 'facilitate Jewish immigration into Palestine.'

Hertz's words marked a thinly veiled attack on British policy towards Jewish immigration into Palestine, which since the 1930s had generated tension between the government and the Zionist movement.⁵⁶⁰ Immigration restrictions which began in 1936 reflected a shift in British policy towards appeasing the Arab population in Palestine, causing Zionist leaders to suspect that the government was no longer committed to implementing the the Balfour Declaration. Anglo-Jewish relations deteriorated further with the publication of

⁵⁶⁰ For a recent overview of British policy on immigration into Palestine, see Aviva Halamish, 'Jewish Immigration: The Base of the Palestine Triangle' in Michael Cohen (ed.), *The British Mandate in Palestine: A Centenary Volume, 1920-2020* (London, 2020), pp.172-188. See also Michael Cohen, *Britain's Moment in Palestine: Retrospect and Perspectives, 1917-1948* (London, 2014), pp. 287-306.

the 1939 Macdonald White Paper which effectively ended British mandatory obligations to establish an independent Jewish state, proposing instead an Arab majority state with controlled Jewish immigration.⁵⁶¹

One way in which Zionist groups attempted to undermine the White Paper during the 1940s was by sending Jewish refugees from Europe to Palestine by sea, in defiance of the restrictive immigration quota. Hertz reminded his audience of the sinking of two ships carrying Jewish refugees, the *Patria* and the *Struma* – separate incidents which caused international outrage at Britain’s policy on immigration into Palestine. Determined to honour the terms of the White Paper, the British government refused to grant the refugees the necessary papers to enter Palestine. The *Patria* was sunk in Haifa harbour in November 1940 with a loss of 252 lives after Jewish militants detonated a bomb on board in a miscalculated attempt to disable the ship, in order to prevent the deportation of the Jewish refugees on board. The Jewish Agency announced that the refugees themselves had detonated the device in a desperate attempt to escape the vessel – the British were blamed for the tragedy having driven them to such measures. Only much later was the true cause of the explosion discovered.⁵⁶² The sinking of the *Struma* by a Soviet torpedo in the Black Sea in February 1942 marked the single biggest loss of civilian life at sea during the Second World War.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ For an overview of the White Paper see Michael Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat From the Mandate: The Making of British Policy, 1936-45* (New York, 1978), pp.66-86.

⁵⁶² Cohen, *Britain’s Moment in Palestine*, p.372.

⁵⁶³ For an overview see Daphna Sharfman, *Palestine in the Second World War*, pp.108-113. For a detailed examination of the disaster, see Douglas Frantz and Catharine Collins, *Death on the Black Sea: The Untold Story of the Struma and World War II’s Holocaust at Sea* (New York, 2003).

All but one of the 800 Jewish refugees on board were lost when the ship was struck on its return voyage to Romania after the British government refused entry to Palestine. In Britain, Palestine and around the world, Zionist groups blamed both tragedies on the callousness of the British government. Voicing this indignation, Hertz recalled that

the death-cries of the 250 victims on the refugee boat the *Patria* and the 769 men, women and children drowned on the *Struma* made well-wishers of Britain the world over doubt the fairness of local government in their attitude to the newcomers

The rabbi's overtly political tone struck a strikingly subversive note in comparison to the commemorative projects which had raised Wingate as an unproblematic exemplar of national virtue. The rabbi's emphasis on Britain's perceived failures in its obligations to the Jewish people reflected an alternative investment in Wingate, one which placed his loyalty to the cause of Zionism above his national affiliation. 'He loved,' the Rabbi informed the congregation, 'to speak of himself as a born Zionist.'

Hertz portrayed Wingate as a dissident voice, aghast at his country's failure to fulfil its obligations. He observed that 'Wingate must not have long been in Palestine before he perceived that the concern of the local civil servants seemed to be not how to facilitate Jewish immigration into Palestine, but rather how to restrict it'. The rabbi highlighted Wingate's support for the idea of a Jewish army as a further departure from British policy, observing that he

must have noted with bitterness that in our day the conscience of the age had done little for the Jew, even in regard to the rights that had been solemnly promised him by all the fifty-five members of the League of Nations. He was one of that small group who felt that full justice would not be obtained by Jews ... so long as there was no Jewish army fighting in the field. Hence his dream to lead such an army.

As with immigration into Palestine, the issue of arming and training a Jewish brigade was a cause of friction between Zionist groups and the British government. Drawing on the experience of the First World War, Zionists were convinced that if Jews made a substantial military contribution to the war effort they would be rewarded at the eventual peace conference.⁵⁶⁴ Early in the war proposals from Zionist leaders for such a force were rejected by senior officials, despite the strategic benefits it might have offered had Rommel's troops overrun British mandated territory in Palestine.⁵⁶⁵

The matter was particularly fraught at the time of the rabbi's speech. In the months prior to the memorial service, several groups of Jewish soldiers serving in Polish military units in Britain had deserted, citing antisemitism. The situation placed the British government in a difficult position in relation to their Polish allies, worsened by the soldiers' requests to be transferred into the British army. Despite initially favouring court-martialling the deserters, the government relented following the intervention of Labour MP Tom Driberg.⁵⁶⁶ Reminding the congregation of this incident, Hertz noted that had Wingate's dream been realised, it 'might have prevented a situation now before the general public, which is

⁵⁶⁴ Cohen, *Palestine: Retreat From the Mandate*, pp.98-124.

⁵⁶⁵ For efforts to establish a Jewish army, see Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 1988), pp.252-277; Gavin Schaffer, 'Re-Thinking the History of Blame: Britain and Minorities During the Second World War', *National Identities* 8 (2006), pp.401-419, p.411; Daphna Sharfman, *Palestine in the Second World War: Strategic Plans and Political Dilemmas* (Sussex, 2014), pp.56-67.

⁵⁶⁶ <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1944/apr/06/polish-forces-great-britain-anti-semitism> [Accessed on 10/06/2018]; David Engel, *Facing a Holocaust: The Polish Government in Exile and the Jews* (London, 1993), pp. 210-245; Schaffer, 'Re-thinking', p.410.

embittering to the Jewish soldier, embarrassing to the Polish authorities and most unwelcome to the British government.’

Hertz’s address politicised Wingate’s heroic reputation in a manner largely absent from non-Jewish commemorations. It highlighted the Chindit commander’s support for the Zionist cause and harnessed his beliefs to contemporary political issues and events. Furthermore, the rabbi’s sermon captured many of the concerns of Jewish communities and Zionist groups in wartime Britain: the persecution of Jews in countries under Nazi domination; the opening of Palestine to Jewish immigrants; and the formation of a Jewish army. The *Jewish Chronicle* reproduced Hertz’s address almost in its entirety.⁵⁶⁷ The rabbi’s comments about Jewish defectors in the Polish army were also widely reported in the British press.⁵⁶⁸ Hertz placed narratives of Wingate’s heroism at the centre of debates over British government policy.

Jewish commemorations in Britain reveals the fluidity of Wingate’s heroic reputation, demonstrating the ways in which different communities invest an individual’s life with different meanings. In an address at a service held at Queen’s Park synagogue, rabbi Kopul Rosen highlighted the separation between Jewish and non-Jewish interpretations of the Chindit commander:

⁵⁶⁷ *Jewish Chronicle*, 28/04/1944, p.12. For the *Jewish Chronicle* during the war, see David Cesarani, *The “Jewish Chronicle” and Anglo-Jewry* (Cambridge,1996), pp. 180-192;

⁵⁶⁸ *The People*, 14/05/44; *Daily Herald*, 27/04/44, p.4; *Daily Mirror*, 29/04/44, p.5;

If ever a man was a passionate and fervent Zionist, that man was Orde Wingate. Non-Jews would remember him as a great fighter who developed a new technique in guerrilla warfare; to the Jews, however, it would be an association with the ideals for which he fought that they would remember him. His name was one of those eternal names linked with an eternal people on an eternal soil.⁵⁶⁹

Capturing Wingate's significance beyond the nation-state for British Jews, Rosen followed Hertz in transforming the Chindit commander from military strategist to Zionist hero.

Similar themes were widely repeated in the plethora of commemorative projects undertaken by the Jewish community. Jews across Britain flocked to synagogues to pay homage to the Chindit leader at special services.⁵⁷⁰ In Glasgow the congregation were told that when in Palestine Wingate, although a 'great British patriot', had been 'shunned by the British people out there' and that his 'pleading' for the creation of a Jewish fighting force was turned down.⁵⁷¹ At a meeting held by the Jewish agency for Palestine, future Israeli president Chaim Weizmann addressed a large gathering of agency members, recalling that Wingate had confided in him

how disappointed he was to meet in Jerusalem all those people whose business it was to support and help in the building of the National Home, and who, in his opinion, were imbued with such hostility and indifference towards it.⁵⁷²

Weizmann went on to recount Wingate's efforts to gain support for a Jewish army and noted that in his letters from Burma he 'always dreamt, spoke and wrote of his return [to Palestine] in the final stage of founding the Jewish State or the Jewish National Home.' Jewish

⁵⁶⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 05/05/44, p.10.

⁵⁷⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, 26/04/1944, p.12; *Daily Herald*, 26/04/1944, p.1; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 29/04/1944, p.; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 12/05/1944, p.5; *Larne Times*, 04/05/1944; p.8; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 01/05/1944, p.6

⁵⁷¹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 25/08/1944, p.10

⁵⁷² *Jewish Chronicle*, 14/04/44, p.7; *Palcor Bulletin*, 06/04/1944, p.7

communities came together to articulate an understanding of Wingate's heroic reputation in which his support for Zionism and his affection for the Jewish people transcended his status as a specifically British military hero.

A few examples of letters of condolence from Jews to Wingate's widow again offer glimpses of powerful emotional investments in the Chindit captain. In many, the authors appointed themselves as representatives of their communities who sought to convey their profound feelings of personal loss. N.A Ben-Tovim wrote that he and his

kinsmen in the Holy Land ... regarded Wingate as sent in answer to our prayers. He understood our race and our faith with his heart as well as his brain. We all believed that he was chosen to repay the debt of Christianity to Judaism by leading us on the road to the peace of Jerusalem ... We are inconsolable and can offer you no consolation, but I felt you should know that his memory will live on in our national story.⁵⁷³

More formally, Ivan Shortt wrote 'on behalf of the representative council of Birmingham Jewry' to 'express our community's deepest sympathy on the tragic death of your gallant and distinguished husband.'⁵⁷⁴ Along with the many others Lorna Wingate received from members of the Jewish community, these letters indicate the resonance of Wingate's heroic reputation among Jewish communities in Britain.

⁵⁷³ Ben-Tovin to Lorna Wingate, 01/05/1944, IWM Wingate Collection, Box 5

⁵⁷⁴ Ivan Shortt to Lorna Wingate, 24/04/1944, IWM Wingate Collection, Box 5.

4. Wingate of Judea: Orde Wingate's Heroic reputation in Palestine

The reverence towards Wingate in Britain was matched by the Jewish community in British-mandated Palestine, the *Yishuv*. His Special Night Squads and passionate advocacy for the Zionist cause had earned Wingate the respect of key figures in the Zionist movement. In the words of one national newspaper, his death was a tragedy on 'human, comradely, and political-Zionist levels.'⁵⁷⁵ In the weeks after Wingate's death, an array of commemorative activities were organised by a diverse range of groups, including politicians, Zionist organisations, Jewish trade unionists, farmers on Jewish settlements and veterans of the SNS. As a sign of mourning, flags were flown at half-mast on all public buildings and Jewish national institutions.⁵⁷⁶ Memorial services were held by various religious and political groups nationwide, accompanied by other commemorative projects including the naming of streets and public squares after Wingate, the planting of a forest in his honour and a public exhibition of photos of his time spent in the Jezreal Valley.⁵⁷⁷ Immediately after news of his death, the Jewish press in Palestine printed numerous editorials and obituaries paying tribute to Wingate, hailing the British officer as a hero of the *Yishuv*. In British-mandated Palestine, commemoration of Wingate reached a pitch that matched, perhaps even exceeded, that of his home country.

⁵⁷⁵ *Davar*, 04/04/1944.

⁵⁷⁶ *Haaretz*, 02/04/1944.

⁵⁷⁷ *Hatzofe*, 07/04/1944; *Mishmar* 13/04/1944; *Haaretz* 13/04/1944; *Davar* 04/04/1944.

Tributes in Palestine echoed that of the Jewish community in Britain. Descriptions centred on his unique contribution to the Jewish people and their cause; ‘his deep religious faith’, wrote one newspaper, ‘is what bound him so strongly and deeply to Zionism’s aspirations, and Zionism’s ethos is what made him such a loyal friend to the Jewish people.’⁵⁷⁸ Many reports highlighted his qualities as a leader, focusing on his command of the SNS. One commentator in the Tel-Aviv daily *Hazman* wrote that men serving under Wingate were ‘willing to follow him through fire and flood. They became attached to him and loved him not as a commander and instructor of the highest stature, but as a comrade and a friend who understood them and their aspirations as if he were one of them; despite being a gentile.’⁵⁷⁹ While several newspapers published accounts of the activities of the SNS, few mentioned the conduct of operations, which often involved considerable brutality against those considered Arab terrorists.⁵⁸⁰ Instead, journalists focused on Wingate’s qualities as an inspirational leader who, ‘took part in every action, put himself in equal danger, and served more than once as a role model of courage, forcefulness and self-sacrifice.’⁵⁸¹

As with the British Chief Rabbi’s eulogy, many of those commemorating Wingate presented the British soldier in prophetic, almost mystical, terms. Conservative newspaper

⁵⁷⁸ *Davar* 07/04/44.

⁵⁷⁹ *Hazman*, 07/04/44.

⁵⁸⁰ Accounts of the SNS featured in *Davar*, 07/04/44; *Haboker* 07/04/44; *Haaretz*, 13/04/44; *Haaretz*, 21/04/44; *Haboker*, 26/04/44. For the conduct of the SNS under Wingate see Simon Anglim, ‘Orde Wingate and the Special Night Squads: A Feasible Policy for Counter-Terrorism?’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 28 (2007), pp.28-41; Matthew Hughes, ‘Terror In Galilee: British-Jewish Collaboration and the Special Night Squads During the Arab Revolt, 1938-39’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43 (2015), pp.590-610; Matthew Hughes, *Britain’s Pacification of Palestine: The British Army, The Colonial State and the Arab Revolt, 1936-1939* (Cambridge, 2019), pp.281-288.

⁵⁸¹ *Davar*, 07/04/44.

Haboker informed readers that he resembled ‘an ascetic or monk who spends his days in the dark room of a medieval castle, poring over ancient books of theology ... his deep set eyes contained something of dreaminess and fantasy in their expression.’⁵⁸² The writer went on to quote an American journalist’s description of Wingate’s appearance: ‘At first glance he looked like a tiny prophet living on desert honey and insects, his body bent, his hair thin, and a persecuted look in his eyes.’

Despite these similarities to British commemorations, remembrance in Palestine differed in two key areas. First, Palestinian commemorations of Wingate tended to be more direct in their criticisms of the British government. Through the celebration of the dead soldier, commentators reflected on the national character of Britain, the ideals of which Wingate was rare in upholding. Second, commemorations in Palestine took up Wingate’s enthusiastic self-presentation as a soldier in the tradition of the biblical figure of Gideon, further underlining the interactions between Wingate’s self-fashioning and public narratives of his life.

The centrepiece of commemorations in British-mandated Palestine was, once more, a memorial service organised by the Jewish Agency, this time in the Jeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem.⁵⁸³ The *Palestine Post* commented on the ‘striking departure’ from the Jewish religious custom of not delivering funeral orations during the Hebrew calendar month of

⁵⁸² *Haboker*, 07/04/44.

⁵⁸³ *The Palestine Post*, 07/04/44, p.3.

Nissan, in which Passover falls.⁵⁸⁴ The paper noted that special dispensation had been granted (this was not the case for the Great Synagogue service in London, which took place after Passover had been completed). By noon on 6 April 1944, a large crowd had gathered in the hall of the Jerusalem temple. Among those present were the chief Rabbis of Palestine, members of the Jewish Agency Executive and the National Committee, representatives of the national institutions, British government officials and uniformed officers, as well as members of the Jerusalem congregation.⁵⁸⁵ The service opened with a reading from Psalms, Chapter 119, the initial letters of which form the Hebrew equivalent of O-R-D-E. After a reading of the story of Gideon from Chapter 7 of the Book of Judges, Chief Rabbi Herzog rose to deliver the memorial address.⁵⁸⁶ Herzog's speech foreshadowed many of the themes expressed in Hertz's eulogy. The Rabbi hailed Wingate's support for the Zionist cause, declaring his death a 'calamity' to the people of Israel. Like Hertz, the Rabbi took the opportunity to admonish the British government for its perceived failure to honour its commitments to the Jewish community in Palestine. Where Hertz would criticise British policy, Herzog emphasised the national character of the British in his rebuke, raising Wingate as an exemplar of Britain's *former* greatness. Addressing the dead soldier, he declared:

You personified the genuine tradition of the British people, by virtue of which Britain reached the sublime heights of being, among all nations of the world, the one truest to its conscience. To our sorrow, that tradition has weakened in recent years, but I am certain that it will recover. It is your spirit,

⁵⁸⁴ *The Palestine Post*, 07/04/44, p.3.

⁵⁸⁵ *Hatzofe*, 07/04/44.

⁵⁸⁶ Order of Service, IWM Wingate Archive. Chindit Box 5.

Wingate, the same spirit that inspired Arthur James Balfour, which will in the end rest once again upon Britain!⁵⁸⁷

Speaking before a Jerusalem congregation primarily of non-British Jews, Herzog captured the duality in the Zionist movement's attitude to Britain – the country responsible for both the promises, and the ultimate disappointment, of the Balfour Declaration. For Herzog, Britain's failure to deliver on its obligations marked a lapse in national character, a deviation from the 'genuine tradition'. Like Balfour, Wingate personified a moral standard that the nation had failed to uphold.

The tone of Herzog's address reflected the rabbi's own ambivalent position towards the British government. Prior to his time in Palestine he served as rabbi of Belfast (1916-1919), and then Dublin (1919-1922), before being appointed Chief Rabbi of Ireland (1922-1936).⁵⁸⁸ During this time he openly supported Ireland's fight for independence, including the activities of the Irish Republican Army.⁵⁸⁹ In Palestine he was a supporter of Zionist terror group *Irgun*, and, according to his son, former Israeli President Chaim Herzog, 'had much to do with the underground forces and their activities.'⁵⁹⁰ MI5 and the Palestine police both kept close watch on Herzog's activities after the war⁵⁹¹ The rabbi's comments reveal the tensions

⁵⁸⁷ Eulogy reproduced in *Hatzofe*, 07/04/44

⁵⁸⁸ Chaim Herzog, *Living History: A Memoir* (London, 1997), pp.6-25.

⁵⁸⁹ Calder Walton, 'British Intelligence and the Mandate of Palestine: Threats to British National Security Immediately After the Second World War', *Intelligence and National Security* 23 (2008), pp.435-462, p.453.

⁵⁹⁰ Herzog, *Living History*, pp.46-53, p.75.

⁵⁹¹ Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire* (London, 2013), p.96.

which characterised Anglo-Jewish relations in Palestine after the publication of the White Paper.

