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UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY FAMILIES

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UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

Why is it important to understand the authentic experience of military family life? Military family life is unique and challenging but it is not without reward. Research into the challenges is manifold, whereas adaptive behaviours attract less attention. To better inform those who seek to support the military family, a more balanced and nuanced understanding of experiences that may warrant mitigation or maximisation may lead to more empathic and insightful policy and intervention. This would not only benefit the family, but also the service person(s) through reduction in domestic stressors and a sense of holistic support.

How has the research been undertaken? A Narrative Inquiry approach was employed to interview families of recent military veterans, inviting them to reflect on their experiences as a military family and capture the entire journey from enlistment to transition back to civilian life. No preconditions were set and they were invited to tell their story on their own terms, consistent with the methodology. A theoretical framework based on social constructivism, strengths-based approaches and family systems theory was employed to analyse the subsequent data.

What are the main research findings? Many of the known challenges such as separation, accommodation, spousal employment, access to healthcare and childrens' education were highlighted. However, there were many examples of positive growth for some or all and overall the stories were positive, suggesting that those interviewed had been able to contextualise their experiences and in most cases celebrate growth and resilience as a family. As Brockman *et al* (2015) note, "It is remarkable that the majority of military service members and their intimate partners and children show considerable resilience in the face of these significant challenges"

Why do these findings matter? Policy, aided by research, is most often employed to deal with a problem. A more measured and comprehensive understanding of the military family experience that acknowledges the benefits as well as the difficulties and seeks to preserve the former whilst mitigating the latter could potentially lead to policy that was more effective and enduring. Ultimately, anything which enhances combat power in our Armed Forces is invaluable and for service personnel to feel confident that their family were being supported and could in turn then support them would act as what is referred to in the military as a 'force multiplier'.

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Preface

Research in the United Kingdom into the challenges faced by military families has historically been somewhat sparse in comparison with that conducted and supported in other nations, principal amongst whom have long been the United States of America. Those challenges are anecdotally well described in the general mythology and folklore of military service and thus culturally normalised within the military community, where many have been seen as rites of passage to full cultural acceptance (Segal, 1988; Caforio, 2006). Additional cultural differences, expectations and norms in wider society then compound those challenges, both in respect of the service person and their existing or subsequently developed family. However, the profile of military families in the UK has been progressively raised since the recognition of the Armed Forces Covenant in the mid 2000s and its subsequent formalisation in 2011 (Ashcroft, 2014). In the wake of this, with support from government in terms of ring-fenced funds for research, a number of academic institutions have been able to expand the body of knowledge in this area, not least Northumbria University's Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research. Historically, the USA is widely known to vociferously and proudly support and fund their Armed Forces and veterans' community (Eichenberg, 2005). Whereas in the UK, despite high approval for military personnel, as opposed to the military tasks upon which they are employed, in the general population (Gribble *et al*, 2012) the military footprint in general society is constantly shrinking (Hines *et al*, 2014). The experience of the military family is in many cases correspondingly quite alien to that experienced by non-military families and, as with anything that does not sit within the mainstream of public and political awareness, risks being misunderstood, under-estimated and at the same time undervalued (Hall, 2011; Spencer, 2015).

The term, 'lived experience', is most commonly associated with studies employing phenomenology, however, whilst this study employs narrative inquiry, the same ontological interest in how military families experienced life is central to that inquiry. This study sought to explore through the stories of the families themselves precisely how they felt about their military life in all aspects – good, bad and indifferent. The principal challenges of separation, frequent relocation, children's education, spousal employment and career development, sub-standard accommodation and access to healthcare are well known and the frequent subject of both academic research and formal survey (Ministry of Defence Families Continuous Attitude Surveys, MOD 2021), but what is much less clear is how families actually felt about their experiences. Did they bond more readily in the face of adversity and challenge? Did they

experience relationship growth? Did their children gain as much as they might arguably have lost from their itinerant upbringing? The further intent of this study was therefore to add to the body of knowledge by determining whether these questions and potential answers thereto would come to light without prompting by the researcher, as a natural component of their personal stories. As will be seen in later chapters, the majority of previous studies into military families owe their genesis to the researchers' interest in developing understanding of and suggesting solutions to the well-known problems listed above. The net result was commonly that further evidence was found to support the existence, scale and impact of a problem and most research papers went on to suggest innovative solutions. However, in most cases the research focus was on the military families' experience in reacting and responding to the problem at its core, isolated by the parameters of the study design from seeing the problem in a wider context. Therefore, the overall aim of this work was to start from a neutral perspective and explore the experiences of service families as independently as possible of the established parameters that typify the majority of existing work.

Critically therefore, this study sought to invite answers to questions without overtly asking questions in the first place. By using the methodology of Narrative Inquiry, those military families interviewed were asked only to tell the tale of their military family life from their own perspective. They were given unrestricted latitude in explicitly unstructured interviews to begin the story where they chose, end it where they chose and furnish it with whatever content they chose. Any questions asked during interview were intended to be Socratic and solely for the purpose of adding clarity to a point raised. By taking this approach it was anticipated that the common problems that are a regular feature of both academic enquiry and official survey as detailed above would be presented, but that also there would be examples of experiences unique to the military family community that were less problematic or even positive, thus offering balance and context to what is known of the military family experience.

A word on style.

The issue of writing style was an early conundrum in the composition of this thesis. In exploring the proposed methodology it seemed incongruous to collate, analyse and present stories in a manner that was most unlike a natural, storytelling narrative. The dry, cerebral, third person prose of academia did not appear to sit well with either the nature of the stories gathered, nor of the structure needed to present them. Early iterations of the thesis were written in the first

person – an issue which divided the supervisory team. In the end, a balance had to be struck between the often unconventional approach to composition favoured by narrative theorists and the gravitas needed for a doctoral submission. Richardson (1994, cited in Kim 2016) observed, "For thirty years, I have yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. Countless numbers of texts have I abandoned half read, half scanned". Kim (2016) goes on to press the point that narrative inquiry is strengthened by accessible and engaging prose. However, Sword (2012) makes the case for the aforementioned balance in one simple sentence, "a dull writing style is an academic survival skill". Ergo to survive this doctoral endeavour, the conventions of academic writing must be retained. Nonetheless, it will be presented with the exercise of some literary licence and attention paid to its readability.

Acknowledgments

Inevitably, there is a very long list of people who deserve to be acknowledged in respect of their contribution to my arrival at this apotheosis of my student career. Chronologically then, rather than in order of importance, I must start with Major Wendy Jones and Major (later Lt Col) Sheila Jones (no relation), who recruited me onto the Military Nursing Diploma in 1997. This academic vehicle allowed for traditionally trained nurses such as myself to play catch-up with the new breed of Project 2000 nurses and later became the BSc in Defence Nursing Studies, which I later still helped to deliver as a nurse tutor. Perhaps most prominent in that era, however, was Major (later Lt Col) Alan Barr, who was the first person to convince me that just because something was published in a peer reviewed journal, that didn't make it the 'truth'. Steve Hemingway and Jack Walker at the University of Sheffield deserve a mention for getting me to a 2:1 in my Bachelors studies, on the way to registering as a mental health nurse, although if they'd briefed me better and told me to up my game earlier in the course I could have got a first! I was 1.33% off. Dr Edgar Jones at Kings College London was centrally influential in helping me to my first masters degree and helped me embrace more autonomy as a student. Dr Jenny Eland at Birmingham City University warrants no less a mention for guiding me through PGCE, PG Dip Ed and my Masters in Education. Professor Jamie Hacker Hughes must be thanked for head-hunting me for my first academic post after leaving the military and for having been a staunch friend for over twenty years, all of which brings us more or less up to date.