Herzog's observations on British national character were a recurring theme in commemorations of Wingate in Palestine, as commentators expressed frustration with Britain by extolling the virtues of the Chindit commander. Published in left-wing newspaper *Davar*, the chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive David Ben-Gurion's obituary of Wingate echoed the tension between hope and disillusionment in Herzog's address. Ben-Gurion valorised Wingate as an exemplar of a set of national values that British policy makers had abandoned. Under the header 'He was certain that the error would be rectified, and that the British people would honour the commitment it had given the Jewish people', Ben-Gurion hailed Wingate as 'an uncompromisingly dedicated fighter for the British ideals of justice and brotherhood, between both individuals and nations.'⁵⁹² Tacitly signalling his approval for the subversion of British authority, he went on to describe Wingate's lack of deference to those above him: 'when it seemed to him that a wrong had been done, he was concerned neither with pleasing his superiors nor his career prospects: loyalty to truth, justice, the Bible, came before any other consideration.' For Ben-Gurion, as for Herzog, Wingate's support for the Zionist movement provided a counterweight to British policy in Palestine. 'None of us was

⁵⁹² *Davar*, 02/04/44.

sadder than him about the deviation of British policy in the Land of Israel on the eve of the war.’

British national character was the theme of a long obituary in Tel-Aviv daily newspaper, *Hazman*. This time the author attributed the government’s vacillation on the issue of Palestine to inherent contradictions in the nature of the British people:

The British character is a bundle of contradictions, a thorough mix of good and bad. Extreme practical mindedness together with much sentimentality and romanticism. Cleverness and shrewdness side-by-side with naivety. Zeal for honesty and justice mixed with excellence in hypocrisy and deceit. A deep-rooted democratic sensibility combined with a high regard for being ruled by a decaying upper class. A touching compassion for others’ pain, together with cool, perfectly calm and detached cruelty. Restraint of urges and remarkable stolidity side by side with stormy emotions and enthusiasms. A tendency to weakness and being resigned, mixed with noble heroism and tenacity.⁵⁹³

The article then excluded Wingate from this negative assessment. ‘Such was not the case with Wingate. Moreover, in everything he did he proved that in him, in that one man, was concentrated all that is good in the British character, all the light stored in the soul of that peculiar nation.’

The reference to the ‘decaying upper class’ points to the unexpected projection of a British army officer as a hero of the Jewish trade union movement. A specially convened meeting of the Labour Federation Council lauded the dead soldier.⁵⁹⁴ Once again, Wingate was compared favourably to his countrymen, this time as a figure who transcended narrow class interests. The speaker reminded the assembly that ‘notwithstanding his social class that

⁵⁹³ *Hazman*, 04/04/44.

⁵⁹⁴ *The Palestine Post* 04/04/44, p.3; *Davar*, 04/04/44.

provided military commanders and colonial governors for the British Empire, Wingate was not defined by his class. He rose above its notions, was willing to be lonely and sometimes deeply unpopular, to fight and win his own battles.⁵⁹⁵ The speaker contrasted Wingate's approach to leadership with the disingenuous methods of other commanders:

The way he treated us was, also, never that type of British officer - well known from various lands and historical periods - who, having taken command of a native force, develops patriotic feelings for his soldiers' nation purely in order to inspire them to victory. Wingate possessed the skill and knowledge to uncover, value, and cultivate the Palestinian Jewish Zionist community's latent military capability.

Separating Wingate from the shortcomings typical of others, the speaker transformed the elite officer into a suitable subject for working-class admiration.

The trade unionist's delineation between Wingate and the 'type' of British commander that affects patriotic sentiments in order to inspire 'native' troops echoed Wingate's own criticisms of the methods adopted by T.E. Lawrence examined in chapter two. The distinction would undoubtedly have pleased the Chindit commander. Indeed, it is possible that the speaker made the comments with Lawrence in mind. If so, the contrast between the two marks a rare exception in commemorations of Wingate. More frequently, in Palestine as in Britain, Lawrence was invoked as a point of comparison to Wingate: an archetypal figure that helped define the genre of heroism Wingate embodied.⁵⁹⁶ Thus, one writer in *Hazman* observed, 'Lawrence dreamed of an Arab empire and was thus "Lawrence

⁵⁹⁵ *Davar*, 04/04/44.

⁵⁹⁶ *Davar*, 02/04/44; *Haaretz*, 02/04/44; *Davar*, 07/04/44; *Hazman*, 07/04/44; *Haboker*, 07/04/44.

of Arabia”, Wingate dreamed of Judea’s revival, and shall remain “Wingate of Judea.”⁵⁹⁷ An obituarist in *Haboker* went one step further: ‘he quickly developed a reputation of a new Lawrence – he was dubbed not only “Lawrence of Judea” but also “Lawrence of Abyssinia” and “Lawrence of Burma”⁵⁹⁸ That Wingate should be compared to Lawrence is unsurprising; the familial link between the two marked Lawrence as a recognisable figure to highlight Wingate’s own heroics. In the words of one newspaper, the Chindit commander ‘was actually born with the blood of heroes flowing through his veins.’⁵⁹⁹ The analogies between Wingate and Lawrence appeared so natural – British officers leading foreign soldiers in irregular warfare – that they often overwhelmed the differences between the men in the popular imagination. References to Lawrence further highlight the potency of pre-existing narratives of imperial heroism during the Second World War.

Regardless of Wingate’s strenuous efforts to distance himself from Lawrence, comparisons between the two persisted, both during Wingate’s lifetime and after his death. This phenomenon highlights the limitations placed on the possibilities for masculine self-fashioning by the finite material of the cultural circuit. Graham Dawson has argued that the narrative resources of a culture limit the possibilities for a masculine self in terms of physical appearance and conduct, the values, aspirations, tastes and desires recognised as

⁵⁹⁷ *Hazman*, 07/04/44.

⁵⁹⁸ *Haboker*, 07/04/44.

⁵⁹⁹ *Haboker*, 07/04/44.

“masculine.”⁶⁰⁰ For David Lloyd Owen, Lawrence marked a recognisable mode of masculine heroism which he sought to inhabit as a fighter of irregular warfare in the desert. For Wingate, Lawrence represented a heroic archetype from which he was never fully able to separate himself.

While comparisons with Lawrence highlight the limitations placed by the cultural circuit on Wingate’s masculine self-fashioning, references to another soldier-hero in Palestinian commemoration suggest a more favourable reception of his projected heroic identity. Chapter two of this thesis explored the ways in which Wingate drew on the biblical figure of Gideon to fashion his identity as a Christian soldier. Just as the biblical soldier ‘divided the three hundred into three companies’, Wingate chose to operate three night squads and quoted the story of Gideon when delivering training lectures on strategy to the men of the SNS.⁶⁰¹ As with General Gordon in Britain, in Palestine, where the story of Gideon as liberator of Israel had particular resonance, Wingate’s self-representation as the biblical soldier-hero was further disseminated through commemorations. At the service held in the Jeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem, the reading was taken from the story of Gideon in chapters 7 and 8 of the Book of Judges.⁶⁰² A commentator writing in *Haaretz* reported that the service was in ‘impeccable taste’ and that ‘the story of Gideon had been one of

⁶⁰⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.23. Also see Ben Griffin, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem’, *Gender & History* 30 (2018), pp.377-400, p.386.

⁶⁰¹ Christopher Sykes, *Orde Wingate* (London, 1959), p.174.

⁶⁰² Order of Service, IWM Archive, Black folder.

[Wingate's] favourites.' The writer went on to note that Wingate read the same passages to the men of the SNS. The *Palestine Post* reported that 3,000 mourners from farming settlements 'stood with bowed heads' at an open-air memorial service in Ein-Harod while a schoolboy gave the same reading.⁶⁰³ Such ceremony affirmed Wingate's status as a Christian hero in the tradition of Gideon.

Wingate's posturing as Gideon was further endorsed in obituaries, with writers transforming the Chindit commander into a modern incarnation of the biblical soldier. A report in *Haaretz* linked Wingate's religious faith and military thinking to emphasise 'a unique combination: a man of action and a man of vision, a dreamer warrior.'⁶⁰⁴ Making explicit Wingate's connection to his hero, the article advised readers that 'in Judges chapter 7 you will find Wingate's military doctrine. However, this modern Gideon had at his disposal air transport and wireless communication'.⁶⁰⁵ Similar allusions were made in a *Palestine Post* article recounting Wingate's operations in Ethiopia. Where Gideon armed himself with 'the sword of the Lord' (Judges 7:18), the article announced that in his Gideon Force, Wingate forged his own 'sword of rare metal.'⁶⁰⁶ Citing Judges 15:8, the writer observed that Wingate's strategy was to smite the Italian army in Ethiopia 'hip and thigh.' A headline in *Haboker* declared 'Wingate - a Gideon of our own times.'⁶⁰⁷ This time, the writer appeared to

⁶⁰³ *Palestine Post*, 13/04/1944, p.3; *Mishmar*, 13/04/1944

⁶⁰⁴ *Haaretz*, 02/04/44.

⁶⁰⁵ *Haaretz*, 02/04/44.

⁶⁰⁶ *The Palestine Post*, 09/04/44.

⁶⁰⁷ *Haboker*, 07/04/44.

register Wingate's conscious efforts to mould himself into a soldier in the tradition of Gideon. Wingate 'meditated upon his hero day and night' and even as a child 'saw himself as a Gideon leading his camel mounted troops through the desert.' In this analysis, the foundation of Wingate's status as a modern Gideon lay deeper than superficial similarities; it was the product of a lifetime of meditation and discipline.

The most striking public-ation of Wingate's self-representation as Gideon came in a *Haaretz* article describing the activities of the SNS. Under a subheading quoting Judges 7, the article relayed Wingate's unorthodox attempt to re-enact Gideon's routing of the Midianites using military trumpets rather than the rams' horns used by Gideon's men. Although registering the 'consternation of the SNS sergeants' at receiving the command to blow their trumpets to 'let Midian know that the People of Israel is going to war with it', the article nonetheless followed Wingate's biblical interpretation of the operation.⁶⁰⁸ When noting the success of the engagement the following day against the rebels, the article noted 'and indeed, after a while the Lord did deliver Midian into the hands of the People of Israel.' In narratives such as these, Wingate was not merely inspired by, or akin to, Gideon. He *became* Gideon.

Conclusion

⁶⁰⁸ *Haaretz*, 21/04/44.

Reflecting on the twentieth century's failure to 'produce military heroes in the old model', John MacKenzie pointed to the advent of mass, industrial warfare as an arena which produced countless ordinary heroes but 'very few, if any, among the leadership.'⁶⁰⁹ Orde Wingate 'may have come close', MacKenzie argued, 'but his death, instead of confirming his heroic status, in some ways pre-empted it.'⁶¹⁰ As this thesis has shown, Wingate enjoyed a remarkable degree of fame during the war. But Mackenzie is right that deprived of the opportunity to oversee *Thursday*, Wingate did not achieve the highest level of acclaim in Britain, although the condolence letters in the IWM collection offer glimpses of the intense emotional investment the Chindit commander generated among some Britons.

Wingate's status in Israel provides an interesting counterpoint. This chapter has shown how commemorations in British Mandated Palestine matched, perhaps exceeded, those in Wingate's home country. The numerous streets, squares and landmarks across Israel today that bear Wingate's name testify to the reverence he continues to inspire among people who adopted him as their own hero. In Israel, where narratives of Wingate are bound up in the foundation stories of the nation, his reputation more closely fulfils MacKenzie's definition of heroic myth.

The various commemorations of Wingate indicate the influence of the heroic persona he fashioned during his lifetime. Wingate's self-image as an exemplary leader and visionary

⁶⁰⁹ MacKenzie, 'Afterword', p.976.

⁶¹⁰ MacKenzie, 'Afterword', p.977.

military strategist, outlined in various writings throughout his career, was central to public narratives of his life after his death. In Britain, Wingate's self-representation as a soldier in the tradition of the Christian imperial hero was repeated by most commentators, who readily positioned narratives of the Chindit commander's life alongside those of other heroes of empire. The celebration of Wingate as a specifically Christian hero further exposes the persistence of faith in public life in England during the 1940s, supporting Matthew Grimley's assertion that the idea of the English as a Christian people 'still resonated with a public that saw itself as Christian.'⁶¹¹

Comparing official and Jewish commemorations highlights the fluidity of Wingate's heroic reputation, as different communities projected different meanings onto the Chindit commander's life. In commemorations endorsed by the state and disseminated in the popular press, Wingate was hailed as a British national hero whose leadership exemplified the virtue of the country's defence of imperial possessions. Among the Jewish community in Britain, some struck a subversive note, politicising Wingate's heroic reputation and expressing the contemporary concerns of the Zionist movement. These same concerns were echoed and amplified in British Mandated Palestine, where commemorations frequently expressed dissatisfaction with government policy towards Palestine. In these Palestinian

⁶¹¹ Grimley, 'The Religion of Englishness', p.906.

commemorations, some commentators reflected on the character of the British, hailing Wingate as the exemplar of a moral standard that the country had failed to uphold.

Commemorations of Wingate highlight both the possibilities and the limitations of self-fashioning. Often, the narratives of male heroism that Wingate drew on were recognised by commentators and further disseminated through acts of commemoration and in the mass media. Wingate was aligned with the Christian soldier-heroes, the explorers and the biblical figure of Gideon who powerfully shaped his own self-image. Yet, in becoming a public narrative, Wingate's life and the significance of his ideas and actions were removed from his control and left open to broader interpretation. Accordingly, associations were drawn between Wingate and other less desired heroic figures on the cultural circuit of male heroism. Central to Wingate's self-fashioning was his opposition to T. E. Lawrence. Yet narratives of Lawrence proved too potent during the Second World War, shaping popular understandings of the heroic masculinity Wingate was seen to embody. An established and recognisable script of male heroism available on the cultural circuit, narratives of Lawrence over-whelmed Wingate's opposition, with the Chindit commander celebrated as 'a new Lawrence'.

Chapter 5: Comics, Empire and the British Remembrance of the Second World War, 1958-1978

Between 1939 and 1945, close to five million citizens of the British Empire joined the military services.⁶¹² The imperial nature of the Second World War is encapsulated by the presence of West Indian volunteers among RAF aircrew at English bases during the Battle of Britain, of Indian soldiers fighting Italian troops in the Libyan Desert, and West African infantrymen among the Chindit columns in the Burmese jungle. Churchill's defiant speech in June 1940 is remembered today for its solemn pledge to 'fight on the beaches,' but equally significant was the reassurance that if Britain were subjugated, 'our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle.' Despite the Eurocentric tone of its remembrance today, the Second World War was viewed at the time as an imperial struggle, not only by politicians like Churchill but also by ordinary people around the world. It is striking, then, that the imperial nature of the conflict has, until recently, been 'suppressed' in British popular memory of the war, only coming into focus in the last two decades through commemorations such as the 2002 opening of the Commonwealth Memorial

⁶¹² Allan Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody Minded: The British Soldiers Goes to War* (London, 2015), p.xviii.

Gates at Hyde Park, or the Imperial War Museum's 2016 exhibition based on oral testimony from service personnel and civilians who came to Britain during the war.⁶¹³

Previous chapters have analysed how narratives of imperial heroism shaped both the self-fashioning of British commanders, and representations of special-forces soldiers. The following chapter extends my research on wartime narratives to examine post-war representations of soldierly heroism in 'picture library' war comics, building on recent scholarship on the relationship between British cultural memory of the Second World War and the imperial dimensions of the conflict. I have chosen to focus on war comics for three principal reasons. First, while other cultural forms have attracted extensive scholarly attention, particularly war films, comics have generated surprisingly little academic research, perhaps overlooked as juvenilia of little artistic value. Secondly, although neglected by scholars, these war comics attracted a huge readership and were a significant vehicle for the transmission of stories about the war, a vital component of the cultural circuit. Thirdly, although the broad influence of war comics has been widely acknowledged, by focusing on a particular format – the 'picture library' exemplified by *Commando* – my research generates clear conclusions about the prevalence of different settings (desert, jungle, imperial city et. al.), and about changes over time. The chapter argues that imperial themes and racial

⁶¹³ Patrick Finney, 'Isaac Fadoyebo's Journey: Remembering the British Empire's Second World War', in Patrick Finney (ed.), *Remembering the Second World War* (London, 2017), pp.71-88, p.73.

stereotypes remained a significant facet of the British remembrance of the Second World War through to the 1970s.

The broader legacies of the cultural circuit that shaped the self-fashioning of Wingate and Lloyd Owen can be traced into popular boys' culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Narratives of imperial adventure, martial heroism in exotic climates, and of battles fought against (and occasionally alongside) racially different indigenous soldiers were a regular feature of boys' story papers and comic strips. British popular culture during the 1950s was saturated with war narratives, as a cycle of soldiers' memoirs, popular histories, biographies, and fictional books and films met popular demand for war stories. By the 1960s, the units that Wingate and Lloyd Owen commanded had themselves been amalgamated into the repertoire of images and narratives in the cultural circuit of male heroism. In the fictional stories which dominated the picture library comic format,⁶¹⁴ the heroic exploits of Long Range Desert Group-style (LRDG) units in the desert, and Chindit-style special forces in the jungle, regularly featured. Often, stories set within recognisable historical campaigns were peopled with fictional characters, perhaps to balance authenticity with the risk of falsification. Direct references to the likes of Orde Wingate or David Lloyd Owen are therefore precluded from the picture library. However, Wingate often featured in educational strips such as *True War* or *World of Wonder*; Lloyd Owen, meanwhile, was featured once in a prose story in the *Lion Book for*

⁶¹⁴ In contrast, some comics such as *Eagle* regularly featured strips and reports about real characters.

Boys in 1961⁶¹⁵. Such appearances make clear that both men represent the kind of figures that picture libraries drew on to create their fictional protagonists. Just as Wingate and Lloyd Owen had internalised stories of Gordon and Lawrence, the young readers of comic books were invited to imagine themselves as Chindits and members of the Long Range Desert Group. This chapter therefore further illustrates the link between individual self-fashioning and the cultural circuit that extends throughout this thesis.

A series of works have explored the relationship between empire and British remembrance of the Second World War, with historians in broad agreement about the absence of the imperial nature of the conflict in British popular memory. Some scholars have argued that the emphasis upon key events of the war in Europe has eclipsed the imperial theatres of conflict. Summarising of the British ‘myth’ of the war, Mark Connelly noted the prominence of a few ‘signal events,’ before observing the particular absence of the Far Eastern war in British remembrance.⁶¹⁶ In a recent chapter, Patrick Finney took up these ‘signal events’ and argued that a narrow focus on the ‘iconic’ moments in Britain and Europe – Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, the Normandy landings – had left little space for other important episodes or theatres of the war.⁶¹⁷ Other work has highlighted the absence of non-Europeans in British popular memory of the conflict. Ashley Jackson, for example, has argued that the focus on the European war has obscured the impact of the conflict on

⁶¹⁵ *World Of Wonder* 139, 18/11/1972; *True War* 2, 16/07/1978; *Lion Book of War Adventures* 1962, pp.80-83.

⁶¹⁶ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004), p.2.

⁶¹⁷ Finney, ‘Isaac Fadoyebo’s Journey’, p.73.

colonized peoples, as well as British reliance on colonial resources.⁶¹⁸ Wendy Webster traced the *promotion* in wartime propaganda of the idea of a ‘People’s Empire’ of equal Commonwealth partners which, she argued, was quickly forgotten after the war.⁶¹⁹ Wendy Ugolini highlighted a similar amnesia in her examination of post-war hostility towards commonwealth servicemen, whose presence in Britain had been tolerated, if not welcomed, during the conflict.⁶²⁰ As these works indicate, a Eurocentric interpretation of the Second World War has undoubtedly proven resilient in British remembrance of the conflict.

Given the prominence of Empire in popular and official wartime discourse, the apparent post-war amnesia regarding the imperial nature of the conflict is striking.⁶²¹ Paul Gilroy has argued that the memory of the war in Britain served to distract from rapid imperial decline in the immediate post-war decades, making the country’s reduced status bearable.⁶²² For Gilroy, ‘remembering’ the war served to facilitate a silence around Empire. The relative absence of post-war representations of the imperial dimensions of the conflict appears to support Gilroy’s conclusions. The role of the British Fourteenth Army – a multi-national force of Commonwealth soldiers that liberated Burma – remains so neglected in narratives of

⁶¹⁸ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London, 2006), p.1; Ashley Jackson, ‘The British Empire, 1939-1945’ in Richard Bosworth, Joseph Maiolo (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume II: Politics and Ideology* (Cambridge, 2015), pp.558-580.

⁶¹⁹ Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (London, 2007), p.88. See also Wendy Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford, 2018), pp.225-258.

⁶²⁰ Wendy Ugolini, ‘“When Are You Going Back?”: Memory, Ethnicity and the British Home Front’ in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp. 175-194.

⁶²¹ Jackson, *The British Empire*, pp.3-9.

⁶²² Paul Gilroy, *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London, 2004), pp.95-132.

the Second World War that it has even been dubbed ‘the forgotten army.’⁶²³ In his hugely influential memoirs, Churchill’s examination of the Far Eastern campaign was brief and unsatisfactory, while popular war films of the 1950s rarely featured the war in the Far East (except in the form of prisoner of war stories about western soldiers).⁶²⁴ The Desert War was also relatively absent from popular 1950s cinema. When featured, the war was usually portrayed as a struggle between British, Italian and German troops, obscuring the role played by colonial soldiers, or the impact of the war on the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa and the Middle-East.⁶²⁵ Yet, as this chapter argues, if we look at alternative sites of memory formation to those usually examined by cultural historians of the Second World War, we find that Empire and imperial fronts featured more prominently than scholars have suggested. Martin Francis has demonstrated the efficacy of this approach in his examination of lesser known 1950s war films. By looking beyond the cluster of celebrated texts, Francis identified the representation of the North African campaign in imperial terms which, he argued, can be read as meditations on imperial decline.⁶²⁶

This chapter follows Francis in exploring a neglected site in the creation and dissemination of popular memory of the Second World War in Britain. It examines the

⁶²³ Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, pp. 248-256.

⁶²⁴ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2007), pp. 294-313; Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson, ‘Introduction: “Keep Calm and Carry On”3. The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain’ in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp. 1-24.

⁶²⁵ Martin Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema’, in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp. 111-132.

⁶²⁶ Francis, ‘Remembering War’, pp. 126-127.

representation of the conflict in British comics of the 1960s and early 1970s, a medium that produced new depictions of the war which were greedily consumed every week, primarily by boys and young men. The chapter generates fresh insights into the relationship between race, empire and the memory of the Second World War in post-war Britain by analysing representations of the Desert War and the Far Eastern campaign in British comics. Comics reveal the existence of narratives of the Second World War which competed with the Eurocentric memory of the conflict identified by Finney. They demonstrate that Empire was far from absent when constructing the myths of Britain and the Second World War. The chapter develops three principal arguments. First, it makes the case for comics as source of memory production in the 1950s and 1960s, arguing that a focus on popular films has obscured the circulation of alternative Second World War narratives during this period. Second, the chapter explores the imperial connotations of comic book depictions of the North African campaign, positioning comics as a counterpoint to the notion of the 'empty desert' identified by Francis in the popular war films of the 1950s. Rather than a vast, empty space in which British, Italian and German soldiers fought for supremacy, comic books registered ways in which the indigenous inhabitants of the desert interacted with the Second World War. Finally, this chapter explores the depiction of the war in the Far East. It argues that comics did not shy away from aspects of the Far Eastern campaign which were largely ignored in 1950s British cinema, including the humiliating retreats from Burma and Malaya, and the fall of Singapore. In place of a 'forgotten army', comics frequently registered the role of non-white colonial soldiers and indigenous guerrillas in the liberation of Burma.

1. Boys' comics and the popular memory of the Second World War

The 1950s and 1960s were the golden age of British comics.⁶²⁷ The lifting of paper rationing in 1953 and continued restrictions on the import of American titles until 1959 saw the industry grow rapidly, as picture-strip stories displaced story papers as the preferred reading material for boys and young men.⁶²⁸ The period saw publishers D.C Thompson and Amalgamated Press establish their dominance of the market, while smaller publishers such as Hulton Press, J.B Allen and Len Miller vied to produce popular cheaper publications. With an extensive working-class readership, weekly comic sales reached around 14 million during the 1950s, although the true readership was undoubtedly much higher, as publications were passed on and swapped after reading.⁶²⁹ In the early 1950s war picture-strip stories appeared less frequently than those about cowboys, swashbucklers or sporting heroes, but by the end of the decade, depictions of the Second World War had become ubiquitous in boys' comics. A key turning point came in 1958 with the introduction of war-themed 'picture libraries' – pocket sized comics which featured a single, self-contained story focusing specifically on the Second World War, rather than a collection of shorter strips.⁶³⁰ Amalgamated led the way

⁶²⁷ For British comics in this period see Adam Riches et al, *When the Comics Went to War* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp. 126-152; James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London, 2011), pp.76-107.

⁶²⁸ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.76.

⁶²⁹ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.101, pp.76-77.

⁶³⁰ Mike Conroy, *War Comics: A Graphic History* (Sussex, 2009), p.108.

with *War Picture Library* in 1958, following up with *Air Ace Picture Library* (1960), *Battle Picture Library* (1961) and *War at Sea Picture Library* (1961). D.C Thompson responded in 1961 with *Commando*, while smaller publishers Micron and C. H Pearson released *Combat Picture Library* (1959) and *Air War Picture Stories* (1961) respectively.⁶³¹ Affordably priced at a shilling, the rapid proliferation of the format testified to its popularity with readers: the war picture libraries each printed six new stories a month in the 1960s, with ten thousand issues published between 1960 and 1992.⁶³² Most publications were discontinued in the 1980s but *Commando* remains in print today and has achieved something of a cult following, still selling over five thousand issues in September 2018.⁶³³ The two most popular titles, *War Picture Library* and *Commando* provide the principal sources for this chapter, which covers the period from the format's inception in 1958 until 1978 just before its rapid decline.

Like the shorter comic strips, picture libraries celebrated the virtues of martial heroism performed by (predominantly) British and Commonwealth soldiers from every branch of the services and in every theatre of the war. The longer format allowed greater character development and more complex storylines, lending the publications a psychological realism usually absent from shorter strips.⁶³⁴ Special operations provided fertile material for depictions of heroism, although the stories were just as likely to feature small bands of

⁶³¹ Chapman, *British Comics*, pp. 95-96.

⁶³² Conroy, *War Comics*, p.108; Chapman, *British Comics*, p.96.

⁶³³ <https://www.commandocomics.com> [Accessed on 01/10/2018]

⁶³⁴ Conroy, *War Comics*, p.108.

regular soldiers.⁶³⁵ Many of the early writers, artists and editors had seen combat during the war, augmenting the picture libraries' claims to represent battlefield action realistically.⁶³⁶ At *War Picture Library*, writers Ken Bulmer, Val Holding, Colin Thomas and Norman Walker all served during the conflict, as did editor Ted Bensberg.⁶³⁷ The first two editors of *Commando* – Charles Checkley and Ian Forbes – were Second World War veterans, as were regular story writers Eric Hebden and R. A. Montague.⁶³⁸

War comics in this period were a resolutely masculine format. All the strips which I have examined were written by men. Women featured very rarely in stories, most frequently as anonymous, passive victims threatened by violent male enemies. Although there were occasional references to mothers, wives and girlfriends, romantic love stories were not a feature of the genre. Honour and duty inspired male heroism, not 'getting the girl'. These resolutely homosocial environments drew on the long tradition of boys' story papers. The absence of women from the pages of war comics also indicates the target audience of boys and young men.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁵ Mark Connelly, David Willcox, 'Are you Tough Enough? The Image of Special Forces in British Popular Culture, 1939-2004', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25 (2005), pp.1-25.

⁶³⁶ Conroy, *War Comics*, p108; Chapman, *War Comics*, p.98.

⁶³⁷ James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London, 2011), p.98.

⁶³⁸ Information provided through email correspondence with Georgia Battle, Magazine Journalist, DC Thompson Media, 28/11/2018

⁶³⁹ Although the target audience was male, future research could examine the extent to which women consumed and enjoyed the format.

British comics and picture libraries were distinct from their American counterparts by their claims to offer an authentic representation of combat. As Ted Bensberg observed of *War Picture Library*, ‘we aimed for strong, believable human stories set against a background of exciting and realistic action.’⁶⁴⁰ Accordingly, stories in publications like *War Picture Library*, *Battle Picture Library* and *Commando* were set in real locations, the drama often revolving around recognisable events from the conflict.⁶⁴¹ Care was taken to represent soldiers’ insignia, equipment and vehicles as accurately as possible.⁶⁴² Although the stories were most often fantasies of male heroism, such attention to detail reinforced the comics’ claims to offer a realistic depiction of the war. The boundaries between history and fiction were further blurred by the inclusion of Second World War facts and quizzes for readers to test their knowledge, printed on the inside covers of the publications.⁶⁴³

War comics were part of a process of ‘remembering’ the war for an immediate post-war generation.⁶⁴⁴ The historian Brian Edwards neatly encapsulated this process in his examination of post-war comics: “I recall a teacher being astounded by a usually reluctant pupil’s extensive knowledge of the North African campaign, only to scold him when he

⁶⁴⁰ Quoted in Steve Holland, ‘Introduction’ in *Let ‘Em Have It: 12 of the Best Battle Picture Library Comic Books Ever!* (London, 2008), p.5.

⁶⁴¹ A few examples: *War Picture Library* no.1, ‘Fight back to Dunkirk’ (1958); *War Picture Library* no.51, ‘Destination Alamein’ (1960); *Commando* no.288, ‘The Terror of Tobruk’ (1967); *Commando* no.187, ‘D-Day Plus’ (1965).

⁶⁴² Philip Cass, Jonathan Ford, “‘What Are You Waiting For, Diggers?’: The ANZAC Image in *Commando* Comics”, *Pacific Journalism Review* 23 (2017), pp.197-215, p.207.

⁶⁴³ For example the inside cover of *Commando* 1331 (1970) challenged readers to correctly identify drawings of infantry weapons from the war.

⁶⁴⁴ Geoff Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’, *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001), pp.818-838, p.819.

volunteered that he had gained his knowledge from *War Picture Library* no.1, *The Rats of Tobruk*.⁶⁴⁵ The pupil's appetite for information regarding the war was undoubtedly typical of many during the 1950s and 1960s, who looked beyond official cultures of memory for their understanding of the conflict. Such representations of the Second World War in comic books provided a framework which complemented more conventional forms of historical knowledge. Indeed, as Edward's recollection indicates, the comic book had the potential to appeal to the imagination of young boys more than any other medium.

Given the popularity of war comics in the post-war decades, their contribution to the popular memory of the conflict has received surprisingly little attention, particularly in comparison to the war films of the same period. Since Andy Medhurst's 1984 call for a critical re-evaluation of 1950s war films, the genre has been highlighted as a crucial site for the production and transmission of popular memory of the Second World War.⁶⁴⁶ Dismissed by contemporary critics for their social conservatism and self-indulgent nostalgia, war films of the 1950s have since served historians as a window into the changing configurations of class and gender in post-war Britain.⁶⁴⁷ This emphasis is understandable: some eighty titles

⁶⁴⁵ Brian Edwards, 'The Popularization of War in Comic Strips, 1958-1988', *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996), pp. 181-189, p.185.

⁶⁴⁶ Andy Medhurst, '1950s War Films' in Geoff Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London, 1984), pp. 35-38.

⁶⁴⁷ For example, Neil Rattigan, *This is England: British War Films and the People's War, 1939-1945* (London, 2001); Neil Rattigan, 'The Last Gasp of the Middle Class: British War Films of the 1950s', in Wheeler Winston Dixon (ed.), *Reviewing British Cinema, 1900-1992* (New York, 1994), pp.143-153; Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From*

dealing with the Second World War were released during the 1950s, and weekly cinema audiences were still as high as 14.5 million in 1959.⁶⁴⁸ Further, as television eclipsed cinema in the 1960s, the transition of the war film to the small screen ensured that the genre continued to influence successive generations.⁶⁴⁹ War films were lent authority as ‘vectors of memory’ by the professed attempts of filmmakers to represent the conflict as authentically as possible, often adopting a quasi-documentary style which made post-war films such as *Dunkirk* (1958) and *The Dam Busters* (1955) resemble those made during the conflict.⁶⁵⁰ Other releases adapted autobiographical accounts written by former servicemen (*The Wooden Horse* 1950, *The Cruel Sea* 1953, *The Colditz Story* 1955) or were shot with the co-operation of the War Office (*Ill Met by Moonlight* 1957), the Admiralty (*Above us the Waves* 1955) or the Air Ministry (*Reach for the Sky* 1956). The truth-claims of such films made them particularly potent in transmitting interpretations of the national past to audiences.

Dickens to Dads Army (Manchester, 1997), pp.135-144; James Chapman, ‘Our Finest Hour Revisited. The Second World War in British Feature Films Since 1945’, *Journal of Popular British Cinema* 1(1998), pp.63-75; John Ramsden, ‘Refocusing the People’s War: British War Films of the 1950s’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998), pp.35-63; Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War* (London, 2000), pp.179-238; Christine Gerahty, *British Cinema in the 1950s: Gender, Genre and the “New Look”* (London, 2000); Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema* (London, 2003), pp.28-46; Phillip Gillet, *The British Working Class in Post-war Film* (Manchester, 2003), pp.28-35; Penny Summerfield, ‘Film and the Popular Memory of the Second World War in Britain 1950-1959’ in Phillip Levine, Susan Grayzel (eds.), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain* (2008), pp. 157-175, p. 157; Penny Summerfield, ‘Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s’, *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), pp.935-957; Penny Summerfield, ‘Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War, 1939-1960’, *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (2011), pp.330-353.

⁶⁴⁸ James Chapman, *War and Film* (London, 2008), p. 198; Nicholas Pronay, ‘The British Post-Bellum Cinema: A survey of the Films Relating to World War II Made in Britain Between 1945 and 1960’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8 (1988), pp.39-54, p.39.

⁶⁴⁹ Ramsden, ‘Refocusing the People’s War’, p. 36.

⁶⁵⁰ Summerfield, ‘Film and the Popular Memory of the Second World War in Britain 1950-1959’, p.157; Ramsden, ‘Refocusing’, p.45.

Yet the focus on critically acclaimed, commercially successful war films has produced a misleadingly homogenous impression of the construction of the conflict available in popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s. The most popular war films of the 1950s depicted a just war fought and won by the British Armed Forces, almost invariably overlooking the role of allied or imperial troops.⁶⁵¹ They celebrated the heroism of self-controlled upper- and middle-class officers in command of loyal lower-class servicemen, and largely ignored the roles of women, civilians and merchant seamen.⁶⁵² The war in Europe was the preferred subject matter: of the thirty highest earning war films released during the 1950s only three featured the North African campaign (*The Red Beret* 1953, *Ice Cold in Alex* 1958 and *Sea of Sand* 1958), while only two portrayed the war in the Far East (*The Bridge on the River Kwai* 1957 and *Camp on Blood Island* 1958).⁶⁵³ Historians have begun to look beyond the cluster of celebrated 1950s war films to more obscure works to reveal competing narratives in circulation during the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to Francis' examination of representations of the North African campaign, Penny Summerfield has drawn attention to neglected titles which depicted women's wartime experiences.⁶⁵⁴ Summerfield demonstrated that despite the almost exclusively male focus of popular 1950s and 1960s war films, complete amnesia

⁶⁵¹ Summerfield, 'Film', p.175; Summerfield, 'Divisions', p.351; Francis, 'Remembering War', p.114, 119.

⁶⁵² Summerfield, 'Film', p.172.

⁶⁵³ Information on highest earning 1950s films taken from list in the appendix of Ramsden, 'Refocusing', p.62. A lurid exploitation thriller from Hammer Studios, Val Guest's *Camp on Blood Island* (1958) is an outlier among other more sombre depictions of war listed here. Despite its tagline – "This is not just a story - it is based on a brutal truth" – the production values and aesthetic style of the film do not bolster the same claim to realism attributed to other 1950s war films. The same director's less successful *Yesterday's Enemy* (1959) took a more nuanced and morally ambivalent approach to the conflict in Burma.

⁶⁵⁴ Francis, 'Remembering War', pp111-132; Penny Summerfield, 'Public Memory or Public Amnesia? British Women of the Second World War in Popular Films of the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009), pp.935-957.

concerning women's role in the conflict did not prevail. Both studies indicate that there was no single, uncontested memory of the conflict in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s: alternate interpretations existed alongside the hegemonically dominant construction emerging from popular cinema.

Scholarly examination of the cultural memory of the Second World War has tended to group comics alongside film and other representations of the conflict in popular culture. John Ramsden argued that, rather than create their own interpretation of the conflict, war films of the 1950s and 1960s 'reinforced a general image of the war' available in popular literature, memoirs and comic books.⁶⁵⁵ Despite registering the role of comics in the production of popular memory, Ramsden asserted that films and comics produced identical narratives of the Second World War. Similarly, Geoff Eley acknowledged the role of comics as one part of a 'rich arena of memory production' which also included film, television drama, documentary, comedy and popular fiction.⁶⁵⁶ Like Ramsden, Eley did not attempt to explore the specific construction of the war emerging from comics. In his exploration of the relationship between adventure narratives and the imagining of masculine subjectivities, Graham Dawson approached comic books as part of a broader 'pleasure culture of war' also encompassing war-related toys, games and models marketed at children.⁶⁵⁷ In a similar fashion, Michael Paris explored the representation of war in British popular culture – including comic books

⁶⁵⁵ Ramsden, 'Refocusing', pp.40-43, p.45.

⁶⁵⁶ Eley, 'Finding the People's war', p.819.

⁶⁵⁷ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Oxon, 1994), p.236.

and juvenile literature – to argue that warfare was consistently sanitised and romanticised to appeal to boys and young men.⁶⁵⁸ These works highlight the importance of comics in shaping the popular memory of the conflict, but offer only limited analysis of comics as a distinctive site of memory formation in their own right.

A few specialist studies have explored the ideologies which underpinned British war comics in this period. Brian Edwards examined the influence of the genre in promoting an enthusiasm for narratives of war among boys in the post-war decades. Edwards suggested that for boys born between 1950 and 1988, the construction of the popular memory of the Second World War can ‘be accredited in part at the very least to comic books.’⁶⁵⁹ Despite arguing for the recognition of war comics as a valuable source, Edwards’ study nevertheless does little more towards an account of the genre’s construction of the war than note its focus on ‘gung-ho soldier heroes.’⁶⁶⁰ John Sutherland also suggested that war comics presented war as ‘the arena of honour, heroism and ethical violence.’⁶⁶¹ Both Edwards and Sutherland largely followed Ramsden and Eley in substituting a broad survey of the celebration of warfare for close textual analysis of comics. Alexander Clarkson included British picture libraries in his examination of the construction of an idealised masculinity in war comics of the 1960s, asserting that the Second World War played a crucial role in ‘popular memory

⁶⁵⁸ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London, 2000), pp.222-261.