I have known Lt Cdr RN (Rtd) Matthew Kiernan PhD – or Matt – for over two decades, since we were both captains in the Army together. Ever since I first dabbled in study I have sensed there is a schism in academia, particularly in vocationally-grounded academia like ours, between researchers who can teach…and teachers who can research. Matt is the former and I am the latter. Friendships like ours bridge that schism that sometimes seems impossible to span. In my experience of a host of higher education institutions, Northumbria University seems to be prominent amongst those who recognise the essential equality of the two disciplines within academia and the need for synthesis over schism in their regard. To that end – not that I could forget him – I also owe a debt of thanks to Dr Michael Hill – or Mick – who understands the value of that synthesis and furthermore injected energy, enthusiasm and belief into me and my studies.

The penultimate acknowledgments must go to Dr Rebekah Stamps and Dr Shirley Timson, who were instrumental in identifying that the recurrent depression that had blighted my early years of doctoral study was owed to previously undiagnosed ADHD. Their help has enabled me to reframe my attitude to study away from a resentful feeling of imposition to a more positive and enthusiastic pursuit of knowledge.

Lastly and without question most critically, I owe an incalculable debt to my wife, Caroline and our six wonderful children who have accommodated my need to study over the last two decades with grace and tolerance, but who look forward to the day when Dad gets his life back as much as I do.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to our late, beloved Queen, Elizabeth, whose Commission I held for over a quarter of a Century and to whom I held fierce and proud allegiance. God rest her soul and bring blessings on her heirs and successors. God save the King.

Major (Retired) Mark Sewart

Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval was sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on

I declare that the word count of this thesis is 75,831

Name: M R Sewart

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Date: 02 Oct 2022

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1: Introduction

The relationship between the military and its soldiers' dependants or families has not always been a harmonious one. You do not have to look all that far back into history to see that families have not always enjoyed favour with the military. The first married quarters for ordinary soldiers were not provided until the 1850s, at a time when soldiers had to apply to their commanding officer for permission to marry (Strachan, 1984). Prior to then, a soldier's wife and children would have been expected to live in barracks with the rest of the soldiery. Away from home, the logistics tail of a marching army, known as 'camp followers', was usually accompanied by soldiers' wives and children (Delo, 1998). The uncompromising nature of military institutional culture requires the subordination of individual needs, which includes family needs, to the 'exigencies of the service' (Greenberg *et al,* 2007; Siebold 2007). As a result, historically families have not been readily nurtured and supported, but arguably tolerated. As Moelker and van der Kloet (2006) observe, "Military organisations are slow in accepting responsibility for military families".

Greater acceptance of the need to support the military family has run in parallel with wider shifts in the military culture over the last half a Century, shifts described by many through the Institutional/Organisational (I/O) model (Moskos, 1977). Put simply, "*The traditional perception of military service as a calling, or vocation, to the nation by its citizens, legitimated by broadly based national values, is giving way to a subjective definition of military service as an occupation in the labor (sic) market, involving the performance of work for civilian types of*

rewards under specified contractual conditions." (Cotton, 1988). Even more simply, in the minds of many it's 'just a job…' and increasingly there are those asking whether a 'job' should be able to exert such levels of control over not only its employees but also its employees' families. To support military families each Service has its own 'Families Federation' – independent third sector organisations dedicated to the families of service personnel. The Army Families Federation was originally founded in 1982 as the 'Federation of Army Wives Clubs' (Army Families Federation, 2022), which serves to illustrate the gender norms of the time. The RAF Families Federation was founded only in 2007, although families provision was generally better in the RAF even prior to then (McCafferty, 2016).

Within the accounts of those who contributed to this work as research subjects there is a broad spread of experience, from a family's first 'married quarter' being a caravan at one end of the spectrum to postings and housing being organised around children's educational and health needs at the other and everything in between. One of the key features of this work in comparison with the greater body of military family's research is its use of the exclusively qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry to look beyond the generalisable data that are extracted from most studies. This illuminates the real experiences and 'exceptions to the rule' that may offer a modicum of caution and balance in the assumptions made about how best to support military families. The very fact that positive aspects of the military family experience have been examined less thoroughly suggests there may be merit in considering them before further irrevocable changes are made to that experience or, as it may be proverbially expressed, "throwing the baby out with the bathwater.". There will be more on this later, but as an example the current Future Accommodation Model (HM Govt, 2016) seeks to offer families a choice as to whether they live in traditional married quarters or rent appropriate accommodation amongst the local civilian community. That is an attractive prospect and one which the author's family, certainly, would have liked to have been able to consider prior to our most recent and, as it turned out, final posting. However, we were atypical as a service family. However well-meaning, the net effect of dispersing the military community may well be to erode or even destroy the social cohesion that has been a feature of military life for centuries (Moelker and van der Kloet, 2006; Gosling, 2008; Army Families Federation, 2016) That cohesion – of families as well as service personnel – may be the glue that has effectively held the Armed Forces together thus far. (Downes, 1988)

1.2: Setting the scene - what is a Service Family?

Actually, this sub-title is two questions in one; what is the actual reality of a 'service family' and what is the accepted definition used by the MOD, of a 'Service Family'? In many cases, the two are different. Historically, the gulf between the two was significant but it has been decreasing ever since. It still, however, exists and this research sought to inform the latter by more clearly illustrating the former.

In order to be able to put together a coherent policy on anything, an organisation is going to have to set some definitions, much in the same way as researchers have to set inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inevitably though, this results in circumstances that were not considered and accounted for in the drafting of policy and such is the cultural eccentricity of the MoD that changes to policy can take years to effect, given the geological pace with which MoD has historically reacted to change in peacetime.

Today however, things are improving, but relatively little information that is focused on the contemporary experience of Forces' Families exists in the formal literature. Even today, according to the outgoing Chief Executive of the Army Families Federation, families "*'make do' with poor housing, constant separation and a thousand other frictions which come as a normal part of the service life package*" (Spencer, 2015). Furthermore, the 2018 Families Continuous Attitude Survey (MOD, 2018) found that 56% of families 'did not feel valued by the Service'. It has taken the conflicts of recent times in the Middle East and the associated re-awakening of a social cognisance of the military – as enshrined in the Armed Forces Covenant (HM Govt, 2011) – to generate growth of research interest in military families and veterans (Ashcroft, 2014). The reason why it is necessary to ask, 'what is a Service Family?' is because government and the Ministry of Defence have had to ask themselves that question repeatedly, over the last 170 years or so, in order to inform policy on what provision should be made. This is what is referred to as a 'planning assumption' and whilst there will have been recorded evidence of the policies thus generated, the assumptions can only be inferentially deduced based on provisions made. The planning assumptions of the past appear to have been consistent with those of the general population and its common understanding of the 'nuclear family' as a heterosexual married couple and children (or the prospect thereof) and provision has historically been made on that basis. Meanwhile society has moved on, whilst the Armed Forces traditionally lag behind societal change to some degree (Keegan, 1994). Nevertheless, although extant policy still

indicates that to be eligible to be recognised as a family and thus be entitled to service families' accommodation a service person should be, "be married or in a civil partnership or … have permanent custody of children" (MoD 2012 – updated 2019 – JSP464) that does now include same-sex marriage, despite the fact not being overtly stated. There is also provision for those in long-term relationships to occupy surplus accommodation where it is available.