⁶⁵⁹ Edwards, ‘The Popularization’, p.186.

⁶⁶⁰ Edwards, ‘The Popularization’, p.183.

⁶⁶¹ John Sutherland, ‘The Comic Side of War’, *Financial Times* 13/12/2008

across Europe and America' creating 'a mass audience for war comics.'⁶⁶² Clarkson argued that British comics promoted an ethos of heroic, military masculinity, presenting the Second World War as an 'ideologically straightforward fight against a brutal and unthinking enemy.'⁶⁶³ In a similar study of the gendered meanings behind Australian war comics, Ross Laurie argued that warfare was presented to readers as a 'masculine civic duty which should come easily to men.'⁶⁶⁴ While these works have highlighted the celebration of war as a worthy masculine endeavour in comics, and have hinted at the relationship between the genre and popular memory of the conflict, they have done little to distinguish the ways in which comic book representations differed from those in war films.

A more recent study by James Chapman has examined the divergence between the two genres in the production of memory of the Second World War. Noting the status of comics alongside 1950s war films as 'part of an ideological project to present the Second World War as a national achievement', Chapman considered the representation of class and race in both.⁶⁶⁵ The social politics of war comics, he argued, marked a key area of difference from cinematic narratives of the conflict. While war films tended to celebrate the leadership of middle and upper-class officers, the heroes of comics were just as likely to be lower-ranked, working-class soldiers.⁶⁶⁶ Reflecting the predominantly working-class readership of

⁶⁶² Alexander Clarkson, 'Virtual Heroes: Boys, Masculinity and Historical Memory in War Comics, 1945-1995', *THYMOS Journal of Boyhood Studies* 2 (2008), pp.175-185, p.176.

⁶⁶³ Clarkson, 'Virtual Heroes', p.177.

⁶⁶⁴ Ross Laurie, 'Masculinities and War Comics', *Journal of Australian Studies* 23 (1999), pp.114-121, p.120.

⁶⁶⁵ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.96.

⁶⁶⁶ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.101.

comics, the archetype of the officer-hero was certainly less prevalent, although not entirely absent from comic book depictions of the war.⁶⁶⁷ In this respect, comics suggest the resilience of the egalitarian ideas which underpinned the ‘People’s War’ during a period in which films appeared to replace wartime populism with narratives of elite, individual heroism.⁶⁶⁸

Chapman found common ground between comics and film in their privileging of narratives which featured white British and Commonwealth soldiers.⁶⁶⁹ For Chapman, the focus in comics on theatres of war in which British and Commonwealth armed forces played a major role – Burma, North Africa, Italy, France, Greece, New Guinea – and the exclusion of other allied troops, echoed the ‘Anglocentric narratives’ of 1950s war films.⁶⁷⁰ As films and comics were part of the same ‘ideological project’ described by Chapman to reinforce a narrative of the war as Britain’s ‘finest hour’, their mutual emphasis on arenas in which British troops fought is unsurprising.⁶⁷¹ Yet, as noted above, popular war films of the 1950s overwhelmingly favoured the war in Europe rather than its imperial theatres. The preponderance of comic book stories featuring North Africa and the Far East marked a significant departure from the Eurocentric narratives emerging from war films, bringing the imperial nature of the conflict into view. Further, while the heroes of British comics were

⁶⁶⁷ Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p.245.

⁶⁶⁸ Rattigan, *This is England*; Rattigan, ‘The Last Gasp of the Middle Class’, p.143-150; Ramsden, ‘Refocusing the People’s War’, pp.46-50; Richards, *Film and National Identity*, p.130, p.135, p.144; Summerfield, ‘Film and the Popular of the Second World War’, pp. 172-173; Penny Summerfield, ‘Divisions at Sea: Class, Gender, Race, and Nation in Maritime Films of the Second World War, 1939-1960’, *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (2011), pp.330-353, p.352.

⁶⁶⁹ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.98.

⁶⁷⁰ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.98-101.

⁶⁷¹ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.98.

usually white, British and Commonwealth soldiers, there remained space for the depiction of non-white soldiers and colonized peoples, either as allies of the British, as enemies, or even as indifferent observers of the war.

Examining representations of the Second World War in British comics of the 1950s and 1960s brings race and empire back into consideration when analysing the popular memory of the conflict. If the imperial dimensions of the war were largely absent from popular films, they regularly took centre stage in comic books. The popularity of the genre in the 1950s and 1960s problematises Gilroy's assertion that the popular memory of the Second World War suppressed thoughts of Empire. Every week, millions of boys and young men in Britain (as well as in Australia and New Zealand) read stories set in the imperial theatres of war, featuring white British and Commonwealth soldiers alongside non-white comrades and indigenous inhabitants. Comics readily depicted episodes of the Second World War often assumed by historians of film to be erased from the cultural memory of the conflict.⁶⁷² Close analysis of war comics demonstrates that film was not the only popular medium that produced and transmitted popular memory of the Second World War in the decades following the conflict, and that narratives which focused on the war in Europe did not go unchallenged.

⁶⁷² Connelly, *We Can Take It!*, pp.250-254. See also Noakes, Pattinson, *Introduction: Keep Calm and Carry On*, pp. 12-13.

2. The Desert War in British Comics: Representations of Hostile Arabs

In their repeated visits to the North African campaign – though marked by crude orientalism, and the lurid, often absurd, plotlines typical of the genre – British comics and picture libraries of the 1960s and 1970s nevertheless allowed a unique space in the narrative for the inhabitants of the desert, ascribing to them a range of possible responses to the conflict. Contrasting with other representations of the conflict in popular culture, the presence of Arabs in comic book stories complicates recent scholarship on British cultural memory of the North African campaign, which highlights the prevalence of depictions of an ‘empty desert’: an uninhabited theatre of war traversed only by Axis and Allied forces.⁶⁷³ Comics add a further dimension to this image, filling its empty spaces with action.

The Desert War has long inspired cultural representations, even before its cessation. In 1970 the military historian Corelli Barnett observed that the North African campaign had ‘entered into the British folk memory, a source of legend, endlessly re-written as both history and fiction.’⁶⁷⁴ During the conflict, the Desert War frequently dominated press and media coverage, distracting from less glamorous but (arguably) more important campaigns in the Far East. In the decades after the war, Britain’s campaign in North Africa – particularly Montgomery’s victory at El Alamein – came to symbolise one of the nation’s last moments

⁶⁷³ Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire’: Finney, ‘Isaac Fadoyebo’s Journey’, p.76; Eva Kingsepp, ‘The Second World War, Imperial, and Colonial Nostalgia: The North Africa Campaign and Battlefields of Memory’, *Humanities* 7 (2018), pp.1-16, p.7.

⁶⁷⁴ Corelli Barnett, *Britain and her Army 1509-1970* (London, 1970), p. 439.

of global power before America became dominant.⁶⁷⁵ The ever-growing corpus of popular histories dealing with all aspects of the Desert War suggests that the conflict in North Africa remains a source of fascination and pride for many Britons.⁶⁷⁶

British narratives of the Desert War stressed the ‘civilised’ nature of the conflict, with both Allied and Axis troops approaching the battlefield with a spirit of chivalry and fair play. Montgomery and Rommel developed strong public profiles during the war, hailed as heroes in the British press.⁶⁷⁷ Praise for the Nazi general came from unexpected quarters; Churchill himself offered an extraordinary tribute in parliament describing Rommel as a ‘very daring and skilful opponent’ and ‘a great general.’ That the conflict took place in the supposedly empty wilderness of the Western Desert secured it the status of a ‘clean’ war, both in the sterility of the terrain and the presumed absence of violence against civilian populations.⁶⁷⁸ The trope of the ‘empty desert’ in popular British narratives of the North African campaign has served to obscure the interaction between the war and the indigenous inhabitants of North

⁶⁷⁵ Kingsepp, ‘The Second World War, Imperial, and Colonial Nostalgia’, p.7.

⁶⁷⁶ For popular military histories of the Desert War see, among many, Colin Smith and John Bierman, *Alamein: War Without Hate* (London, 2002); Stephen Bungay, *Alamein* (London, 2002); Niall Barr, *Pendulum of War: The Three Battles of El Alamein* (London, 2004); James Holland, *Together We Stand, North Africa 1942-1943: Turning the Tide in the West* (London, 2005); Robert Lyman, *The Longest Siege: Tobruk, the Battle that Saved North Africa* (London, 2009); Bryn Hammond, *El Alamein: The Battle that Turned the Tide of the Second World War* (London, 2012); Jonathan Dimpleby, *Destiny in the Desert: The Road to El Alamein* (London, 2012); Richard Doherty, *El Alamein 1942: Turning Point Desert* (London, 2017).

⁶⁷⁷ Kingsepp, ‘The Second World War’, p.7; Antulio J. Echervarria II, ‘“The Highest Rule”: Rommel as a Military Genius’ in Jill Edwards (ed.), *El Alamein and the Struggle for North Africa: International Perspectives from the Twenty-first Century* (Cairo, 2012), pp. 181-196; Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire’, p.112. See also John Bieman, Colin Smith, *War Without Hate: The Desert Campaign of 1940-1943* (London, 2004).

⁶⁷⁸ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London, 2014), pp. 76-79.

Africa, suppressing the imperial nature of a conflict characterized as a European war fought between European armies.⁶⁷⁹

Despite this Eurocentric perception of the North African campaign, notions of race and empire certainly bound Britain to the Desert War, and historians have acknowledged this fact.⁶⁸⁰ In the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal, a vital artery of the Empire, Britain's strategic objectives in the region were decidedly imperial in nature. The conflict was fought between rival imperial powers, mainly in Libya, an Italian colony. The Eighth Army in the Western Desert was drawn from men from throughout the Empire, with Indian, New Zealand, Australian and South African soldiers fighting alongside the British.⁶⁸¹ As chapter three demonstrated, wartime narratives of the Desert War in the British press, particularly those of special operations, drew heavily on tropes of imperial exploration and adventure.

The demands of war also brought unprecedented interventions into the daily lives of imperial subjects in North Africa. The memoirs of LRDG servicemen routinely recall encounters with both hostile and friendly Arabs in the desert. British servicemen were issued with 'blood chits' in all probable local languages, promising payment if lost soldiers were

⁶⁷⁹ Francis, 'Remembering war, Forgetting Empire?', pp.111-132.

⁶⁸⁰ Jackson, *The British Empire*, pp.97-144; Francis, 'Remembering War', p; Finney. 'Remembering', p.71-88; Iain E Johnston-White, *The British Commonwealth in the Second World War* (London, 2017), pp.212-255.

⁶⁸¹ A number of works have explored the experiences of commonwealth soldiers in the North African campaign. See, among many, Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London, 2015), pp.34-43; Andrew Steward, *Empire Lost: Britain, the Dominions and the Second World War* (London, 2008), pp.51-63; Alan Jeffries, 'Training the Troops: The Indian Army in Egypt, Eritrea, and Libya, 1940-1942' in Jill Edwards (ed.), *El Alamein and the Struggle for North Africa: International Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century* (Cairo, 2012), pp.31-54; James Jacobs, 'The War In North Africa, 1940-1943: An Overview of the Role of the Union of South Africa' in Jill Edwards (ed.), *El Alamein and the Struggle for North Africa: International Perspectives from the Twenty-First Century* (Cairo, 2012), pp.9-30.

assisted back to Allied lines.⁶⁸² North Africans fought on both sides of the war. The Sanusi Arab Force (later renamed the Libyan Arab Force) of Arab tribesmen assisted the British army, while the Germans formed the Free Arabian Legion from battalions of Moroccans, Tunisians and Algerians.⁶⁸³ Most importantly, Arabs were all too often unintentional casualties during the three-year campaign in North Africa. As Montgomery's Chief of Staff General Sir Francis de Guingand later admitted, 'the civilian population suffered terribly and we had to destroy cities, communications, towns, harbours and the lot.'⁶⁸⁴ Today the desert remains infested with millions of unexploded Second World War bombs – a stark reminder of how history may impinge upon the present.⁶⁸⁵

Martin Francis has noted the absence of any acknowledgement of the indigenous inhabitants of the desert in the two classic depictions of the campaign in 1950s cinema, *Sea of Sand* (1958) and *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958).⁶⁸⁶ Only in less commercially successful, largely forgotten works was Francis able to identify some consideration of how the war impacted the lives of North Africans. Eva Kingsepp has identified the 'empty desert' trope in British documentary narratives of the Desert War which, she argued, have presented North Africa as

⁶⁸² William Kennedy Shaw, *Long Range Desert Group* (London, 1945), pp.150-151; Fitzroy Maclean, *Eastern Approaches* (London, 1949), p. 168; David Lloyd Owen, *The Desert My Dwelling Place* (London, 1957), pp.157-158, Michael Crichton-Stuart, *G Patrol: The Guards Patrol of the Long Range Desert Group* (London, 1958), pp.185-186; Alistair Timpson, Andrew Gibson-Watt, *In Rommel's Backyard: A Memoir of the Long Range Desert Group* (Barnsley, 2000), p.83.

⁶⁸³ Nigel Thomas, *The German Army 1939-45 (2): North Africa & the Balkans* (London, 1998), p.5.

⁶⁸⁴ Quoted in Richard Holmes, *The World At War: The Landmark Oral History from the Previously Unpublished Archives* (London, 2007), p.270.

⁶⁸⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/70-years-on-from-el-alamein-the-desert-battle-that-still-claims-lives-8221988.html> [Accessed 10/02/2019]

⁶⁸⁶ Francis, 'Remembering War, Forgetting Empire', pp.111-132; Kingsepp, 'The Second World War', p.7.

‘a land made for war’ with no indigenous population to consider and no infrastructure to be damaged.⁶⁸⁷ Comics and picture libraries offer a counterpoint to these works, bringing race and empire back into view.

The glamour of war in exotic locations made the North African campaign a regular feature in British picture libraries. Of the 300 issues of *War Picture Library* and *Commando* published between 1958 and 1978 examined for this chapter, 50 titles, or 17%, featured the North African campaign. Indeed, the very first issue of *Commando* – the longest running title, introduced in 1961 – told the story of a tank crew stranded in the Libyan Desert.⁶⁸⁸ Of the 50 titles examined here that depicted the Desert War, over half featured Arabs or the indigenous inhabitants of the desert in the narrative.⁶⁸⁹ A further recurring theme features special operations in the Desert War, with heroes penetrating deep into the desert or operating undercover in the bustling Egyptian capital, providing writers with an opportunity to explore encounters between British soldiers and the inhabitants of North Africa and the Middle-

⁶⁸⁷ Kingsepp, ‘The Second World War’, p.7.

⁶⁸⁸ *Commando* 1 (June, 1961), ‘Walk or Die’.

⁶⁸⁹ *War Picture Library* titles featuring Arabs: *War Picture Library* 451 (June, 1961), ‘Tiger Moth’; *War Picture Library* 209 (September, 1963), ‘Desert Duel’; *War Picture Library* 270 (December, 1964), ‘The Price of Treachery’; *War Picture Library* 270 (December, 1964); *War Picture Library* 751 (April, 1965), *War Picture Library* 932 (October, 1966) ‘The Relic of the Sands’, *Battle Picture Library* 111 (November, 1966), ‘Desert Hide-Out’; *War Picture Library* 1034 (February, 1968), ‘Hunt the Killer’: ‘At Bayonet Point’; *War Picture Library* 651 (April, 1971), ‘Now or Never’; *War Picture Library* 920 (February, 1974), ‘Core of Steel.’

Commando titles featuring Arabs: *Commando* 58 (February, 1963), ‘Tattooed Hero’; *Commando* 173 (July, 1965), ‘Desert Traitor’; *Commando* 184 (October, 1965), ‘Death Flies Fast’; *Commando* 222 (July, 1966), ‘The Lost Army’; *Commando* 285 (September, 1967), ‘Desert Warrior’; *Commando* 375 (December, 1968), ‘Common Foe’; *Commando* 409 (June, 1969), ‘Oasis of Death’; *Commando* 452 (January, 1970), *Commando* 470 (April, 1970), ‘Dressed to Kill’; ‘The Sword Shall Decide’; *Commando* 644 (May, 1972), ‘Sands of Doom’; *Commando* 678 (September, 1972), ‘The Bayonet Fighters’; *Commando* 877 (October, 1974), ‘Killer in a Kittyhawk’; *Commando* 912 (February, 1975); *Commando* 962 (August, 1975), *Commando* 1025 (April, 1976), ‘Appointment in Cairo’; *Commando* 1130 (May, 1977), ‘The Cairo Secret’; ‘Death in the Desert’; *Commando* 1253 (September, 1978), ‘A Game of Chance’; *Commando* 1270 (November, 1978), ‘Dogs of the Desert’.

East.⁶⁹⁰ Comics tended to present the desert in three ways; as a ‘hostile desert’ populated by Arabs wishing to expel the British or assist the Nazis; a ‘friendly desert’ of indigenous Arab allies; or a desert populated by civilian victims of the war.

These desert stories frequently involved motorised raiding units and regularly identified the ‘Long Range Desert Group’ by name, for example in *Commando*’s ‘Common Foe’ (1969). Occasional espionage narratives also featured the clandestine activities of British and German secret agents in Cairo. None of the editions I have examined named David Lloyd Owen. This is not surprising, as famous officers were rarely named in *Commando* and *War Picture Library*, which did not publish the mixture of fact and fiction found in comics which included multiple strips in each issue. Even so, these stories still demonstrate the persistence of many of the features of the narratives of British heroism in the desert examined in the first three chapters of this thesis: brave British soldiers supporting each other and enduring the rigours of the desert - heat, thirst, sand and hostile ‘tribesmen’—in the service of the nation.

The depiction of the desert as a hostile space where uncivilised, bloodthirsty Arabs posed as great a threat to British soldiers as Axis troops featured regularly in depictions of the

⁶⁹⁰ For the LRDG: *Commando*, ‘Scourge of the Desert’ 123 (July, 1964); *Commando*, ‘Desert Warrior’ 285 (September, 1967); *Commando* 373 (December, 1968), ‘Desert Sword’; *Commando*, ‘Desert Squadron’ 417 (July, 1969); *Commando*, ‘The Sword Shall Decide’ 452 (Jan, 1970); *Commando*, ‘Dressed to Kill’ 470 (April, 1970); *Commando*, ‘The Warriors’ 670 (August, 1972); *Commando*, ‘The Lost Army’ 867 (September, 1974); *Commando*, ‘Forward the Raiders’ 910 (Feb, 1975); *Commando*, ‘A Game of Chance’ 1253 (Sep, 1978);

North African campaign.⁶⁹¹ Occasionally comic writers engaged directly with the forces of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism that would shape the post-war Middle East, but more often, the reader was left to infer the reasons for hostility towards the British.⁶⁹² Depictions of the ‘hostile desert’ drew on well-established racist stereotypes of Arabs as cunning, uncivilised, anti-European religious fanatics.⁶⁹³ As warlike tribesmen, sinister Sheikhs, Egyptian spies or untrustworthy desert guides, depictions of hostile Arabs in British comics registered the precariousness of British imperial authority in the region, positioning the popular memory of the Desert War within the broader context of British imperial decline in the Middle-East.⁶⁹⁴

Kathryn Castle has argued that the juvenile literature of the 1950s and 1960s expressed the atmosphere of a rapidly dissolving empire.⁶⁹⁵ For Castle, children’s stories set in former colonies projected a positive image of an empire ‘growing up’ rather than ‘breaking up’, and of former imperial subjects ready for self-government.⁶⁹⁶ Comic book depictions of

⁶⁹¹ *Battle Picture Library* 279, ‘Desert Hide-Out’ (April, 1966); *Commando* 375, ‘Common Foe’ (December, 1968); *Commando* 409, ‘Oasis of Death’ (June, 1969); *Commando* 644, ‘Sands of Doom’ (May, 1972); *Commando* 670, ‘The Warriors’ (August, 1972); *Commando* 1025, ‘Appointment in Cairo’ (April, 1976);

⁶⁹² For Arab nationalism see *Commando*, ‘The Cairo Secret’ (May, 1977); anti-imperialism *Commando*, Tattooed hero 58 (February, 1963).