However, for the purposes of this study, the cohort who were kind enough to volunteer their time all happen to represent a Service Family in the traditional, nuclear family sense. At the point of recruiting research subjects the author was open to the idea of interviewing same-sex couples or indeed single personnel, who of course generally still have families whose needs have been hitherto outside the scope of policy (Moelker and van der Kloet, 2006) however all respondents were of the typical family nature, i.e. family composition was not set as an inclusion/exclusion criteria. For good or ill, all families featured a male service person in a heterosexual marital relationship, with children. Data gathered from atypical families would have been welcome, but none was offered.

Of the eleven subjects interviewed, only two joined up already married and with children, which offered the opportunity to compare their experiences with those who formed and developed their Service Family from within.

1.3: Military culture and lifestyle

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'culture' as, "the customs, ideas and social behaviour of a particular people or group." (OED, 2011) If it is reasonable – as its inclusion in the dictionary suggests – to assume that this is a universally understood definition, it nonetheless requires further contextualisation to the people or group in question. Keegan (1994) observed that, "Soldiers are not as other men – that is the lesson that I have learned from a life cast among warriors". He goes on to expound the opinion that attempts to equate the work of soldiers – and by extension the military – with civilian equivalencies are folly and that there must always be a discrete distance between mainstream society and those who defend it.

The word, 'vocation', from the Latin *vocatio*, meaning a call or summons, is afforded a range of definitions in the modern era, most of which relate to having a particular suitability to a certain type of employment (Scholes, 2013). Professions that were once regarded as vocations

included nursing and teaching, both of which have long-standing associations with organized faith.(Scholes, 2013) A vocation was seen as more than simply a job, but a calling and obligation to serve. In this context, soldiering (and by association all military service) has always been seen as a vocation and like all vocations, it was essentially incompatible with aspects of life outside of the path you had chosen. In the past, perhaps the most prominent casualty for those who dedicated themselves to a vocation was family. This work has been designed to specifically focus on the reality of family life for those who serve or have served. Full cognisance of what that means in the widest sense is likely to be the preserve of military initiates, but it is incumbent upon the author to attempt to convey that meaning to a non-military readership.

There are two distinct historical genealogies to the modern British 'military' culture; that of the Royal Navy and the Army, albeit that the latter's formalisation as a professional force was met with some disdain and opposition in the nineteenth Century (Downes, 1988, Penn & Berridge, 2018). The Royal Air Force is an amalgam of the two, owing its lineage to the Royal Artillery spotter balloons of the late nineteenth Century, via the merging of the Army's Royal Flying Corps and the Navy's Royal Naval Air Service, leading to its formation in 1918 as a separate force (Chant, 1990; Nesbit, 1999; Parton, 2008). The dominant culture in public perception, arguably, is that of the Army. This is by dint of its size in relation to the other two (Hines *et al*, 2014). The Royal Navy is the smallest of the three Armed Forces and although quite properly it refers to itself as 'the Senior Service', on account of having been formally established first and setting the standard for British warfare on a national basis, the most common analogue for what can be generally understood as military culture is the Army model. A report commissioned by the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmens Families Association (SSAFA, 2019) found that two thirds of respondents thought first of a soldier when asked about their perceptions of the military. Armies have been raised since mankind first began to organise itself into competing civilisations (Gray, 2005). Our modern Army in all functional respects conducts its affairs as a homogeneous entity but it is, in fact, more akin to a federation of independent corps and regiments, unified under a collective banner. Furthermore, the whole organisation conducts itself as if each of its core constituents were generic Teeth Arms units. Ergo, an engineer unit or even a medical unit will be organised in roughly the same way that an infantry unit is organised. (National Army Museum, 2022) Combine that with the common dictum that one should be 'a soldier first and a specialist second', then it's easy to see how the subliminal drip-feeding of military culture can be administered and maintained. HM Armed Forces rightly vests a very great deal in the concept of

'command'. Beyond simply being a fusion of leadership and management, command also brings with it legal powers and responsibilities, with separate statute laws to facilitate its governance (MOD, 2014) No other employer would enjoy the power to imprison an employee for what, to a layperson, would seem trivial misdemeanours, yet that is precisely the situation for anyone serving with HM Armed Forces. For balance it is important to note that the Military Corrective Training Centre at Colchester is not a prison (MOD, 2020), but is precisely what its title says it is and in contrast to the way the civilian prison system seems to operate (notwithstanding its noble aspirations) it genuinely seeks to rehabilitate rather than punish. Nevertheless, subjectively it is still seen as 'prison' by its potential clientele.

The net effect of the combination of Military Law, imposed 'Values and Standards' and the constant, low-level reinforcement of military discipline is that the entire military community conforms to a deliberate, socially constructed reality. Those exposed to that reality for long enough may find it difficult to challenge their own assumptions when attempting to interact outside the 'military bubble'. For Service families, whose progeny may well go on to enlist themselves, these assumptions risk being assimilated as truth and thus become difficult to challenge when such challenge becomes necessary.

The military footprint in today's society is the smallest it's ever been (Hines *et al*, 2014). Seventy years ago, after two World Wars in relatively quick succession, even those who had not been in uniform would know someone who had and the ethos, privations, sacrifices and cultural nuances of military service needed no explanation. Furthermore, in the third quarter of the twentieth Century most politicians would have served or would have a close family member who had served, but now the numbers of veterans amongst those who wield power is very small and it is therefore more important than ever before to be able to articulate the truths of service life to that power. For good or ill, art, literature, the moving image and in most recent times the computer game have imbued military service with a romanticism and beguiling fantasy that are far removed from the grim, gritty and often mundane reality of soldiering (Chapman & Linderoth, 2015) , however...

> *"The Army works like this; if a man dies when you hang him, keep hanging him until he gets used to it!"*
> *Spike Milligan*

Citing a comedian might seem frivolous in a work of this nature, but before he found fame with The Goons and everything thereafter, Lance-Bombardier Terence 'Spike' Milligan served in the Royal Artillery during the Second World War and was invalided out of Italy with what we would today recognise as PTSD. Thus, what might appear at first glance to be a facile observation at the expense of the military hierarchy is in fact an insightful truism that illuminates the single most important socio-cultural/occupational element of military service. Whether as a conscript or a volunteer, once an individual joins up they cede significant control of their lives to their Service. As Soeters *et al* (2006) comment, "In this perspective cultural homogeneity within the whole group reigns". When one considers that most of today's regiments owe their genesis to subservient, feudal times, when armies were raised to serve the Crown (usually) by landowners from the able-bodied men who worked their land (Prestwich 1996), it's not difficult to see why this sense of subordinating oneself to a higher authority that can wield power over you, even unto death, is subliminally woven into everything the military thinks, says and does. Modern military service is replete with examples of good corporate governance, health & safety, welfare provision and so on, but behind the benevolent pastoral veneer, 'the exigencies of the service', often motivated by an unconscious corporate memory of less sympathetic times, will always be put first. (Hockey, 1986) Again harking back to that feudal social structure, those in positions of authority have largely unrestricted power to interpret what those exigencies might be. Given the author's background within the military is as part of the medical services, the situation with regard to medical management of service personnel is a prime example. In the Army in particular, ultimate control of risk rests with unit commanding officers (MOD, 2014). By 'unit' what is meant is a formed and largely self-contained sub-group of a larger formation, such as a regiment or Corps. Each unit, irrespective of its key function, contains within it its own logistic support, administration, transport and medical services. Whilst functionally a unit's medical officer is there to treat patients, he or she has no authority to mandate the way in which one of their patients may be managed by the unit (JSP950 - HM Govt, 2014). Their role is to act as a medical *advisor* to the chain of command, who can and in this author's thirty years of professional military healthcare experience sometimes do choose to ignore the medical advice.