⁶⁹³ Jack Shaheen, ‘Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people’, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (July, 2003), pp.171-193; Jack Shaheen, ‘Arabs images in American comic books’, *The Journal of Popular Culture* 28 (1994), pp.123-133.

⁶⁹⁴ For hostile tribes see *Commando*, ‘The Warriors’ 670 (August, 1972); *Commando*, ‘Common Foe’ 1083 (December, 1963). For sinister Sheikhs see *Commando*, ‘Tattooed Hero’ 58 (February 1963); *Commando*, ‘Death in the Desert’ 962 (August, 1975). For Egyptian spies see *Commando*, ‘Appointment in Cairo’ 1025 (April, 1976); *Commando*, ‘The Cairo Secret’ 1130 (May, 1977). For untrustworthy desert guides see *Commando*, ‘The Lost Army’ 222 (July, 1966).

⁶⁹⁵ Kathryn Castle, ‘Imperial legacies, new frontiers: children’s popular literature and the demise of empire’ in Stuart Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 145-162, p.159, 160.

⁶⁹⁶ Castle, ‘Imperial legacies, new frontiers’, p.160.

the North African campaign expressed no such optimism, nor did they attempt any renegotiation of the racial supremacy implicit in the colonial relationship. Rather, stories about the Desert War followed the familiar formula of the imperial adventure story, contrasting the civilised British soldier with the unenlightened Arab.⁶⁹⁷ The depiction of hostile Arabs relied on visually codified representations in which their physical appearance served as a marker of their character. ‘Arabness’ was usually signified by clothing, particularly the traditional head-dress or the fez, with the ‘hooked nose’ of a Sheikh or the ‘evil eyes’ of an Arab tribesman a sure indication of their malevolence.⁶⁹⁸ The narrative voice of comics frequently drew the reader’s attention to such features: for example in *Commando*’s ‘Oasis of Death’ (1969) Arab characters are variously described as: ‘wild-eyed’; ‘evil figures’; ‘evil-eyed’; ‘evil-looking’; ‘fierce-looking’; ‘grinning evilly’; and as having ‘eyes that shone...with the savagery of warring ancestors.’⁶⁹⁹ In contrast, British heroes were muscular, square-jawed and often from a long line of soldier-heroes. The LRDG sergeant protagonist of *Oasis of Death*, for example, is described as having: a ‘grimly determined face’; ‘sinewy, straining muscles’; an ‘inbred toughness giving him a grip of iron’ and as hailing from a ‘warrior family’.

⁶⁹⁷ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London, 2000), pp. 49-83.

⁶⁹⁸ For Arab headdress see *Commando* 452, ‘The Sword Shall Decide’ (January, 1970); *Commando* 173, ‘Desert Traitor’ (July, 1965); *Commando* 285 (September, 1967)

⁶⁹⁹ *Commando* 409 (June, 1969), ‘Oasis of Death’

The behaviour of Arab characters further underlined the divide between civilized Europeans and savage Arabs. One frequent device used to express this divide was the treatment of European prisoners by their Arab captors. In *Commando*'s 'Tattooed Hero' (1963), European soldiers are subjected to various ordeals of torture by a Sheikh with 'a talent for fiendish devices.'⁷⁰⁰ When the same story was republished with different text and artwork in 1969, three new but equally barbaric methods of inflicting suffering on the prisoners were added.⁷⁰¹ In 'Common Foe' (1968), a Tuareg chief demands that an LRDG patrol hand over a German prisoner caught looting a sacred temple 'so that he may be punished by the Tuareg in their own way.'⁷⁰² Demonstrating the proper treatment of prisoners, the LRDG commander refuses, and resolves to defend the Nazi officer and fight the large army of Tuareg warriors, despite being outnumbered. Again, in 'The Sword Shall Decide' (1970), an Arab chief working alongside an LRDG patrol gleefully offers to 'strike this dog's head from his body' when confronted with a German prisoner, only to be reprimanded by an officer and told that 'the British army will deal with him.'⁷⁰³ There was little suggestion in such stories that British influence had advanced these 'primitive' societies. Against a backdrop of British withdrawal from the region, the reader is left with an

⁷⁰⁰ *Commando* 173 (February, 1963), 'Tattooed Hero'

⁷⁰¹ *Commando* 409 (June, 1969), 'Oasis of Death'

⁷⁰² *Commando* 375 (December, 1968), 'Common Foe'

⁷⁰³ *Commando* 452 (January, 1970), 'The Sword Shall Decide'.

impression of Arabs as unfit for self-government, without the restraint and guidance of British authority.

Besides morality, the physical superiority of the British over hostile Arabs was repeatedly asserted in comic book depictions of the Desert War through the staging of contests between British soldiers and Arab tribesmen. In 'Desert Traitor' (1965), for example, an Arab among an otherwise friendly tribe of Tuareg fears that the British presence in their camp will attract German bombers and is promptly challenged to a wrestling match by the Scotsman in question. Soundly beaten, the Arab betrays his tribe and agrees to lead a Nazi patrol to the British soldier's location in exchange for gold. An almost identical plotline appears in 'Dogs of the Desert' (1978), when a British soldier-archaeologist fights an Arab tribesman who objects to him living among his people because he will 'teach our children the ways of women.'⁷⁰⁴ Occasionally British soldiers were forced to demonstrate their intellectual superiority over hostile Arabs. In 'Death in the Desert' (1975) for example, a British Lieutenant is taken prisoner by the evil Sheikh El Rashid, who offers to spare his life if he can beat him at a game of chess. The British officer wins and defeats the Sheikh once more to save the life of a German prisoner. Echoing the narrative structures of imperial adventure fiction, British supremacy in comic book depictions of the Desert War hinged upon

⁷⁰⁴ *Commando* 1270 (November, 1978), 'Dogs of the Desert'.

both the use of force and the superior abilities of British soldiers to keep in check subject peoples who no longer knew their place.

While hostile Arabs featured regularly in comic book depictions of the Desert War, the reasons for Arab hostility to the British were often left unclear. In *War Picture Library*'s 'Desert Hide-Out' (1966) for example, a German general leads a vast army of Arab tribesmen with no explanation given as to why indigenous North Africans might wish to take up arms against the British.⁷⁰⁵ Given the picture libraries' claims to draw on actual episodes from the war, it is striking that story writers rarely made reference to Arabic-language Nazi propaganda which sought to stoke anti-British sentiment among local populations.⁷⁰⁶ Perhaps such a level of character development was considered unnecessary for Arabs whose most important characteristic was merely their hostility to British soldiers. Instead, an inherent Arab desire for personal gain was often considered sufficient by comic writers to explain collaboration between the inhabitants of the desert and the Nazis. Thus, readers of comics regularly encountered minor Arab characters like desert guides or menial labourers working against the British as spies in exchange for Nazi money.⁷⁰⁷ The Islamic faith of hostile Arabs in comic books served as an alternative explanation for hostility, further distancing tribesmen

⁷⁰⁵ *War Picture Library* 1171 (August, 1966)

⁷⁰⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (London, 2009), pp.1-14.

⁷⁰⁷ See *Commando* 442 (April, 1964), 'The Lost Army'; *Commando* 886 (January, 1975), 'Private Apache';

from the ‘civilised’ British soldiers whom they referred to as ‘infidels’, ‘unbelievers’ and ‘white pigs.’⁷⁰⁸

Occasionally, comic narratives did register the forces of anti-imperialism and Arab nationalism that would shape the post-war Middle East. Two issues of *Commando* – ‘Tattooed Hero’ (1963) and ‘The Cairo Secret’ (1977) – serve to illustrate this point. First published in 1963, and then again under a different title in 1969, ‘Tattooed Hero’ drew a direct link between Britain’s nineteenth-century wars of Empire and the Second World War. Rather than the erasure of Empire characteristic of the classic Desert War films, the comic presented the Second World War as a single episode in a broader struggle to maintain British imperial authority in North Africa. The narrative opens in 1884 in Sudan, during the Mahdist revolt, as Sergeant ‘Bull’ Tyler and a company of British soldiers are overwhelmed by the Mahdi’s warriors.⁷⁰⁹ The comic’s depiction of the imperial soldiers’ heroic stand against the Mahdi’s ‘dervishes’ echoed the nostalgia for empire characteristic of the imperial epic genre of 1960s British cinema.⁷¹⁰ The opening caption of the sequence hailed Queen Victoria as ‘monarch of the greatest empire the world has ever seen’, while the British soldiers’ dialogue and the narrative voice consciously drew on the words of Rudyard Kipling’s 1892 panegyric

⁷⁰⁸ *Commando* 375, ‘Common Foe’ (December, 1968), p.61; *Commando* 1130, ‘The Cairo Secret’ (May, 1977), p.56, *Commando* 173, ‘Desert Traitor’ (July, 1965), p.50.

⁷⁰⁹ The rooting of picture library narratives in pre-20th century conflicts was a recurring device. See *War Picture Library* 270, ‘At Bayonet Point’ (December, 1964) which opens during the Crusades, and *War Picture Library* 856, ‘The Red Rag of Courage’ (May, 1973) which begins during the Peninsular War.

⁷¹⁰ For the film *Khartoum*, see Max Jones, ‘National Hero and Very Queer Fish’: Empire, Sexuality and the British Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918-72’, *Twentieth Century British History* 26 (2015), pp.175-202. See also Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford, 2007), pp.182-183.

to the Sudanese fighters, 'Fuzzy Wuzzy.'⁷¹¹ Wendy Webster has argued that the depiction of British soldiers under siege by subject peoples in 1960s imperial films like *Zulu* (1964) and *Khartoum* (1966) reflected an increasing sense of an empire under threat, as Britain faced the aftermath of the colonial insurgencies of the 1950s and rising domestic tensions around immigration.⁷¹² The massacre of British soldiers at the beginning of 'Tattooed Hero' evoked a similar sense of the fragility of British imperial authority. In apparent acknowledgment of the contemporary turmoil sweeping Britain's former colonies, a caption accompanied an image of shrieking 'dervishes' charging the outnumbered British soldiers, noting that in 1884 the 'cauldron of discontent was *already* burning in Africa' [my italics].

Fig. 5.1 Tattooed Hero



Source: *Commando*, 1963

⁷¹¹ The narrative voice marvels that the Sudanese warriors 'broke the square.' In the 1969 reprint, a British soldier's remark that 'they earned it, them black devils' echoes the final line of Kipling's poem: 'you big black boundin' beggar – you broke a British square!'

⁷¹² Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, pp.182-217.

The remainder of 'Tattooed Hero' merged war and empire genres, transposing a Victorian model of imperial heroism onto the Desert War to depict British soldiers re-fighting a nineteenth-century imperial conflict against a modern-day Mahdi. Jumping forward to 1941, Tyler's grandson Harry is a LRDG sergeant in North Africa who, along with an Italian colonel and a German lieutenant, is taken captive by the 'mad Sheikh' Abdul Ahmed, a direct descendent of the Mahdi [Fig. 5.1]. A hook-nosed, whip-wielding sadistic tyrant with a 'talent for fiendish devices', Ahmed offers a typical example of the comic book depiction of Arabs as uncivilised, religious fanatics.⁷¹³ Determined to avenge his ancestor's defeat at Omdurman and 'drive the infidels from his land', the Sheikh has amassed a secret army of Arab soldiers armed with modern weapons to defeat whichever European power emerges victorious from the Desert War. In need of experienced leaders, Ahmed attempts to persuade his prisoners to join forces with him. When all three refuse, they are tortured in a sequence which captures the construction of racial hierarchy implicit in the comic's narrative. At the bottom lies the 'savage' Ahmed, overseeing his Arab followers' barbaric treatment of the prisoners. Next is the weak-willed, decadent Italian who quickly submits to the torture. The German officer puts up a spirited resistance but eventually yields, leaving only the British LRDG trooper whose indomitable spirit remains unbroken. Harry Tyler is cast out into the

⁷¹³ Jack G Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (2001, Northampton), pp.7-43; Jack G Shaheen, 'Arab Images in American Comic Books', *The Journal of Popular Culture* 28 (1994), pp. 123-133.

desert to die, but the resilient Englishman finds his way back to British lines and returns with an army to defeat the Sheikh and avenge the massacre of his grandfather's regiment.

Despite its preposterous plotline and crude racial stereotypes, 'Tattooed Hero' nonetheless registered the rejection of British imperial authority by former colonial subjects in North Africa and the Middle East. Abdul Ahmed and his secret army, patiently biding their time in the desert until Britain is too weak to maintain relinquish authority, hinted at the growing anti-British sentiment that would lead to the country's post-war decline as an imperial power in the region. The rooting of the narrative in a nineteenth-century colonial rebellion underlined both the imperial nature of Britain's involvement in the North African campaign, and the deep roots of indigenous populations' opposition to British authority. As the first caption in the comic observed, 'the sun-baked deserts of Africa are old fighting-grounds for the British army.' Viewed in the context of the upheaval in Britain's former colonies in the years before its publication in 1963, 'Tattooed Hero' reflected a sense of an Empire facing growing challenges from subject peoples.

A further reason for the foregrounding of Empire in 'Tattooed Hero' may lie in the experiences of the team responsible for producing the comic, many of whom saw military service in imperial hinterlands. The editor of *Commando*, Charles 'Chick' Checkley, joined the RAF in 1941 and was posted to Canada until 1946. Cover artist Kenn Barr was a Scot who served with the British Army in Egypt during the 1950s as part of his national service. Most significantly, the comic's scriptwriter, Eric Hebden, had a long and varied military career. Born in 1910, Hebden joined the royal artillery at the age of 18, serving in Hong Kong

before being moved to Gibraltar where he commanded a coastal anti-aircraft battery with the rank of captain. During the Second World War he served in the Far East, including India, Burma and Indonesia. After the Japanese surrender, he sat on the War Crimes Commission in Singapore, before returning to Britain in 1949. Hebden went on to be appointed executive officer of the National Army Museum, before taking early retirement in 1971.⁷¹⁴ Having spent most of his life in service of the British Empire, Hebden's depiction of the fanatical Abdul Ahmed and his savage Arab army may reveal something of the writer's attitude to anti-colonial movements. At the least, the comic production team's varied military experiences throughout Britain's former colonies demonstrates an awareness of the imperial dimensions of the Second World War.

⁷¹⁴ Information provided through email correspondence with Georgia Battle, Magazine Journalist, DC Thomson Media, 28/11/2018

Fig. 5.2 The Cairo Secret



Source: *Commando*, 1977

Stories registered the tensions of imperial governance more frequently through the late 1960s and 70s. More directly than ‘Tattooed Hero,’ *Commando*’s May 1977 release, ‘The Cairo Secret’, strikingly conveyed a sense of the precariousness of Britain’s imperial authority in Egypt, depicting a city teeming with spies, informers and saboteurs keen to expel

the British.⁷¹⁵ The story follows British intelligence officer Brett Moore as he attempts to foil an Egyptian conspiracy to frame British imperial troops for the assassination of King Farouk, with the intended effect of sparking a revolution in Egypt and diverting British manpower away from the battle against Rommel in the desert, causing Britain's defeat and exit from the region. The unpopularity of the British in Egypt and its potential to spill over into violence is established early in the narrative. As Moore is driven through a bustling market, he comments to his driver 'we were never really popular here, now that Rommel seems set on reaching the canal, the gypoes wouldn't think twice about changing sides.' [fig 5.2].⁷¹⁶ Emphasising the vulnerability of imperial authority, the frame depicts the two solitary British officers and their car surrounded by Egyptians, while in the foreground stands a grim-faced, fez-wearing Egyptian man. The implication is clear; popular support for nationalist movements threatens to overwhelm Britain's status as an imperial power. The next frame conveys this point more directly; as the car passes a mob of protestors, some of whom are waving Nazi flags, Moore and his driver are met with cries of 'English out!' The British officer's response neatly encapsulates Britain's dual objective of defeating Germany and maintaining imperial authority in the region: 'luckily they are only shouting...It wouldn't take much to start real race riots. Powerful men would like just that. Part of our job here is to stop them.'

⁷¹⁵ *Commando*, 'The Cairo Secret' 1130 (May, 1977).

⁷¹⁶ *Commando*, 'The Cairo Secret', p.16.

First published over twenty-years after Britain's withdrawal from Egypt, 'The Cairo Secret' retrospectively gestured towards the inevitability of Britain's post-war imperial demise. The Egyptian conspirators' desire to dispose of Farouk and eliminate British influence is undoubtedly a nod to the objectives of the 1952 Egyptian revolution, while the depiction of angry anti-British street protests and Arab eagerness to side with the Nazis registered more generally the tensions that fuelled the upheaval of the 1950s.⁷¹⁷ The narrative did not explore the specific grievances that mobilised Egyptians in support of Arab nationalism, nor did it attempt to outline any advantages of British administration. Rather, the innate characteristics of the Arab characters – scheming, cunning and fanatical – serve to underline their ungovernability. The ending of 'The Cairo Secret' unintentionally captured the dynamic implicit in the colonial relationship, as Moore beat one of the Egyptian plotters so savagely that the military police had to intervene. The officer's outburst is a break from standard comic and picture library depictions of British soldiers, which usually stressed the virtues of self-control and the humane treatment of enemy prisoners.⁷¹⁸ The comic appears to endorse Moore's attack; as he is pulled away from his victim, his senior officer can be seen approaching in the background of the frame. Rather than reprimand Moore for his outburst, he merely praises the intelligence officer's initiative in solving the case.

⁷¹⁷ Robert Macnamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle-East, 1952-1977: From the Egyptian Revolution to the Six Day War* (London, 2003), pp.23-64. See also Robert T. Harrison, *Britain and the Middle East, 1619-1971* (London, 2016), pp.197-205.

⁷¹⁸ *Commando* 452, 'The Sword Shall Decide' (January, 1970); *Commando* 375, 'Common Foe' (December, 1968).