Having said all that, it is of critical importance to understanding the military culture to appreciate that military service requires tough, resilient, indomitable characters who respond instinctively to command. Squaring the circle of trying to inculcate a sense of warrior spirit in service personnel whilst also trying to adapt to the changing expectations of the mainstream society from which recruits are drawn remains a significant challenge to military establishment and culture (Gosling,

2008; Malmio, 2021). Furthermore, it would be wrong to ignore the gender component to this exercise in cultural contextualisation. Just as nursing – the author's profession – is still considered a female occupation by many in the mainstream population (Lane, 2000; MacWilliams *et al*, 2013; Smith *et al*, 2021), so warriors are still drawn from the menfolk in popular belief (Hale, 2008; Malmio, 2021; Christensen & Kyed, 2022). As a consequence, the military culture is predominantly masculine in nature and female service personnel either masculinise their behaviours or adapt in other ways (Doan & Portillo, 2017; Do & Samuels, 2020).

1.4: The Military and the Family

Lang (1965 – cited in Soeters *et al*, 2006) identified three key components to military culture; communal life, hierarchy and discipline and control. Families may not be as directly affected by the latter two components as their serving member, but they are simultaneously both integral and antagonistic to communal life. Integral because as Bowen *et al* (2003) say, "Unit supports and informal community supports are features of the social structure in which families are embedded " and antagonistic because they divide the serving member's loyalties between the military and themselves (Segal, 1988)

As previously mentioned, it wasn't until the 1850s that married quarters were made available to soldiers and such relationships as warranted recognition and housing provision became formally acknowledged (Strachan, 1984). In more recent times there have been slow but steady improvements. There are signs of potential change, as is borne out by a recent statement from the then Chief of Defence People, wherein he acknowledged the shortcomings of decades of policy that was based on the 'traditional' family and no longer meets the needs of 21st Century society. (Nugee, 2016);

The classic picture and indeed that upon which policies have hitherto been based is of a traditional nuclear family of father (usually the serviceperson), mother and children, but as Nugee (2016) intimated it should be borne in mind that the family of a single soldier, sailor or airman may very well regard themselves as a 'military' family. Furthermore, in contrast with earlier times the Armed Forces now recognise same-sex marriage and also stable long-term relationships, or what are often referred to as 'common law' marriages. (Fairbairn *et al*, 2019).

There have been innumerable attempts throughout history to succinctly express what it is about military culture that differentiates it from that of mainstream society. Here is one attempt that also takes in the family perspective;

Serving in the military is more than an individual occupation; it also has a culture of shared beliefs, practices and experiences. The impact of deployments and reintegration on military marriages and children are a part of the shared sacrifice that comes with military service. Military families have a unique culture. Frequent moves, non-traditional work hours and long absences of the deployed parent are common among military families. Families must live with constant worries about the safety of their war fighter (Houston *et al*, 2009).

This is an American view, but it is not dissimilar to the British view of military service (Downes, 1988). However, it fails to get to the nub of the matter for this author. As observed earlier, military culture is immersive and can be seen as somewhat authoritarian and this functional reality underpins everything else (Hockey, 1986; Cotton, 1988; Soeters *et al*, 2006). No other employer can as readily require you to stop whatever you are doing, at any time, any day of the year and come and do its bidding, irrespective of the impact on the individual or their family. 'Service need' supersedes every other consideration. It doesn't matter what else you may have going on in your life, the military works on the assumption that it has the absolute right to demand your compliance in all things, earning it the title of a 'greedy institution' (Segal, 1988). Few other walks of life have entire Acts of Parliament (Armed Forces Act 2005 - HM Govt) devoted to their management and additional laws with which to enforce its will. That is not to say that the military is wrong to operate on that assumption. It would be unable to do what the country requires of it if it did not. However, that assumption seems to have been fully and completely assimilated into the subconscious of the collective military psyche, such that 'service need' is regularly cited as justification to impose on people in situations where such imposition is not clearly warranted (Dixon, 1976; Hockey, 1986; Burrell *et al*, 2006; Bergman *et al*, 2014). It seems there is a subconscious concern that too much acquiescence to the needs and wishes of the individual (and by extension their families) will somehow erode military discipline (Bergman *et al*, 2014).

That tension that exists between the organisation and the individual has perhaps been a feature of military service since the first organised forces were formed. Cotton (1988) describes how the institutional and vocational qualities of the military are slowly giving way to a more

occupational structure, more akin to civilian contractual arrangements in mainstream employment. Given the vintage of those observations and the fact that they were written in the dying days of the Cold War, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that we still continue to see the erosion of the traditional military ethos despite seeing wars in the Balkans and Middle East theatres over the intervening thirty years. The title of the collected works in which Cotton's contribution is published reinforces the point. It is entitled, "The Military: More than just a job?" (Moskos & Woods, 1988) and that we are still having to ask that question, three decades on, speaks volumes about mainstream society's capricious attitude to those who defend it. The phrase, "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf" is often attributed to George Orwell, although there is a fair body of doubt as to whether he ever said or wrote that verbatim. Nevertheless, the principle is well established in military thought. Increasingly however, perhaps most prominently since the advent of round the clock news media and the internet, mainstream society appears to be becoming increasingly uncomfortable and questioning, thanks to their exposure to the consequences of violence being done on their behalf (Ashcroft, 2012). In an objective, philosophical sense that is a healthy thing, however in a pragmatic sense it has the potential to weaken our defence.

1.5: Background to the study

Given the limited amount of qualitative research that captures the authentic, first-hand experience of service families for its own sake, rather than solely as context for the solution of a problem, this study aims to give a voice to them through narrative story-telling. Capturing the experience of service families whilst avoiding the pitfall of looking only at how service families feel about the established issues is central to the intent behind this work. As noted earlier, the starting point of much of the existing body of evidence has been that there is a problem to solve through analysis of subjects' responses to it. Furthermore, in considering the existing literature, the dominance of American authors is inescapable. US culture is traditionally more supportive of their military than the UK (Fossey, 2012) and the culture and traditions of their forces is noticeably different (McCartney, 2010). The scale of the issue is of a different order of magnitude as well, with Fullerton *et al* (2011) noting that in the US, *Military families include 2.9 million people, with approximately 40% of all service members having at least one child*. Yet, as noted above, the bulk of the available literature focuses on problems as they come to light. Thus, there is a distinct cluster of work looking at domestic violence in military families

(McCarroll *et al*, 2003; Marshall *et al*, 2005; Mansfield *et al*, 2010), and numerous works that consider the effects on children of parental military service (Hillenbrand, 1976; Hunter & Nice, 1977; Drummet *et al*, 2003; Burns *et al*, 2009; Esqueda, *et al*, 2012; Everson *et al*, 2013). In recent and ongoing veterans' studies, it is quite right and proper that issues such as homelessness and alcoholism are taken very seriously, but the context that those affected are in a minority compared with veterans who transition to civilian life with no problems is very often missed (Ashcroft, 2014; Cogan, 2014). The same phenomenon could be said to apply to the issue of military families. The latest Families Continuous Attitude Survey (MOD, 2021), for example, covers a wide range of issues and being in essence a political document it presents the data in such a way as to put the MOD in the best possible – or least worst – light. For example, one question asks families whether they 'felt part of the wider Service community'. The results showed that 17% of RN/RM families agreed, 31% of Army families agreed and 20% of RAF families agreed, but the headline to that data stated, "Army families are more likely to agree they felt part of the wider Service community than the other Services", minimising the fact that the data shows that more than three-quarters (77.33%) of military families **do not** feel part of the wider Service community.   Thus, a piece of work that attempts to ascertain the subjective and comprehensive experience of military families is adding new knowledge to the broader academic field. This work will seek to explore some or all of the known challenges faced by military families, as well as seeking to uncover new material that has hitherto passed unnoticed or unregarded. Therefore, the discrete aim of this work is to examine the lived experience of military family life through narrative inquiry in order to gain a balanced picture of that life, from which the research question will later derive.