Wendy Webster has argued that in the decades after the war anxieties about Britain's reduced status on the world stage produced a prolific genre of Second World War nostalgia, transposing the soldier hero from an imperial setting to the Second World War.⁷¹⁹ Britain's colonial wars and the process of decolonisation between the 1940s and 1960s provide an important context for understanding this nostalgia, of which comics were a part. As with war films of the 1950s, war comics recycled the narrative structures of imperial adventure stories, depicting a homosocial world where men demonstrated courage and martial heroism.⁷²⁰ During the 1960s and 1970s the Second World War permeated British television schedules, as war films of the 1950s were joined by new television plays, documentaries and comedies that returned to the war years and drew on the same tropes of camaraderie and stoicism.⁷²¹ The enthusiasm for war comics was part of this broader post-war interest in the war years, reassuring a Britain facing significant post-war upheaval that the conflict had been their 'finest hour.' Yet it is possible, also, to identify the anxieties described by Webster in comic book narratives of the North African campaign. Depictions of scheming Arabs, hostile to the British registered opposition to imperial authority in the region and retrospectively gestured towards the inevitability of British withdrawal.

⁷¹⁹ Wendy Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England': Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948-1968", *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001), pp. 557-584.

⁷²⁰ Webster, "There'll Always Be An England", p.566.

⁷²¹ Lucy Noakes, 'Popular Memory, Popular Culture: The War in the Post War World' in Michael Geyer, Adam Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume 3. Total War: Economy, Society and Culture* (Cambridge, 2015), pp.675-697, p.689.

3. The Desert War in British Comics: Representations of Arab Allies and Civilian Victims

‘The Cairo Secret’ marks a rare exception in which the writers of comics appeared to engage directly with the political forces that would shape the Middle East in the aftermath of British withdrawal from the region. More frequently, the presence of hostile Arab tribesmen in comic book narratives merely served to register the existence of opposition to British authority in the Middle East and North Africa. However, the depiction of vast armies of Arab soldiers in comics obscures the complex situation faced by Allied desert forces in the Second World War. Throughout the conflict, Arabic-language Nazi propaganda in the Middle East and North Africa attempted to stoke Arab nationalism and antisemitism, promising the liberation of the region and encouraging Arabs and Muslims to join the front against the British.⁷²² Between 1939 and 1945, Germany broadcast unceasing shortwave radio and distributed millions of leaflets across the Middle-East and North Africa in an attempt to win Muslim and Arab hearts and minds.⁷²³ Miles Lampson, the British ambassador to Egypt, traced with alarm the rise of anti-British sentiment in Cairo.⁷²⁴ And yet, in 1942, the Wehrmacht had only 130 members in its Arab unit.⁷²⁵ A total of 6,300 Arabs served in

⁷²² Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (London, 2009), pp.1-14;

⁷²³ Herf, *Nazi*, p.10.

⁷²⁴ Miles Lampson, *The Killearn Diaries, 1934-1946* (London, 1972); Herf, *Nazi*, pp.57-87.

⁷²⁵ Gilbert Anchar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (London, 2010), pp.145-146;.

German military units in all theatres during the conflict, including 1,300 from Palestine, Iraq and Syria. In comparison, 9000 Palestinians enlisted in the British army and hundreds of thousands of Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians and Libyans joined the Free French forces to fight the Axis.⁷²⁶ The British recruited five battalions of Libyan refugees to form the Libyan Arab Force, and countless Bedouins acted as guides and assisted British soldiers lost in the desert.⁷²⁷

Despite the efforts of several prominent individuals during the 1940s to draw attention to the positive contribution made by the inhabitants of the desert to the North African campaign, their role in the conflict has largely been erased from British national memory of the war.⁷²⁸ As Martin Francis has observed, a scene in the film *The Black Tent* depicting a Bedouin attack on a German convoy marks a rare exception in a genre which overwhelmingly portrayed the Desert War as a European struggle. In war comics and picture libraries, however, stories acknowledging collaboration between indigenous North Africans (albeit in caricatured form) and the British were less rare. Though seldom straying from the tropes of savagery applied to hostile Arabs, they nonetheless brought the role of indigenous North African combatants back into consideration in the popular memory of the Desert War.

⁷²⁶ Anchar, *The Arabs*, pp.145-146;

⁷²⁷ Todd M. Thompson, 'Covert Operations, British Views of Islam and Anglo-Sanusi Relations in North Africa, 1940-1945', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009), pp.293-323; Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (Oxon, 2010), pp.108-109. The most famous example of Arabs fighting for the British army was the small force of desert raiders commanded by Vladimir Peniakoff, colloquially known as 'Popski's Private Army', see Vladimir Peniakoff, *Private Army* (London, 1950).

⁷²⁸ Thompson, 'Covert Operations', p.313; Francis, 'Remembering', p.119.

The Sword Shall Decide (Commando, 1970) typifies the genre's valorisation of primitive Arab tribesmen making common cause with the British in their fight against the Axis. The hero of the story is LRDG sergeant Bill Bradley whose brother, Lieutenant Johnny Bradley, is killed in an ambush by a German equivalent of the LRDG after a tip-off from an Arab spy. Desperate for revenge against the German commander responsible, the notoriously ruthless Major Otto Schmidt, Bradley proposes to join forces with El Alam, an Arab chief who leads a band of 'savage tribesmen' and has 'always helped the British.' Initially mistaking Bradley for a German and nearly killing him, El Alam and his men agree to assist Bradley in an attack on Schmidt's headquarters. After an all-action battle between El Alam's men and the Germans, Bradley captures Schmidt and takes him prisoner. When the German manages to grab a sword from one of El Alam's men, Bradley arms himself with the Arab chief's sword and eventually kills Schmidt after a tense duel. Promising El Alam that the British will soon defeat the Nazis, Bradley returns to British lines to join the next offensive against the Germans.

The Sword Shall Decide celebrates the martial spirit of non-white combatants in the Desert War, with a prominent role in the narrative given to El Alam and his men. As always, the innate savagery of the tribesmen serves to distinguish them from the civilised British soldiers. El Alam almost cuts Bradley's throat on their first encounter, and after Schmidt has been captured Bradley has to prevent El Alam's men from beheading the German. The Arab tribesmen release 'blood-curdling screams' and 'savage battle cries' as they hurl themselves on the German soldiers, and El Alam rides a horse into battle and fights with a sword rather

than modern weaponry. Yet while Arab savagery in *Tattooed Hero* poses a threat to British imperial authority, the primitive tribesmen in *The Sword Shall Decide* embody a romantic trope of the desert as a timeless space, home to noble, pre-modern societies free from the restraints of western civilization.⁷²⁹ The status of Arabs as carriers of a primitive culture is almost always underlined by their anachronistic dialogue; in *The Sword Shall Decide* El Alam utters such phrases as ‘Now, my brave ones! To the infidel’s armoury!’ and ‘Let us slay the infidels!’ By the end of the comic, even the supposedly civilised Europeans have temporarily regressed to the primitive state of the tribesmen as they fight to the death with Arab swords.

Fig. 5.3 Core of Steel



Source: War Picture Library, 1974

⁷²⁹ Graham Dawson has discussed the appeal of the Bedouin in narratives of adventure as a reaction against modern life. *Soldier Heroes*, pp. 167-190.

Comic book stories featuring friendly Arabs projected a liberal fantasy of the British role in the Desert War as benevolent defenders of the native population from the brutality of rival imperial powers. Occasionally, such sentiments were explicitly expressed by the inhabitants of the desert [fig.5.4], but more often German atrocities against Arab populations served to demonstrate the virtue of Britain's presence in the region. In 'The Sword Shall Decide', El Alam despises Schmidt because the ruthless Nazi indiscriminately killed members of his tribe, including women and children. He promises to fight the Germans 'until we drive them from our land' but makes no mention of expelling the British. Indeed, when Bradley assures El Alam that 'the desert will be yours again. We will have the Germans out of Africa in no time' he replies, 'and when that day comes you must return to us.' Whether the 'you' refers to Bradley himself or to the British is left ambiguous, but the clear implication is that Britain's involvement in North Africa is beneficial to the native population.

Two further issues of *Commando* exemplify the depiction of British soldiers as defenders of native North African populations. 'Dressed to Kill' (1970) features LRDG officer Bert Morris who lived among a desert tribe before the outbreak of war. Returning in uniform to find his former home ransacked and several tribesmen murdered by German soldiers, Bert guides his Arab friends to British lines so that they can learn the ways of modern warfare and avenge the Nazi atrocities. The image of the LRDG officer dressed in traditional Arab clothing on the front cover of the comic evokes the image of Lawrence of Arabia familiar from David Lean's 1962 film, while the back cover promises a similarly

exotic adventure story: ‘It was quite a sight to see Bert Morris ride to war over the parched, desert sands in a battered, bucking jeep ... with hundreds of bloodthirsty Arabs thundering along on horseback behind.’ With the native tribes apparently unable to defend themselves from the brutality of the Axis, it is up to selfless British heroes like Bert Morris to guide them into battle.

Fig. 5.4 Dressed to Kill



Source: *Commando*, 1970

The front cover made a joke of a British officer wearing an Arab costume through the multiple meanings of ‘rag’ as temper, head-dress and as a derogatory racial epithet. Such irreverent humour appeared more frequently through the late 1960s and 70s.

The notion of a British soldier commanding an Arab army was central to 'Desert Sword' (1968), in which a sacred sword is plundered by a German colonel and his soldiers from a nomadic desert tribe called the Charis. British sergeant Sam Lodge must break into the colonel's villa, deep in German-held territory, to retrieve the sword, and then return it to the Arab tribe. Rather than following the classic war films in rendering the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa invisible, *Desert Sword* overstates their significance to the outcome of the conflict. Lodge is informed by his superiors that the Charis are 'fierce fighters' whose support is vital to break the stalemate in the Desert War. When Lodge finally returns the sword to the Arab chief, he is gratifyingly promised that 'ten thousand Charis' arms shall aid your cause.'

Comic book narratives which featured the indigenous peoples of North Africa – as allies or as enemies of the British – repudiated the myth of the 'empty desert' and testified to the presence of non-white combatants in the Desert War. Yet the civilian population of the desert were not, for the most part, actively involved in the conflict. War comics and picture libraries occasionally registered the consequences of the war for non-combatants in North Africa and the Middle East, although this almost always involved German, rather than British, mistreatment of civilians.

Fig. 5.5 Ranks of the Damned



Source: War Picture Library, 1961

The setting of an empty, bomb-damaged desert village was one trope that hinted at the disastrous effect of the war on local populations. In ‘The Ranks of the Damned’ (1961), an LRDG patrol encounters an abandoned settlement. A caption reflects the irreversible damage caused by warfare: ‘inside the courtyard there was a smell of death and desolation. The few signs of occupation were like the ghosts of a past that would never be recaptured’ (fig.5.5).⁷³⁰ Here, the apparent ‘emptiness’ of the desert served to reinforce a sense of the interaction between the indigenous peoples of North Africa and the war. ‘The Price of Treachery’ (1965) offered a similarly unromantic interpretation of modern war, consciously challenging the ‘myth’ of the Desert War as a civilised war in which no violence was perpetrated against non-combatants. An opening caption establishes the tension between the ‘myth’ of the Desert War

⁷³⁰ *War Picture Library* 115, ‘The Ranks of the Damned’, September 1961, p.4.

and the reality: ‘Many strange stories have come out of the Western Desert campaign – stories of chivalry between friend and foe, and conversely, of treachery and deceit that knew no sides and ignored the recognised rules of war.’⁷³¹ At one point in the narrative, a British patrol approaches the desert village of El-Ghaba. Finding it empty and in ruins, an officer well-versed in the realities of modern warfare informs the reader that ‘the Germans probably bombed it when they left. It’s their way of saying thank you to the inhabitants.’

Other comic book stories were more direct in depicting violence against Arab civilians. In ‘At Bayonet Point’, British soldiers enter the village of Trig-El-Guzaba to find a group of ‘scared-looking Arabs’.⁷³² They learn that two German soldiers recently entered the village demanding ‘information about British tommies.’ When the villagers insisted on their ignorance, the Germans promised to return with tanks, and are only prevented from flattening the village by the intervention of the British soldiers. The cold-hearted Nazi was a well-established stock character in comics and picture libraries, but occasionally even British soldiers demonstrated their capacity for cruelty towards native populations. In ‘Killer in a Kittyhawk’ (1974), a British pilot steals a large sum of money intended for bribing locals for information, cynically intending to pin the blame on tribesmen in the camp. As he plans his deception, he muses to himself ‘there are always tribesmen around who would be blamed. It would be like taking cake from a baby.’ The pilot’s attitude to local Arabs captured a

⁷³¹ *War Picture Library* 751 ‘The Price of Treachery’, April 1965, p.2

⁷³² *War Picture Library* 270, ‘At Bayonet Point’, December 1964, p.2.

contempt directed towards the inhabitants of the desert by many British soldiers and which can be found in the pages of war memoirs published in the decades following the conflict.⁷³³

In their frequent inclusion of the inhabitants of the desert in narratives of the war in North Africa, either as hostile, friendly, or victimised Arabs, comics present a striking contrast to depictions of the Desert War in film. Why did comics aimed at boys and young men explore themes largely neglected in depictions of the Desert War elsewhere? The involvement of artists and writers who had served in imperial theatres of the war in the production of comics suggests one possible motivation. Further, as Chapman has argued, the social politics of comics contrasts with that of film by including stories that featured working-class heroes drawn from NCOs and other ranks, rather than privileging the middle- and upper-class officers in popular cinema.⁷³⁴

Comic book writers' willingness to depict an inhabited desert is to some extent a reflection of the specificity of the comic book genre. The visual trope of an 'empty desert' lends itself to cinema in a way that cannot easily be replicated in other forms of media. Film encourages the exploration of space, particularly during the 1950s, as a range of widescreen formats such as CinemaScope, Cinerama and Panavision were introduced. While the film camera can visually register wide vistas and emptiness, comics typically have to pack their

⁷³³ Artemis Cooper, *Cairo in the War, 1939-1945* (London, 1995), pp.113-115; Francis, 'Remembering War', p.113.

⁷³⁴ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.101.

frames with objects and action. Further, the bewildering array of picture library titles published between 1958 and 1977 meant that writers were more likely to engage with aspects of the war not explored in other mediums as they constantly searched for new and exciting storylines.

4. Representations of the Chindits and Jungle Warfare in British comics

The Japanese invasion of Burma in early 1942 sparked a long, brutal Allied campaign to retake the former British colony. Despite crushing early defeats, by May 1945 the revitalised British-led 14th Army had dealt the Japanese their greatest land defeat so far in the war.⁷³⁵ With the fighting taking place thousands of miles from home and a strategic focus upon the war in Europe, the 14th Army in Burma was wryly nicknamed the ‘Forgotten Army’ by British soldiers, who felt that their war received insufficient public recognition or material support from Britain.⁷³⁶ When touring the Burma front in 1943, Admiral Mountbatten began a speech to members of the 14th Army with the words, ‘Right, now I understand that people think you’re the Forgotten Army on the Forgotten Front. I’ve come here to tell you you’re

⁷³⁵ The disaster was overshadowed by the Japanese Imperial Army’s greater defeat at the hands of the Red Army in Manchuria in August 1945, see; Toh Boon Ho, Toh Boon Kwan, ‘The British Led Army in Burma, 1942-1945: The Remarkable Recovery and Successful Transformation of a Military Organization at War’, *International Journal of Military History and Historiography* 37 (2017), pp.35-57, p. 36; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders* (New York, 2005), p. 68. Despite this, a number of military historians have asserted that the defeat in Burma marked the greatest inflicted upon the Japanese in the war. See Roy McKelvie, *The War In Burma* (London, 1948), p.296; Christopher Bayley and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941-1945* (London, 2004); Max Hastings, *Inferno: The World At War, 1939-1945* (London, 2011), p.545.

⁷³⁶ <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-96392;jsessionid=D2CFCFD1C75A2E5E2FFDCD9CE373F33C> [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry for ‘Forgotten Army’ by G.H Dunlop, Accessed on 01/05/2019]

quite wrong. You're not the Forgotten Army on the Forgotten Front ... Nobody's ever *heard* of you.⁷³⁷ Mountbatten's joke masked an underlying anxiety that the struggles and sacrifices of the men who fought to liberate Burma had gone entirely unnoticed at home. Efforts to raise the profile of the 14th army (including the media discourse surrounding Operation *Longcloth* examined in chapter three) paradoxically served to reinforce the perception that the Far Eastern campaigns had been neglected. The nickname was routinely used in the wartime press to refer to the Allied forces in Burma, even forming the title of a British Pathé newsreel showing men of the Chindits and the Chinese army after Operation *Thursday*.⁷³⁸

Fears that the efforts of the 14th Army against the Japanese might be forgotten would seem to be borne out by the apparent absence of the Far Eastern campaign in British popular memory of the war. As Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson have noted, while many British people could identify the day the Second World War ended as 8th of May, Victory in Europe day, far fewer know the date of VJ day and the actual end of the war.⁷³⁹ Mark Connelly has asserted that the war in the Far East was 'unique for its utter lack of distinction in the British popular memory' and that 'very few cultural artefacts of the epic struggle in Burma have come down to us.'⁷⁴⁰ According to Connelly, this perceived national amnesia was, in part, an

⁷³⁷ Quoted in R.A. Hough, *Mountbatten: Hero of Our Time* (London, 1980), p.7.

⁷³⁸ *The Sunday Times* 05/03/1944, p.5; *Daily Mail* 08/11/1944, p.5; *Picture Post* 25/11/1944, p.7; 'The Forgotten Army', British Pathé Newsreel, 12/10/1944.

⁷³⁹ Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson, 'Introduction: Keep Calm and Carry On. The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain' in Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013), pp.1-21, p.12.

⁷⁴⁰ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004), p.248.

‘act of self-protection’ as the British avoided facing up to the humiliating fall of Singapore and retreat from Burma. Connelly suggested that after the war, Burma’s liberation – achieved primarily by troops from the Commonwealth and Empire, particularly India – appeared worthless as the country became independent and declined to become part of the Commonwealth. India’s independence in 1947 appeared to give the British still less reason to celebrate victory in this grand imperial effort.⁷⁴¹

Yet the extent of neglect should not be exaggerated. The experiences of prisoners of war (POWs) in the Far East have remained a prominent aspect of the British cultural memory of the Second World War. Recent scholarship has explored the ways in which Japanese prison camps have been memorialised in film, television programmes, museum exhibitions and prisoners’ memoirs.⁷⁴² The preponderance of prisoner narratives in the decades following the war suggests that rather than members of a ‘forgotten army’, POWs in Burma were an important part of the British public’s understanding of the Second World War. And the experience of captivity was not the only aspect of the war in the Far East depicted in post-war popular culture. In their portrayal of the war in the Burma, British comics and picture libraries demonstrated a striking willingness to portray unsavoury episodes of the war neglected in other cultural forms. While largely conforming to the standard template of male

⁷⁴¹ Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p.248-249.

⁷⁴² Juliette Pattinson et al, ‘Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 7 (2014), pp. 179-190; Frances Houghton, ‘To the Kwaï and Back’: Myth, Memory and Memoirs of the “Death Railway” 1942-1943’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 7 (2014), pp.223-235; Lizzie Oliver, “‘What Our Sons Went Through’: The Connective Memories of Far Eastern Captivity in the Charles Thrale Exhibition, 1946-1964’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 7 (2014), pp.236-252.

heroes bravely battling a hostile racialised enemy, comics regularly featured narratives that centred around the fall of Singapore, the Japanese invasion of Malaya and the British retreat from Burma, in addition to the more familiar prison camp stories.⁷⁴³ Further, while the Japanese were almost always depicted as fanatical and barbaric soldiers, comic book depictions of the 14th Army registered the multi-racial composition of the imperial force that liberated Burma, and celebrated the heroism of non-white troops.