As this work seeks to hear direct from military families of their experience of service life, an approach that allows them to tell their story in their own words and in their own context is needed. Narrative inquiry developed as a method within a broader biographical methodological paradigm but has, in more recent times, come to be seen as an independent methodology (Connolly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Kim, 2016). Using social constructivism as a theoretical underpinning, it will allow for stories to be told that not only convey the tale itself, but also communicate much in the way they are told and in the way they recreate historical events in order to potentiate meaning for the story-teller.

1.6: Thesis overview

Having established terms of reference - or the 'why' - for this work it would be prudent to set out the 'how' in simple terms before proceeding to explore the subject in detail.

The body of this work divides into two parts. Part one contains the traditional core elements of introduction, literature review, theoretical framework and methodology. Part two explores the empirical findings derived from the narratives provided by the research subjects, arranged into complimentary chapters and loosely following a chronology of 'beginnings', 'middles' and 'endings' (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Plummer, 1995; Trahar, 2009). The benefit of considering the narratives through such a structure is how it overtly reinforces the notion that these are stories that have been told and, who knows, the story might be told differently to someone else in different circumstances? In fact, one research subject very kindly repeated our (telephone) interview because the first one had not actually recorded. Between us, we identified a number of areas that we recalled from the first story that could well have been omitted from its second telling, had we not both remembered.

Exploration of the data begins in Chapter 4 with an introduction to the research cohort and an examination of their initial circumstances at the start of their Service family life. The chapter continues, taking into account the different experiences encountered by those who were married when they joined up versus those who were single at the time. Findings are for later, but it is worth noting now that from this particular cohort those who were married when they joined are still married today, whereas half of the originally single service personnel interviewed are now separated or on subsequent marriages. This chapter also looks at how different families adjusted and modified their lives to allow for the eccentricities of Service living.

Chapter 5 takes this theme further, into territory where families are first encountering significant challenges to what civilian families might consider to be family norms, as the realities of separation and other occupational demands become apparent and the family and military begin to embody the form of 'Greedy Institutions' (Segal, 1986). However, in keeping with the intended balance this study seeks, there are also examples of positive development and personal growth, with stories of some of the perks of Service life to contrast with the known privations.

Chapter 6 then considers the family experience in the context of policy and policy changes over the years. The research cohort represents a significant spread of time, in several cases going back decades to a time when one could be forgiven for thinking that the military saw families as an encumbrance or even an irritant. The focus of the chapter is positive, however, given the dramatic changes that have been wrought in both policy and the attitudes of policy-makers, particularly since the establishment of a three-star Chief of Defence People post. As ever with large organisations, problems that persist up until today appear to come from those charged with policy implementation, who perhaps have longer memories and less scope for flexibility than their occupational and political masters.

Chapter 7 takes us to the end of the stories and capitalise upon the inevitable reflection in which Veterans are inclined to indulge. Anecdotally, every generation, particularly of soldiers, will tell you how much tougher they had it in their day and how today's soldiers are 'soft'. The author's own twin sons joined up at different times - though within eighteen months of each other – and the earlier trained one will tell the later trained one that his experience of basic training was tougher than his brother's…so ubiquitous is the sentiment. By the same token, at least as far as several subjects commented, the same sentiment is expressed in terms of military families. Nevertheless, the opportunity for reflection enabled most subjects to put the positives and negatives in their proper context – if they had not done so already – and these two chapters feature noteworthy examples of good times had, often in close chronological relation to bad times. This chapter in particular feeds from the ever-increasing body of work – academic, practical and in policy – into the transition from Service to civilian life and subsequent Veteran experience. It is largely as a result of this academic growth industry that the author is undertaking this research in the first place.

1.7: Personal Reflection

The best place to begin this endeavour would be in placing myself in relation to the work and the subject matter and to do so coherently the first person will be used. The narrative methodology I am using fully expects that who I am will influence both my interpretation of the stories I hear and the manner in which those stories are told to me. Narrative theorists, (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kim, 2016; Plummer, 2019) make regular reference to the inquirer as a full participant in the exchanges that lead to story capture, whose own "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) rank alongside the participant. There is no sense in disguising who I am and, indeed, I have exploited who I am in the course of recruiting research subjects to this study. To start with, though, I think it would be beneficial to place me as an academic before moving on to explain my military and service family self.

1.7.1: The Academic dimension

I was lucky enough to be able to take up a post in 2009 within the Defence School of Health Care Studies at Birmingham City University, as a pre-registration mental health lecturer. I was immediately loaded onto the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (Higher Education) and completed that in October 2010. During that first year the school decided to withdraw military lecturers from pre-registration education. I was personally very disappointed by that as I had aspired to be a 'Nurse Tutor' ever since I first contemplated as a student nurse in 1989 how my nursing career might progress. This meant a sideways move into the post-registration team, whose main aim was to deliver a 120-credit top-up degree programme for non-graduate healthcare professionals. Having completed my PGCE and gained Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, I was thereafter elevated to the status of Senior Lecturer. Completion of the PGCE led onto a Postgraduate Diploma in Education and then to a Masters in Education, by which time I was on the verge of leaving the Forces at the end of my 16-year engagement. At this point, Birmingham City University decided to start offering a Doctorate in Education and I was invited to enrol. It was clear that the entire higher education sector aspired to an 'all doctorate' academic workforce in the fullness of time and so, getting a doctorate (or studying for one) was the only way I was going to be able to continue earning a living as a 'Senior Lecturer' once I left the military.

However, when in 1989 I had first considered one day becoming a nurse tutor, no notion of a future of study and of one day needing a doctorate to do that ever entered my head. In those days, most Registered Nurse Tutors (RNT) had a vocational teaching qualification and only a handful had degrees. Into the nineties RNTs then had degrees and only a handful had Masters-level qualifications and even in the early 2000s an RNT with a doctorate was a real rarity. Having been brought up professionally through those times, I would have been content to practice my nurse teaching on the basis of my two Masters' degrees and my Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and to have perhaps considered a PhD by published works in due course. But the phenomenon of having to run to stand still has followed my career from the beginning. I qualified as a 'certificate-level' RGN in 1992 and already the new 'Project 2000' nurses were starting to come through the system. It was clear to me that the goalposts had moved and I would need to try and get a diploma in order to maintain parity with newer colleagues. I began a DipHE in 1997, concurrently with joining the Regular Army and completed it by 1999. This meant that when I secured a place on a Registered Nurse (Mental Health) Conversion course I was able to undertake it at Bachelors' level, which placed me briefly closer to the front of the pack in the profession. Inevitably, though, the next step of Masters' study became something of a career *fait accomplis* and I started searching for a suitable course. I settled on the MSc in War & Psychiatry, co-delivered by the Institute of Psychiatry and the Department of War Studies at Kings College London and completed it in 2009, just as I began working as a fledgling nurse tutor. Having then completed PGCE, PG Dip Ed and a Masters in Education, as above I began a taught doctorate in Education and completed the first year to gain a PG Cert in Research Practice, but unfortunately the taught component did not lend itself to distance learning and as I left the RAF, so I had to leave the course. As a civilian, I was appointed as senior lecturer in Military, Veterans and Families Studies at Anglia Ruskin University and helped establish the Veterans and Families Institute, whilst concurrently enrolling on their EdD programme, but again life intervened and I had to return home to North Yorkshire. Once there, I was unable to find an academic post and returned to clinical practice – with the military but this time as a civilian. I then enrolled on this PhD in 2015 with a view to returning to academia upon completion. As it happens, I have recently been able to secure a lecturer's post at Teesside University and, most significantly for my academic journey, the post is in pre-registration mental health nursing, which is where I had wanted to be over a decade before.

So what? (after Rolfe *et al*, 2001)

It has taken natural reflection, rather than solely the circumstantially imposed reflection of this work, to appreciate that my relationship with doctoral study has been somewhat resentful and adversarial over the last decade. I make no apology for that. To realistically place myself in relation to this study it is important that I acknowledge my own inherent biases. My very first encounter with doctoral level study was in late 2012 at Birmingham City University and our very first lesson was inspired by an academic paper entitled, "A box of childhood: small stories at the roots of a career" (Nutbrown, 2011). We were each asked to bring a box to the session and then supplied with craft materials to make a box that represented our feelings about starting a doctorate. I wasn't well at the time and reacted quite adversely to the activity, although I tried my best to hide it. I sat in a corner and messed around with pipe cleaners and plasticine (most of the lecturers were early years educationalists) feeling pretty miserable and sullen and without a creative thought in my head. Then, when we got our five-minute warning to wrap up, I was hit with inspiration. I taped my box up and drew a very large tick on the front of it. Then as we were each asked to talk about our boxes I had the opportunity to explain that, for me, getting a doctorate was a 'tick-box exercise', so that I could carry on doing what I was already doing. My attitude was in part down to my mental health at the time, but also to the fact that I was in my last few months of service in the Armed Forces and struggling at the time to find a senior lecturer's post anywhere that didn't demand a doctorate as an essential requirement. In the intervening decade my view has evolved, although I retain what I like to think of as a healthy cynicism, in part because another notion I recall from my early doctoral study was our being repeatedly exhorted to be heterodoxical in our views. It feels pretty heterodoxical to talk of problem-centric or problem-solving research as being itself potentially problematic. The very evolution of our species could be said to be owed to our being good at solving problems, so it is arguably instinctive to take such an approach and this study does not seek to diminish that approach but rather to explore what may be missed along the way.

1.7.2: The Service Family dimension

In common with several of my research subjects, I was already married (and more uncommonly perhaps, a father of four) when I joined the Regular Army. My pursuing a career in the Armed Forces was a fact of life for my wife Caroline from the outset of our relationship. By the time we married in 1990, I had already tried to join four times and been unsuccessful, but always with

the caveat of being encouraged to reapply. However, it did seem to me that I might never successfully pass selection, so I looked around for an alternative career. Caroline had already been selected for nursing and left in 1987 to begin her training over in Stockport and our continuing relationship involved me spending a lot of my time in the company of student nurses. Not that long before, I had been so squeamish that even to be in the grounds of a hospital could make me fall faint. It was something of a personal triumph, therefore, for me to overcome that fear and then to turn it into an interest that became a career.

As a measure of my naiveté, I had no idea when I began my nurse training that I might be able to combine my new profession with the profession of Arms, but a visit by an Army nursing recruiter in our first year put me right. Thereafter, with my wife's endorsement, my aim was to complete my nurse training and try and join the Army as a nursing officer. After qualifying, I took a theatre staff nurse post and joined the Territorial Army Medical Services. In my civilian employment everything was great. I had gone straight into a highly sought-after speciality and was able to undertake the specialist theatre nursing course (ENB176) in the first half of 1994. However my first attempt, also in 1994, to join the Regular Army strength was unsuccessful.

By way of a potential explanation for that, in order to better understand my military and service family experience, it is worth considering the context of the time. Until 1992, the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC or 'QAs') had been an exclusively female Corps and the enforced inclusion of men caused a lot of bad feeling at the time. Thus as most of the QA hierarchy did not approve of men in their Corps it was unsurprising when I was not selected by a panel of senior QAs. There were only two men on my selection event and neither of us was found suitable.

By this stage I was becoming disheartened and was beginning to think that I was going to have to forge a civilian nursing career and stay with the TA. However, I took a theatre nursing post in the military hospital at Catterick and within six months, the Matron (a man, despite the title) urged me to apply for Regular service. As a family this made little functional difference to us apart from almost doubling my gross income, which was very helpful at the time because we were busy digging ourselves out of a 'negative equity' situation. My wife continued with her normal routine, undisturbed and I continued to commute to Catterick just as I had been doing anyway.

There was then a need for a theatre nurse to deploy to Bosnia and so in the New Year of 1998 I began undergoing preparation for the deployment, which was to start in mid-March. Then two things happened. Firstly, my wife had fallen pregnant again and in late January we found out that it was to be twins, whose due date would be right in the middle of my tour. Secondly and sadly, in mid-February my father died. Needless to say perhaps, the entire family were in shock. However, at least as far as my wife and I were concerned, I was still expected to be in Bosnia a few weeks later and whilst we were making funeral arrangements and trying to come to terms with what had happened, I was concurrently continuing with my pre-deployment training.

Prior to my going to Bosnia, Caroline had only ever had to cope with me being away from home for the traditional two-week Annual Camp, but now she was having to cope with a planned six-month absence, weeks after the death of her father-in-law and pregnant with twins. That she did so was admirable, but the strain it placed on the relationship was immense. In those days, communication with home was limited to a 20 minute phone call once a week and although it has over the years become a standing family joke my recollection of those phone calls was an uncomfortable 19 minutes of verbal abuse followed by 1 minute of 'but I love you really!' Years later, when I was deployed in Iraq with the Americans, we enjoyed 20 – 30 minute phone calls daily, whereas on my first Bosnia tour I used to dread the weekly phone call. This aspect of military family life has been prominent in the research for this work.

As a 'baptism of fire' into the Army/Family relationship this had been a serious challenge to the integrity and cohesion of my family and, thankfully, we came through it together. Following the first Bosnia tour I finally progressed to become a fully-fledged Regular officer and subsequent lengthy absences from home were far better tolerated. I was away for 3 months' training in 1999 and another 3 months back in Bosnia in 2000, but after our initial experience these things seemed much more manageable. Fate or 'Murphy's Law' always seemed to guarantee that there would be some drama or crisis whenever I was away, to the point where it became another family standing joke, but we got through it all.

Until this stage of my career, we had been living in Catterick and thus close to family and friends, but when I accepted the offer of RGN to RMN conversion, we had to move to Sheffield. This was exciting for the family as although we were now 70 miles away from home it was somewhere new and interesting and the family knew my being in the Army meant moving

around. However, given that I was only going to be in Sheffield for a year and that my next posting (I had been told) might only be for a similarly short period, my wife elected to home educate our school age children. This, too, was exciting for them and for Caroline, who had diligently researched the national curriculum for their respective ages and created a programme which would ensure that when they finally re-joined mainstream schooling they would not be disadvantaged. Thus our year in Sheffield was a happy time, made happier still by the arrival in the November of child number five. By then, though, I had been told by the Army that I was to be posted to Germany.