The title of Field Marshall William Slim's influential 1956 account of retaking Burma, *Defeat into Victory*, captures the standard narrative structure adopted in comic book depictions of the Far Eastern campaign.⁷⁴⁴ Slim's memoir – which began with the retreat of a bewildered and unprepared Burma Army in 1942, and traced its path through retraining, re-equipping and restoring morale until ultimate victory against the Japanese in Burma in 1945 – configured the campaign into a narrative arc instantly recognisable to British readers; a poor start brought about by incompetence and miscalculation only for victory to be achieved against the odds. For comics featuring the war in the Far East, the initial disasters of the Japanese advance of 1942 provided an ideal context for stories of desperate rear-guard

⁷⁴³ For the fall of Singapore see; *War Picture Library* 900, 'The Old Guard' (September, 1962), *War Picture Library* 323, 'Passage of Arms', (January, 1966); *War Picture Library*, 'Project Disaster' (March, 1967); *War Picture Library* 576, 'South of Singapore' (March, 1970) *Commando* 2280, 'For Malaya see *War Picture Library* 560, 'The Colours' (January, 1970), *War Picture Library* 759, 'Lost at Sea' (May, 1972); *War Picture Library* 981, 'Let None Escape' (September, 1974); *War Picture Library* 1230, 'The Invaders' (July, 1976); For Burma retreat see *War Picture Library* 315, 'Learn Fast and Live!' (November, 1965); *War Picture Library* 704, 'Formula for Danger' (November, 1971); *Commando* 154, 'Burma Johnny' (February, 1965); *Commando* 282, 'The Burma Run' (September, 1967); *Commando* 696, 'Suicide Mission' (November, 1972); For prison camps see: *Commando* 185, 'The Four Scars' (October, 1965); *Commando* 1093, 'Prisoners of War' (January, 1977);

⁷⁴⁴ Field-Marshal William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945* (London, 1956)

heroics, and of inexperienced British troops, bloodied on the battlefield and forced to learn quickly how to become ‘real’ soldiers. The reasons for British retreats and their consequences for British prestige in the region were rarely explored in any detail, instead most often simply noted in an opening caption to set the scene for the following heroic narrative. For example, in *War Picture Library*’s ‘The Invaders’ (1976), the opening caption read thus: ‘On the 8th of February 1942, the Japanese invaded Malaya. With fanatical zeal they surged forward against a British Army badly equipped and poorly trained for the kind of war that they had been thrown into...’⁷⁴⁵ The remainder of the story focused on the experiences of nineteen-year-old British soldier Private Peacock, whose first taste of action is the British retreat from Malaya. Initially too nervous even to reload his rifle in combat, by the end of the narrative Peacock has transformed into a ruthless and efficient soldier. Soldiers like Peacock, a closing caption promises, will eventually ‘come to push the Japanese back to the land of the sun.’

Private Peacock’s transformation from inexperienced rookie to hardened soldier is emblematic not only of the change in the military in Burma from a disparate and ineffective force to a retrained and revitalised conquering army, but also of British popular memory of the Second World War in general. Paul Sanders has identified the strong influence of a ‘Churchillian paradigm’ on British narratives of the conflict; an interpretation of the war which emphasised a ‘nation of victors, not victims’ who demonstrated ‘sublime and

⁷⁴⁵ *War Picture Library* 1230, ‘The Invaders’ (July, 1976).

unwavering steadfastness in the face of adversity'.⁷⁴⁶ The trope of 'defeat to victory' in British comic book stories about the Far Eastern campaign marked an attempt to bring uncomfortable episodes of the conflict in line with the spirit of 'Britishness' that pervaded popular narratives of the Second World War in Britain.⁷⁴⁷

The premise of an unprepared army suffering defeat before being transformed into an efficient weapon was a recurring theme in comic book narratives of the campaign. In *War Picture Library*'s 'Learn Fast and Live' (1965), a group of new recruits are taken by surprise by the Japanese advance and forced to fight their way through the jungle. A final caption confirmed that the experience had 'turned the raw, uncertain boys into tough and self-reliant soldiers'.⁷⁴⁸ A similar transformation occurs in *War Picture Library*'s 'Formula for Danger' (1971), in which a jungle training exercise for a group of rookie commandoes suddenly becomes the real thing when the Japanese strike into Burma.⁷⁴⁹ At the conclusion, having proven themselves on the battlefield, the new recruits' commander proudly confirms their successful transformation: 'we've put an entire Japanese army corps out of action and busted millions of pounds worth of their potential. I reckon you've all won your spurs at this

⁷⁴⁶ Paul Sanders, 'Narratives of Britishness: UK War Memory and the Channel Islands Occupation Memory' in J. Matthews and D. Travers (eds.), *Islands and Britishness: A Global Perspective* (Newcastle, 2012), p.25; Paul Sanders, *The Channel Islands Under German Occupation, 1940-1945* (Jersey, 2005), p.256;

⁷⁴⁷ Daniel Travers, Paul Ward, 'Narrating Britain's War: "A Four Nations and More" Approach to the People's War', in Manuel Braganca and Peter Tame (eds.), *The Long Aftermath: Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936-2016* (Oxford, 2016), pp.77-95, p.77.

⁷⁴⁸ *War Picture Library* 312, 'Learn Fast and Live' (November, 1965)

⁷⁴⁹ *War Picture Library* 704, 'Formula For Danger' (November, 1971)

commando game!’ In keeping with popular British perceptions of the war, initial reverses mark a temporary setback before victory is eventually snatched from the jaws of defeat.

Other comics were less subtle in their attempts to link the Far Eastern campaign to the ‘signal events’ in the popular memory of the war.⁷⁵⁰ *War Picture Library*’s ‘The Old Guard’ (1962) opened with the Dunkirk evacuation, as a British officer heroically attempts to destroy a bridge to prevent German armour from reaching the beaches. The same officer is later posted to Singapore, where he must once again blow up a bridge to slow the Japanese advance and allow troops to be evacuated from the island.⁷⁵¹ The juxtaposition of the celebrated Dunkirk retreat with the fall of Singapore, one of the greatest defeats in the history of British arms, suggests a conscious attempt to rehabilitate the memory of the latter and to counter the derision with which it had been viewed.⁷⁵² Certainly an equivalence is drawn between the heroics of the British soldiers involved in both evacuations, and no criticism is offered of the senior commanders presiding over either disaster. This was not the case in *War Picture Library*’s ‘Law of the Jungle’ (1961). Dunkirk once again provided the backdrop for the narrative in which a British officer goes against his better judgement and follows the orders of a blimpish superior, rather than use his own initiative during the France evacuation.⁷⁵³ When the rest of his unit is wiped out, he rails against the ‘stupid, brainless

⁷⁵⁰ Finney, ‘Isaac Fadoyebo’s Journey, pp.71-88; Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p.2.

⁷⁵¹ *War Picture Library* 900, ‘The Old Guard’, (November, 1962).

⁷⁵² Raymond Callaghan, *The Worst Disaster: The Fall of Singapore* (London, 1977); Karl Hack, Kevin Blackburn, *Did Singapore Have to Fall?: Churchill and the Impregnable Fortress* (London, 2005); Alan Warren, *Singapore 1942: Britain’s Greatest Defeat* (London, 2002).

⁷⁵³ *War Picture Library* 764, ‘The Law of the Jungle’ (June, 1961).

oafs with red tabs' whose orders caused the death of his comrades. The same officer is transferred to the Far East shortly after the Japanese invasion of Burma, is trained as a Chindit and learns to act independently during the first Chindit operation. At the conclusion of the narrative, the officer is part of the D-Day landings and saves the lives of his men by disobeying an order and applying his Chindit interpretation of military discipline. Sandwiched between the Dunkirk evacuation and the D-Day landings, 'Law of the Jungle' makes a clear connection between the Chindit operations in Burma and the 'iconic' moments of the war in British popular memory.

The depiction of the Far Eastern campaign in British comics reinforces James Chapman's assertion that the genre can be seen as 'part of an ideological project to present the Second World War as a national achievement – "their finest hour"'.⁷⁵⁴ This narrative of heroic victory excluded rival versions of events in the war, and disregarded multiple and divergent memories of key moments in the conflict. While comics did not shy away from depicting humiliating episodes from the war in the Far East, they rarely attempted to expose failures of command and strategy. Rather, comics sought to simplify the campaign into a narrative that young British readers would recognise and find acceptable. The invasion of Malaya, the fall of Singapore and the British retreat from Burma served as starting points for comic book narratives that invariably ended in British triumph. For comic readers, the war in

⁷⁵⁴ Chapman, *British Comics*, p.98.

the Far East was certainly not a ‘forgotten war’, but the narrative of the conflict presented in comics provided only a fragmentary and highly sanitized vision of the campaign.

If comics sought to reinforce a narrative of the Second World War as Britain’s ‘finest hour’, it is worth remembering that in his ‘finest hour’ speech, Churchill referred not just to Britain, but to ‘the British Empire and its Commonwealth.’ The military force that liberated Burma exemplified the spirit of unity that Churchill’s wartime rhetoric sought to foster. Composed of British, Indian, Burmese, African, Australian, Malaysian and Chinese soldiers, it was truly an imperial army. How was this multiracial force was portrayed in comic books? At a glance, depictions of the 14th Army appear to confirm Connelly’s suggestion that post-war imperial decline left the British with little inclination to celebrate the great imperial effort of the Far Eastern campaign.⁷⁵⁵ In one hundred copies of *War Picture Library* and *Commando* that featured the war in the Far East researched for this chapter, just under a quarter featured non-white Allied troops at some point in the narrative, as either regular soldiers or Burmese freedom fighters. Those that did feature non-white soldiers almost always gave them a supporting role in the story, with a British, or occasionally Australian, officer as the primary protagonist. Yet the disproportionate focus on soldiers from Britain and the Dominions in war comics is perhaps more a reflection of the existence of a market for comics in the white Commonwealth, than a deliberate attempt to whitewash the history of the Far Eastern campaigns. Indeed, given the sobriquet of the ‘forgotten army’, an appearance

⁷⁵⁵ Connelly, *We Can Take It*, p.248-256.

rate of almost one in four comics is surprisingly high for soldiers whose contributions were so often ignored elsewhere.

None of picture library the strips I have examined mentioned Wingate by name, but the Chindits featured regularly. As with the LRDG, stories repeated many of the features of heroic narratives of jungle warfare examined in the first three chapters of this thesis: brave British soldiers supporting each other and battling the rigours of the tropics - heat, disease, jungle – in the service of the nation. The comic strip image of the plucky Chindits, ordinary men performing acts of heroism in a dangerous environment, echoed the press reports of their exploits examined in chapter three. Jungle stories about the exploits of the 14th Army also repeated the wartime press's celebration of the Gurkhas.⁷⁵⁶ Depictions of the Nepalese soldiers drew on a colonial discourse which identified Gurkhas as a martial race, noted for their loyalty and extraordinary bravery in battle.⁷⁵⁷ The opening caption of *Commando*'s 'Blade of Honour' (1968) was typical of the depiction of Gurkhas in British comics:

Not without reason the Gurkha is known to be one of the finest fighting-men in the whole world. These stocky, tough hillmen from Nepal have a motto... "it is better to die than to live a coward." And they expect their British officers to live up to that motto too. If they have any doubts about them, they speak up.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁶ *War Picture Library* 298, 'Johnny Gurkha' (July, 1965); *Commando* 363, 'Blade of Honour' (November, 1968); *Commando*, 'Gurkhas to the Rescue' (May, 1978); *Commando* 1090, 'One Man's Courage' (December, 1976);

⁷⁵⁷ See Lionel Caplan, 'The Bravest of the Brave: Representations of "The Gurkha" in British Military Writings', *Modern Asian Studies* 25 (July, 1991), pp. 571-591, p.585, 586, 589;

⁷⁵⁸ *Commando* 363, 'Blade of Honour' (November, 1968)

As the final line of the caption indicates, it is possible to detect a shift by 1968 from the colonial construction of the Gurkha as ‘unquestioningly loyal’ to the British, to one based on mutual respect.⁷⁵⁹ The notion that British officers must prove themselves to colonial subjects in order to earn their support, and that they might be found to be unworthy by the men whom they hope to lead, hints at changing power relations between Britain and its former colonies. Stories in which British officers must prove themselves to colonial troops were a regular feature of *Commando* comics in particular during the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁶⁰ Another such storyline featured in *Commando*’s ‘One Man’s Courage’ (1976), in which a British officer is told that he must ‘earn the trust and respect of the Gurkha unit he would live with – and perhaps die with.’⁷⁶¹ After failing to impress initially, by the end of the narrative the officer has proven his worth in battle and is ‘a man on his way to becoming a mighty legend’ among the Gurkha troops. Again, in *Commando*’s ‘The Bamboo Cage’ (1970), a British officer must prove himself, this time to a unit of Burmese freedom fighters.⁷⁶² Soldiers’ memoirs frequently display admiration and affection for the fighting qualities of the Gurkhas, but the recognition of the contribution of colonial troops did not indicate the promotion of a progressive political agenda.⁷⁶³ Comics promoted racial stereotypes which still positioned Gurkha soldiers as loyal subordinates to white Britons. For example, *Commando*’s ‘Gurkhas

⁷⁵⁹ Caplan, ‘The Bravest’, p.587-589.

⁷⁶⁰ See *Commando* 450, ‘Fighting Retreat’ (October, 1969); *Commando* 720, ‘Leave Him Behind’ (June, 1971); *Commando*, ‘Gurkhas to the Rescue’ (May, 1978);

⁷⁶¹ *Commando* 1090, ‘One Man’s Courage’ (December, 1976).

⁷⁶² *Commando* 503, ‘The Bamboo Cage’ (October, 1970).

⁷⁶³ See, among many, Richard Rhodes James, *Chindit: The Explosive Truth About the Last Wingate Expedition* (London, 1980), pp.10-16.

to the Rescue' (1978) told the story of an idealistic British officer who is framed by his commanding officer for a crime he didn't commit. His fiercely loyal Gurkha platoon fight wholeheartedly to help the officer prove his innocence.⁷⁶⁴ The conventions of the war comic genre and the continual demand to produce fresh depictions of the conflict pushed writers to draw on their own experiences and recount episodes of the war for original storylines that rarely featured in popular war films.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how imperial settings retained a significant place in the British popular memory of the Second World War in comics and picture libraries through the 1960s and 70s. Targeted at a mass audience, these publications focused on the exploits of ordinary soldiers and junior officers in the field, not the strategic challenges faced by the most senior commanders. While neither David Lloyd Owen nor Orde Wingate were directly named in the editions of *Commando* and *War Picture Library* on which I have focused, these publications recycled many of the aspects of the heroic narratives which circulated around the LRDG and the Chindits during the war which the first three chapters of this thesis examined. The frequent representation of the campaigns in North Africa and the Far East in comics circulated a familiar heroic model: stories continued to show brave British soldiers enduring

⁷⁶⁴ *Commando* 1225, 'Gurkhas to the Rescue' (May, 1978). In 2015 *Commando*'s publisher, DC Thomson, re-released this issue along with *Commando* 2533 'Lone Gurkha' (January 1992) to commemorate 200 years service to the Crown by the Brigade of Gurkhas. <https://www.dcthomson.co.uk/2015/05/commando-re-release-special-edition-stories-to-support-gurkha-200/> [Accessed 06/01/21].

hardship in exotic environments in the service of the nation, fighting enemies represented through a familiar set of stock racial stereotypes. The religious beliefs of British soldiers were rarely mentioned, in marked contrast both to the stories that inspired Orde Wingate in the 1920s and 30s, particularly about General Gordon, and to the wartime reports of Wingate's death examined in chapter four which placed his faith at the heart of his life-story.

Martin Francis' call for historians to look beyond the celebrated canon of popular war films should be extended to include other neglected sources of memory production. For twenty years from the late 1950s, comics and picture libraries drew weekly audiences to rival even the most popular film releases. In contrast to cinema, the indigenous peoples of North Africa featured regularly. Writers mobilised a diverse set of racist stereotypes when representing the inhabitants of the Libyan interior and the Middle East, describing fanatical warriors, barbaric torturers and cunning liars. Comics repeated the familiar formulas of 'good' and 'bad natives', who performed both as enemies and as allies. Narratives that featured 'tribesmen' assisting British soldiers marked a recognition of the contribution of North Africans to the war effort that was rarely found in other forms of popular culture. Stories occasionally even registered the destruction of the war on the lives and property of local people.

Although the basic format of stories – heroic Briton in exotic environment battling racialised enemy – remained consistent, some aspects changed across the period. The use of less formal language and more irreverent humour increased across the period. Artists

developed new techniques for depicting what has been termed ‘ultraviolence’ in comics.⁷⁶⁵ Racial stereotypes remained central, but stories registered the tensions of imperial governance more frequently through the late 1960s and 70s. Viewed in the context of the decline of Britain’s power and influence in the Arab world, comics that featured hostile imperial subjects appear to gesture retrospectively towards the inevitability of Britain’s withdrawal from the region. Comics thus support Francis’ assertion that the end of empire and the cultural memory of the Second World War should not be posed as two antithetical alternatives.⁷⁶⁶ Whether as enemies of the British, allies, or innocent victims of the war, comics registered the presence of racial difference in the imperial setting of the North African campaign.

Racial difference was also a notable aspect of comic book depictions of the 14th Army, which regularly reflected the racially diverse force that liberated Burma. While narratives of the Far East predominantly centred on white British and Dominion servicemen, a significant minority of stories featured non-white, imperial soldiers fighting alongside the British. In contrast to depictions of the Desert War, stories that featured the Far East did not register discontent among imperial subjects. Nonetheless it is possible to detect a subtle difference in narratives of British imperial leadership. The recurring trope of British officers scrutinised by imperial soldiers and forced to prove their worth as leaders reflected changing

⁷⁶⁵ For developments in the representation of violence in comics in this period see Chapman, *British Comics*, pp.125-143. The graphic techniques used by comic book artists deserve further study.

⁷⁶⁶ Francis, ‘Remembering War, Forgetting Empire?’, p.122.

power relations between Britain and its former colonies. Comic book writers also showed a willingness to engage with humiliating episodes of the war in the Far East, regularly featuring stories that revolved around the fall of Singapore or the retreat from Burma. However, rather than registering the loss of British prestige that followed these incidents, comic books sought to rehabilitate these reverses, bringing them into line with the 'signal events' in British popular memory of the conflict. Despite the 14th Army's reputation as a 'forgotten army', comic books were one 'cultural artefact' which repeatedly featured the war in Burma. Taken together, comic book narratives of the Far East and North Africa reveal that imperial fronts featured more prominently in British popular memory of the war than has previously been argued.

Conclusion

This doctoral thesis began by mapping the repertoire of heroic narratives on which Orde Wingate and David Lloyd Owen drew when fashioning their masculine identities. Although both men led special forces operations behind enemy lines, they had very different experiences during the Second World War. They entered the conflict at different stages in their career, fought in different theatres, achieved different levels of success and popular acclaim, and left contrasting legacies. Yet analysis of the range of texts written by both men during their careers reveals striking similarities in their desire to fashion and project identities as soldier heroes and exemplary leaders. The theory of the cultural circuit provides a useful tool through which to analyse the processes of construction and projection. In their varied writings, both Wingate and Lloyd Owen drew on a shared iconography of male heroism to fashion their identities, selecting heroic exemplars to define themselves.