Initially, this was also very exciting for the family as we departed on a great adventure. I went ahead of the family to take up my new appointment and was shocked and surprised, when I arrived at the Mental Health Hospital Unit in Wegberg to be told that I was the new boss. I was acutely aware that I was a brand-new RN(MH) and expected to be under preceptorship for six months, yet because in seniority terms I outranked the incumbent officer in charge – a friend and colleague with over ten years mental health nursing experience - he had to give way and hand over to me. From a clinical perspective this was farcical, but this being the Army, that was the way they did things. Functionally, we made it work. I had plenty of experience of managing clinical teams so I took on the functional management responsibilities but deferred to more experienced clinical colleagues on any clinical matters. Also, in order to further deconflict my roles, I took to seeing patients in the outpatients department next door to complete my preceptorship. In the long run, this worked very well in preparing me for the next phase of my career, which would be out in a community mental health team.

For the family, though, things were difficult. My wife was struggling for the first time with post-natal depression. Every absence of mine brought with it increased tensions and family disharmony as she struggled to cope with a new baby and four other children under ten, in a place where she had no friends and no family to call upon. In contrast to my first Bosnia experience, this was the real testing time for us as a family. My wife's condition was further aggravated by the fact that mental health support to families overseas was provided by the military, thus my wife flatly refused to engage with services because she knew it would mean dealing with friends and colleagues of mine.

Whilst in Germany, I was reacquainted with a senior RAF colleague who was the head of RAF Mental Health Services. In the course of chatting together I had told him I was applying to

extend my service with the Army. In response he asked me whether I had considered transferring to the RAF, as he knew from our previous service together that I had originally favoured the RAF over the Army. The Army, characteristically, made it as difficult as possible, but by contrast the RAF were ready and able to step in and smooth things over. At midnight on 30 Jun 2004 I ceased to be an Army captain and became an RAF flight lieutenant. Of course, we were still in Germany at the time, but thanks to the sensible and pragmatic RAF we had a month to pack up, move out and report to RAF Marham in Norfolk, where I was to be the Officer in Charge of the Department of Community Mental Health.

On balance I think my wife found the RAF family life better than she had experienced in the Army. Certainly, when I deployed with the RAF she found that unlike when I was in the Army, there were people around asking after her welfare whilst I was away. During my deployment to Iraq in 2006, my boss had the family over for Sunday lunch, arranged for the lawn to be cut for her and the chaplaincy team rallied around. During my two Army deployments, including the first one mentioned previously, no-one from my unit made any contact with my wife whatsoever. It is interesting that in combat regiments there is usually a genuine 'family' and communitarian approach, whereas in the more technical Corps, there is a pronounced distance maintained between personnel and their personal lives. If the hospital I worked in at the time actually had a Welfare Officer, I confess I have no idea who it was.

We only encountered difficulties with the organisation toward the very end of my career and, to be fair to the RAF, it was not their fault but that of the Defence Housing people. We were living in a 4-bed house and already having to use the study as a fifth bedroom when my father-in-law became too unwell to live alone and came to live with us. At the same time, the housing people wanted us to move to RAF Cosford and were offering me an even smaller house. We engaged the support of SSAFA and the unit welfare officer but to no avail and, in the end, we took matters into our own hands and moved the family out of married quarters into privately rented accommodation back home in Yorkshire. I completed my service living what is called the 'married-unaccompanied' lifestyle in an MoD-rented flat in Birmingham, which allowed the family to settle, away from the military.

So what?

It can be seen that there is a clear connectivity between myself, the overall subject matter and the research subjects themselves. As a family, we experienced many things other families would find strange, atypical or even undesirable but because we bought into the military lifestyle we reaped more benefits than disadvantages, even despite the difficulties.

My military career began in the Reserves and many service personnel have either been recruited from the reserves or are likely to join the reserves on completion of their regular service. Military family experience, in common with ours, may thus span both regular and reserve service and in respect of the latter there has been little if any research in any depth, yet in the last two decades the Defence operational requirement has featured more and more reservists (MOD, 2021). My military career also began at the bottom of the ladder, as a private soldier. Engaging with one's research subjects positively must surely be key to successful data capture and the simple fact of being able to share experiences from the very bottom of the military hierarchy upward is a great boon to the engagement process and potentially enhances my credibility with non-commissioned participants. Furthermore, I have bi-Service experience and, in reality, a fairly good knowledge of Royal Navy service life too, which enables me to quickly connect and empathise with veterans from all three services and across the rank ranges. It also allows me to critically compare and contrast two of the three Services from personal experience and having worked in a Tri-Service environment for most of my career I have a good grasp of how the RN do business.

Furthermore, I 'speak the language', that is to say the insider language, filled as it is with acronyms, common terms of reference, slang, colloquialisms and nuanced meaning that may well not be discernible to a layperson. As Irvine *et al* (2008) observe, 'cultural and linguistic concordance does not in itself guarantee rigour', so I must be ever mindful of the potential for bias but in this mode of data gathering the affordance of enhanced mutual understanding between researcher and subject is invaluable.

I have also served overseas, which is becoming an increasingly rare opportunity. In more recent times, overseas tours are offered less and less as UK forces draw down from Germany and other overseas locations. Most of my participants are longer served and have experienced the challenges of an overseas tour, or possibly several. Overseas postings have unique challenges

and opportunities and are definitely worth capturing in support of the overall picture. The other aspect to overseas working – operational deployment – is also a key feature to consider. It may seem a little narcissistic to an outside observer, but to someone who has served in the Armed Forces it is a ubiquitous element of credibility that you have served on deployed operations. Indeed as with so much of military culture it is exceedingly common to see interactions between strangers rapidly develop into friendly conversations on the back of swapping tales about having deployed to the same operational theatre. The fact that I have been to Iraq and Afghanistan is sufficient to earn credibility in the eyes of more junior personnel and having done Bosnia twice helps with the older hands.

From a family perspective, we have lived in both service families accommodation (SFA) and as 'married-unaccompanied', with me living in an MOD-rented flat in Birmingham during the week and only going home to the family at weekends. Housing is a perennial issue for service families and I and my family have had our own fair share of good and bad as we have moved around. As a family we have also experienced the 'absentee father' lifestyle which is common to many service families, particularly where there are earnest attempts to stabilise the family situation.

Finally, having been an established lecturer and academic within the field of the military, veterans and families, I had the background knowledge and academic contacts to undertake this sort of research. Mishler (1995) advocates that the researcher should be able to broaden or expand upon what is told in stories through their general understanding of subjects and circumstance. Undoubtedly my academic CV helped in my getting onto this PhD in the first place, but in my dealings with participants it affords me both a greater understanding of their position and a greater credibility in my participants' eyes because they can see that this PhD is but part of a journey that I have been embarked upon for some time, in the pursuit of improving matters for future service families and also trying to raise the profile of veterans and their families.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1: Overview and generic critique

'The love of complexity without reductionism makes art; the love of complexity with reductionism makes science.' E.O. Wilson.

In terms of reflexive positioning, the approach to searching the literature is analogous with one of the author's favourite pastimes – fishing. We know the river has fish in it and we know there are some fish one would rather catch than others, but when one casts into the water there is relatively little control over what will, or rather may, take the bait. Particularly though, there may be species of fish in the muddy waters that are rarely caught or that have never been caught before, but which we have a reasonable suspicion are swimming therein. To relate that to the literature search, we know there are issues which affect military family life, however we have reasonable grounds to suspect there are other issues that are not as regularly 'caught', but which would offer us a richer understanding of the life of the research river if we could land one or two.