The masculine identities that Lloyd Owen and Wingate constructed in their writings were not mirror images of each other; both men drew on different narratives to emphasise the distinct constellations of heroic characteristics that they found to be aspirational. Yet, as chapters one and two of this thesis have shown, there were important similarities between them. Narratives of elite heroism continued to shape both men's self-image, generating tensions with the egalitarian rhetoric of the 'People's War'. During a period in which the heroic ideal was increasingly democratised, we see in both officers' self-fashioning the

continued influence of romantic individualism and imperial heroism. Wingate positioned himself as a Christian soldier in the mould of his own hero, General Gordon. His pre-war posturing as a romantic adventurer in the Libyan Desert, and as a latter-day Gideon in Palestine, anticipated the public image that he cultivated during the war. Lloyd Owen was even more explicit than Wingate in invoking narratives of imperial heroism to make sense of his own experiences. *The Desert My Dwelling Place* provided an index of the heroic men that shaped his self-fashioning, ranging from fictional adventure heroes to explorers and soldiers. His confession in the memoir of his desire to follow Lawrence of Arabia in fighting irregular operations in the desert starkly captured the powerful influence that the archetype of the imperial hero continued to exert over British officers during the Second World War.

The self-fashioning of Wingate and Lloyd Owen as exceptional individuals, as heroic British officers, and as exemplary leaders of men, demonstrates the continued vitality of romantic Toryism during the 1940s, supporting Martin Francis' assertion that despite the collectivist impulses generated by the 'People's War', alternative cultural imaginaries persisted.⁷⁶⁷ The flamboyant soldiers that both men selected as exemplars embodied many of the essential qualities of romantic Toryism: the superior breeding of the upper class, martial prowess and patriotism. In chapters one and two I explored the ways in which Wingate and Lloyd Owen internalised narratives of such men, integrating them into their own self-

⁷⁶⁷ Martin Francis, 'Cecil Beaton's Romantic Toryism and the Symbolic Economy of Wartime Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), pp.90-117.

representations. The continued cultural space for these elite expressions of heroic masculinity during the 'People's War' further complicates Sonya Rose's formulation of the hegemonic masculinity of the 'temperate hero.'⁷⁶⁸ Chapter one argued that the 'communication communities' in which officers like Wingate and Lloyd Owen were socialised produced alternative hierarchies of masculinities to those identified by Rose, conferring greater legitimacy on characteristics shunned in the performance of 'temperate masculinity.'⁷⁶⁹ As products of military families, elite public schools, royal military academies, and ultimately special operations units, notions of leadership, individualism and elite heroism continued to shape Wingate and Lloyd Owen's self-fashioning.

Chapter two argued that too rigid an application of cultural models to the processes of self-fashioning risks obscuring the complexity and ambiguity of individual expressions of masculinity. Analysis of the personal testimonies of both men reveals tensions between their fantasies of individual heroism and elite leadership, and the egalitarian impulses of a wartime discourse that celebrated ordinariness, collective effort, and understated heroism. These tensions were exemplified in Lloyd Owen's post-war memoir, which alternated uneasily between the celebration of the soldiers of the LRDG as elite individuals, and an emphasis on their status as ordinary men. The ideal of the temperate hero influenced Lloyd Owen's composure of a masculine self in the narrative, emphasising the characteristics of self-

⁷⁶⁸ Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 151-196.

⁷⁶⁹ Ben Griffin, 'Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem', *Gender & History* 30 (2018), pp.377-400, pp.385-395.

effacement, modesty and understatement. This self-representation was counterbalanced, however, by the author's romantic conception of desert warfare, and his conscious alignment of himself and the unit with narratives of elite, imperial heroism. In his private wartime diary, the LRDG commander enacted a heroic identity that was less mediated by the requirement to genuflect to the democratising discourses that were attached to the British remembrance of the Second World War. Lloyd Owen's frustrations at being removed from frontline combat, his tortured response to the possibility that he might be unable to re-join the LRDG after his injury, his horror at becoming one of the 'humdrum, uninitiated majority', betrayed an individualism quite at odds with the selflessness and understatement central to the performance of temperate masculinity.

Tensions between self-effacement and self-promotion are less discernible in the writings of the unashamedly brash Wingate. Yet we see in his frustration with the abilities of the 'second rate' officers and men of a civilian army a similar friction between notions of elite and ordinary heroism. Wingate's public utterances on *Longcloth*, the egalitarian message of his Order of the Day and his endorsement of the propaganda attached to the operation, show the Chindit commander's strategic mobilisation of the language of the 'People's War'. Chapter two argued that in his report of *Longcloth*, the message Wingate sought to impress on his superiors was that the soldiers allocated to him were inadequate for the operation and that such men must not be assigned to him again, but publicly he claimed that *Longcloth* had demonstrated how ordinary men could be trained to engage in long range penetration and match the Japanese at jungle warfare. Both to his superiors in the military, and to the British

public, the operation provided Wingate with the opportunity to fashion himself as a heroic and visionary leader.

Chapter four traced the reception of Wingate's self-fashioning by presenting the first systematic examination of the discourse generated by the Chindit commander's death. British and Palestinian commemorations of Wingate's death during the war mark an illuminating case study of the cultural circuit at work, highlighting the interactions between private and public narratives of individual lives. Wingate's self-representations, explored in chapters one and two, drew on existing public narratives of male heroism. Following operation *Longcloth* and, to an even greater extent, after his death, these self-representations were picked up in public acts of remembrance and newspaper reports of Wingate's life, and transformed into public representations. In this process, described by Graham Dawson as 'public-ation', the heroic identity that Wingate fashioned was open to interpretation and alteration by commentators seeking to frame him within established definitions of male heroism.⁷⁷⁰ Thus, along with his own heroic exemplars, narratives of Wingate's life positioned him alongside those of other soldier-heroes on the cultural circuit. Frequent associations made between Wingate and Lawrence reveal the limitations placed by the cultural circuit on the available possibilities for a masculine self. Wingate had endeavoured to distance himself from

⁷⁷⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), p.25.

Lawrence, but as an established and recognisable public narrative of elite heroism, 'Lawrence of Arabia' provided a potent frame from which Wingate was unable to escape.

The range of meanings ascribed to Wingate in the weeks and months following his death highlight the fluidity of his heroic reputation, as different communities placed contrasting interpretations on his significance. British commemorations drew on and embellished Wingate's own self-representation as a Christian, imperial hero. The emphasis on the Chindit commander's religious faith exposes the persistence of Christianity in British public life during the war, demonstrating the centrality of Christian faith to notions of British national identity. For the Jewish community in Britain, Wingate's activities in Palestine formed the cornerstone of his heroic reputation. Jewish commentators highlighted Wingate's activities in support of the Zionist cause to emphasise his unique significance for the Jewish people, rather than as a national British hero. Jewish remembrance in Britain highlighted Wingate's Zionism as his foremost concern, expressing the community's dissatisfaction with British policy in Palestine. Similar sentiments were expressed in commemorations in British mandated Palestine, where commentators reflected on the nature of the British character. Palestinian commemoration emphasised another aspect of Wingate's self-fashioning, portraying the Chindit commander a soldier in the tradition of the biblical figure of Gideon.

The response to Wingate's death, and the widespread coverage of *Longcloth*, challenges Connelly and Wilcox's assertion that neither Wingate nor the Chindits had a high

profile during the war.⁷⁷¹ Indeed, after *Longcloth* Wingate became one of the most famous soldiers in the British army of the time. The propaganda message of *Longcloth* was central to popular representations of the operation in wartime newspapers and magazines, further underlining Wingate's abilities as an astute self-publicist. Chapter three explored the different meanings projected onto the men of the Long-Range Desert Group and the Chindits in wartime popular culture, arguing that the units came to represent different ideas in the symbolic economy of wartime Britain. As ordinary men who had undergone hardship and endured suffering, the Chindits embodied Britain's ability to withstand the privations of war; the nation's ability to 'take it.' Popular narratives of the Chindits in the wartime British press strongly conformed to Rose's template of 'temperate masculinity', focusing on the good humour and stoicism of the men of the brigade. The soldiers of the Long Range Desert Group occupied an alternative space in the British wartime imaginary, exemplifying a national tradition of adventure, exploration and individualism, albeit shaped by the rhetoric of the 'People's War'.

The broadcasting of narratives of the LRDG and the Chindits by the British press saw the activities of both units, and the experiences of the soldiers involved, moving from the personal to the public realm, thus joining the repertoire of narratives of masculine heroism in the cultural circuit. In the decades after the war, the cultural form that most frequently

⁷⁷¹ Mark Connelly, David Wilcox, 'Are You Tough Enough? The Image of British Special Forces in British Popular Culture, 1939-2004', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25 (2005), pp.1-25, p.2.

produced narratives of Second World War special forces, the British comic book, drew on and modified wartime depictions of both units to create exciting adventure stories. Chapter five argued that comics mark an important and under researched site of memory formation in the cultural history of the Second World War, providing a valuable counterweight to Eurocentric constructions of the conflict that emerged in popular war films of the 1950s and 1960s. By exploring depictions in the highly successful format of picture library comic books of the Chindits, LRDG, and the theatres of war in which they fought, chapter five highlighted the persistence of a familiar narrative template - heroic Britons battling racialised enemies in exotic settings - through the 1960s and into the 1970s, during a period in which some scholars have argued the imperial dimensions of the conflict were forgotten. Although stories often contrasted the morality of civilised Britons with the barbarity of enemies, the explicit references to Christian faith which had pervaded Wingate's self-fashioning and public reputation in the 1930s and 1940s were largely absent from the picture library genre.

Afterlives

The afterlives of Orde Wingate and David Lloyd Owen would provide fertile terrain for future research. Wingate's reputation has been fiercely contested since the 1950s. Early indications of what was to follow came in the consternation caused in some quarters by Leonard Mosely's 1955 biography which, although sympathetic to its subject, embellished

his opposition to the military establishment in Palestine and Ethiopia.⁷⁷² Criticisms of Wingate crystallised in the accounts of two other commanders who had served with him in Burma: Field Marshall William Slim's 1956 memoir *Defeat into Victory*, and the 1961 *Official History of the War Against Japan* by Major General S. Woodburn Kirby.⁷⁷³ Although Slim had written a highly favourable tribute to Wingate immediately after his death, in his memoir he described 'a man who so fanatically pursued his own purposes without regard to any other consideration or purpose' and who 'was strangely naïve when it came to the business of actually fighting the Japanese.'⁷⁷⁴ In a six-page assessment of Wingate, Kirby dismissed the Chindit commander's character as well as his abilities as a general. According to Kirby, Wingate possessed 'neither the knowledge, stability nor balance to make a great commander', and was 'petulant', 'obsessed', and 'unwilling to co-operate with anyone not directly under his command.'⁷⁷⁵ Kirby even suggested that 'the moment of his death may have been propitious for him' as, had he not died during operation *Thursday*, Wingate's inadequacies as a commander would have been exposed.⁷⁷⁶ In response to these damning condemnations, supporters of Wingate published a series of works over the following

⁷⁷² Leonard Mosely, *Gideon Goes to War* (London, 1955). *The Spectator*, 18 March 1955, pp.316-318, published an article condemning Mosely's 'shabby' portrayal of Wingate.

⁷⁷³ William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London, 1956), pp.218-220; S. Woodburn Kirby et al, *History of the Second World War, the War Against Japan, Volume III: The Decisive Battles* (London, 1961), pp. 219-225.

⁷⁷⁴ For Slim's tribute to Wingate, see SEAC Pamphlet, 'The Chindits', October 1944, IWM Wingate Box 6. For criticism of Wingate see Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, p.248, p.250.

⁷⁷⁵ Kirby, *War Against Japan, Vol. III*, p.219.

⁷⁷⁶ Kirby, *War Against Japan, Vol. III*, p.222.

decades rebutting Slim and Kirby's appraisals.⁷⁷⁷ The debate over Wingate's reputation continues to surface. Several historians have accused Wingate of committing atrocities in Palestine, and Frank McLynn's 2010 history of the Burma campaign was highly critical of the Chindit commander's conduct throughout his career, reasserting and amplifying many of the criticisms outlined by Slim and Kirby.⁷⁷⁸

Even so, the heroic construction of the Chindit commander that emerged during the war has endured in British popular culture, as controversy helped keep Wingate in the public eye.⁷⁷⁹ No major feature film was dedicated to his life, possibly due to the obstruction of his widow, Lorna. In 1976 the BBC produced a trilogy of films starring Barry Foster as Wingate, telling the story of his activities in Palestine, Ethiopia and Burma. Filmed entirely in a studio and on a low budget, the series was nonetheless a critical success.⁷⁸⁰ It did not deviate from the popular construction of Wingate as military genius and heroic leader, although Foster's gritty portrayal captured something of the religious fanaticism and tempestuousness of

⁷⁷⁷ Three of Wingate's most vocal defenders served with him in Burma; Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London, 1972); Peter Mead, *Orde Wingate and the Historians* (Braunton, 1987); R. Thompson, *Make for the Hills* (London, 1989), pp.71-76. See also David Rooney, *Wingate and the Chindits: Redressing the Balance* (London, 1994).

⁷⁷⁸ Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (London, 2000), pp.587-588; Frank McLynn, *The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph, 1942-1945* (London, 2010), pp.68-89, was highly critical of Wingate and repeated accusations of war crimes in Palestine,

⁷⁷⁹ Max Jones, 'From "Noble Example" to "Potty Pioneer": Rethinking Scott of the Antarctic, c. 1945-2011', *Polar Journal* 1 (2011), pp.191-206, argues that the controversy surrounding Captain Scott damaged his reputation but sustained public interest in the explorer.

⁷⁸⁰ Among the many positive reviews, the *Daily Telegraph* declared that 'the Wingate trilogy has matched the daring unorthodoxy of its hero's Chindit expeditions', 31 July 1976, p.7.

Wingate's character. In short, it echoed the heroic identity that Wingate had fashioned during his lifetime.

Stories about Wingate and the Chindits have joined those of other British soldiers considered to be either romantic or eccentric in the cultural circuits of military heroism. Wingate has become a by-word for unconventional commanders, as the comparisons with T. E. Lawrence and other heroes of empire that pervaded narratives of his death have largely persisted. He is regularly referenced in the frequent history television series about the Chindits, special forces and the Second World War.⁷⁸¹ When in 1966 United Artists released a film about General Gordon's last campaign in Sudan, *Khartoum*, promotional material located Gordon in the tradition of Clive of India, Lawrence of Arabia, Orde Wingate of Burma, and Montgomery of El Alamein.⁷⁸² To give a more recent example, a 2018 *Daily Mirror* article described the 'long British tradition of romantic, mystical soldiers. General Gordon, TE Lawrence and Orde Wingate.'⁷⁸³ The quotation could have come from 1944. The inclusion of Wingate in a pantheon of great British soldier heroes indicates his continued cultural resonance.

Although David Lloyd Owen was never included in such lists of British greats, his exploits with the LRDG and successful military career brought him authority and status as an

⁷⁸¹ For a recent example, see *Burma's Secret Jungle War with Joe Simpson* aired on BBC 2 in 2016.

⁷⁸² Max Jones, 'National Hero and Very Queer Fish': Empire, Sexuality and the British Remembrance of General Gordon, 1918-72', *Twentieth Century British History* 26 (2015), pp. 175-202, p.197.

⁷⁸³ *Daily Mirror*, 28 April 2018, p.30.

expert on the war and the desert. He was invited to the film premiere of *The Black Tent* in 1957.⁷⁸⁴ In 1958, Lloyd Owen reviewed Virginia Cowles' biography of SAS founder David Stirling, *The Phantom Major*, for the *Daily Telegraph*. Describing Stirling, whom he had worked with closely during the desert campaign, Lloyd Owen wrote that 'his daring became a legend in the Middle East, yet only his fundamental modesty prevented him from becoming one of the greatest heroes of the war.'⁷⁸⁵ Lloyd Owen might have been describing himself. In his 1980 memoir and history of the LRDG, he reflected on the reasons for the low profile of the LRDG compared to other special-forces units of the Second World War, 'I believe this is because the Group, and the men who served with it, were inclined to shun publicity.'⁷⁸⁶ Indeed, Lloyd Owen's reticence to engage in the kind of ostentatious self-promotion that contributed to Wingate's status as one of the most famous soldier-heroes of the Second World War undoubtedly dampened popular recognition of his own wartime achievements.

It was through his memoirs that Lloyd Owen shaped his own public profile and illuminated the heroism of the unit he commanded. When he died in 2001, newspaper obituarists looked to his memoirs for epitaphs. Thus, the *Daily Telegraph* obituary subheading described Lloyd Owen as a 'Wartime commander of the Long Range Desert Group who thrived on danger in North Africa and the Balkans.'⁷⁸⁷ The obituarist went on to

⁷⁸⁴ *Daily Mail*, 08/02/1957, p.10. Martin Francis has examined the film's significance, 'Remembering War, Forgetting Empire? Representation of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema' in Lucy Noakes, Juliette Pattinson (eds.), *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London, 2014), pp.111-132.

⁷⁸⁵ *Daily Telegraph*, 9/05/1958, p.15.

⁷⁸⁶ David Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide: The Long Range Desert Group, 1940-1945* (London, 1980), p.3.

⁷⁸⁷ *Daily Telegraph*, 7 April 2001, p.23.

quote a passage from *The Desert My Dwelling Place*, cited in this thesis as an example of Lloyd Owen's masculine self-fashioning, in which he confessed that 'danger has some kind of Satanic appeal for me. I am drawn toward it in an octopus-like grip of fear.' *The Times* described Lloyd Owen as a 'Buccaneering raider behind Rommel's front line in the sand seas of Western Desert.'⁷⁸⁸ Although he enjoyed a long, distinguished career that saw further deployments in Malaya and Kenya, it was Lloyd Owen's account of his activities with a unit that had only existed between 1940-1945 that shaped public remembrance.

It was presumably as an LRDG commander that Lloyd Owen wished to be remembered. At the age of 63 in 1980 he chose to publish *Providence Their Guide*, his second account of his experiences with the LRDG, rather than write about his military career during the end of empire. In the closing passage of his 1957 memoir, Lloyd Owen had addressed his infant son to voice his misgivings about the nature of future wars,

I only hope that you never have the reality of another war with which to compare your visions of the last one. You see, we had a lot of fun those fifteen years ago. But there was also much that was vile, hideous and terrible. I am only afraid that you would not even have the fun.

Perhaps Lloyd Owen found that there was less 'fun', less to romanticise, in the conflicts fought as Britain relinquished its empire. In the preface to the 2001 edition of *Providence Their Guide*, he reflected on those words from his 1957 memoir, hoping that the grandchildren he now had might 'gain some inspiration by reading of the spirit of those who

⁷⁸⁸ *The Times*, 7 April 2001, p.27.

suffered so much to win victory over evil. It was certainly worth fighting for.’ He continued, ‘But they must think how tragic it was that we failed to win peace in later years.’⁷⁸⁹ The Second World War generated no such misgivings for David Lloyd Owen. The desert sands and jungles of the 1940s continue to provide an arena where brave British heroes proved their mettle and their mastery of a hostile environment and foreign enemies.

⁷⁸⁹ Lloyd Owen, *Providence Their Guide*, p.xvii.

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