The growth of research into military families and veterans over the last decade is encouraging, but still comparatively little information on the actual, holistic contemporary experience of

military families exists in the formal literature, except in relation to their experience of known concerns. Even in the US, where the volume of research into military families is much greater, Park (2011) observes, "Despite urgent needs to better understand the impact of deployment on military children and families and to provide appropriate support for them, there is a dearth of research". Specifically, such research mostly comes from a deductive, problem-centred approach that seeks the views of families in relation to predetermined specific issues or identified problems. Fullerton *et al* (2011) for example, writing in Military Medicine, highlight issues of child neglect in families of (US) Army personnel. Their work was, however, a literature review and not primary research. Nonetheless, the fact that their work was commissioned by the US Department of Defense (USDoD) and conducted through the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences indicates two key points: that the USDoD of the time were concerned about this matter and that more widely, the US place a high priority on military healthcare (and by association, military families' healthcare). This can be seen in some of their findings, where although they conclude that, particularly during deployments, child neglect in military families can be higher than in the general population, those same children have access to both healthcare and social support that is not as readily available to many children in mainstream (US) society (Fullerton *et al*, 2011). Yet aside from that solitary contextual observation, their work does little to illuminate the reality of military children's lives in general, focusing as it does on those amongst them sadly affected by neglect – a state of affairs that is not shown in their work to be generalisable to the whole population. As a further example, whilst Rowe *et al* (2013) looked at the wider impact of service life on service children, "...in relation to socio-demographic variables, military characteristics and mental health symptoms", those particular features do not capture the whole experience of service children, focusing in as the paper does on the mental health sequelae to some of the negative aspects of life as a military child, as if the wider context of that life were common knowledge.

Other common issues feature regularly in the literature such as PTSD in serving members and its impact on families (Brockman *et al*, 2012), the impact of deployment (Alfano *et al*, 2016), suicide in families (Gilreath *et al*, 2016), spousal employment (Meadows *et al* 2016), managing bereavement (Cozza *et al*, 2017), and marital disharmony (Karney *et al*, 2017), however these and other issues will be considered in the main body of the literature review. The relevance at this point is to reprise the recurring theme that works whose subjects are those facing challenges, difficulties and problems with their life as military families similarly fail to illustrate the overall experience of military family life. The starting point of most existing, substantive

research follows this theme of a problem that requires examination, analysis and the generation of a solution, which is a perfectly reasonable and well-meaning aspiration. Pennsylvania State University's 'Clearing House for Military Family Readiness', for example opens its research page with the statement, "We conduct Applied Research in order to solve practical problems." This approach of using a perceived problem as a starting point is a feature of the majority of the available literature and even in narrative inquiry, as Plummer (2019) grimly admits, "My main focus is on tales of suffering in documentary reality."

To approach this study in a more equitable manner therefore, in search of balance rather than to directly contest the methodological approaches of others, consideration was given to looking at both the literature and subsequent research from a strengths-based perspective. Maton *et al* (2004) talk of such problem-centric approaches as being 'deficits-based' and contextualised that thus; "*A central feature of many of the deficits-based approaches … is that individuals, families, and communities who are the subjects of policies are too often viewed as deficient and different, and so in need of "fixing"* ". As noted previously the need for "fixing" in certain circumstances is not contested, but in search of a balanced and realistic picture of UK military families' experiences a strengths-based approach may be a more useful set of scales.

2.2: Review method

In pursuit of new knowledge it is perhaps best to start with what is known and thereafter direct one's attention to what is suspected or unknown (Kumar, 2011) or in this case what is anecdotally and commonly known amongst the target population but under-reported in most of the available literature. Therefore, to set the direction for the literature review the acknowledged issues facing UK Armed Forces families as annually reported were used as the starting point. This might be argued to be making this work problem-focused by default, but as it is only the starting point to generate a body of coherent literature to interrogate, it can be mitigated.

Consistently since their inception, the annual Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Surveys (FAMCAS) have followed the same structure, built around the principal known issues (MOD, 2021):

1.   **Childcare and Children's Education**
2.   **Deployment**

3.   **Employment**

4.   **Healthcare**

5.   **Housing**

6.   **Impact of Mobility**

Cognisance of this allowed for the formulation of keyword searches most likely to generate literature that in some way spoke to how military families experienced military life together.

2.2.1: Research Question

Theorists are at variance as to where in any given work the research question should sit, however the genesis of a literature search is generally framed as a question. A suitable research question for this work, worded effectively and shown to have been arrived at logicaly, serves as a useful focus for both author and reader. The purpose of this section is to detail the considerations that led to the adoption of the research question.

At its inception and prior to project approval, this research was intended to examine all aspects of military family life, to determine whether the existing body of research presents a balanced and accurate reflection. As elucidated previously, the consideration was that the dominant, though not exclusive research focus of the time was on the difficulties, challenges and inequities that generate concerns from and about military families. It was felt that the resultant impression given about military family life was therefore incomplete or even distorted. The journalistic aphorism, *"When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, that **is** news"*, most popularly attributed to John B. Bogart, editor of the New York Sun in the nineteen-twenties, is not a notion unique to journalism. In research too, though generally for more altruistic and noble reasons, the lure of the 'man bites dog' phenomenon stirs the interests of researchers and research funding bodies alike. However where journalism and research must diverge is in the implicit assumption in the aphorism – that 'dog bites man' is 'common knowledge' and does not require evidence. Many assumptions can be made about normal life for military families, away from the known areas of concern, but that life is not common knowledge.

It is also key to understanding this work that it is not a simplistic search for positive experiences to counter the known negatives. Rather, in keeping with academic practice, the aim was to look

at all the evidence from what is available in the literature, augmented by original research, analyse it and synthesise from it a balanced conclusion that more accurately reflects the whole experience. In so doing, it would then add to existing the body of knowledge by better enabling decisions to be made whilst having enhanced cognisance of what may be lost and whether the anticipated gain is therefore worthwhile.

The notion of unintended consequences is so universal to the human experience that it should require no further qualification, but mindful of the observations on 'common knowledge' above, the notion was first described by philosopher John Locke and, interestingly, his observation was made in the context of economic policy (Locke, 1691). Unsurprisingly therefore, other figures in economics, including Adam Smith, Friedrich Engels and in the current era Thomas Sowell have also used the notion in discussion and theoretical critique. But perhaps more pertinent is the work of Merton (1936) who looks at unintended consequences in relation to social actions and organisation and finds that the best way to avert or mitigate unintended consequences is to have had sufficient information, prior to making a decision, to have been able to anticipate those consequences and make suitable allowances for them. Examples of this will be scrutinised in greater detail later, but briefly it could be said that reforms of military housing arrangements, both for families and single service personnel, have unwittingly eroded the sense of community and belonging that is traditionally regarded as beneficial to a military force. (CSJ, 2017) That is not to say that changes should not have been made, but rather that the effects of those changes could have been more effectively anticipated and potentially mitigated if the whole picture were more fully considered. Since the whole picture in relation to military families is not fully visible to us, this research seeks new knowledge to reveal it more clearly.

This therefore poses an immediate challenge in terms of framing an appropriate research question. Speaking simply, to tease out the eventual result, the question is, (in considering military family life…) 'what have we missed?' A secondary question might be, 'does it matter?', although the answer to that has been intimated above. Therefore the core of the research question, to inform both the literature review and subsequent research should focus on what may have been missed, as the consequences will emerge from the analysis of data gathered. The chosen research question is therefore:

What can the stories from veterans and their loved ones reveal about their time together as a military family that has hitherto been under-represented in the available research?

It is phrased as such because it gives the impetus to look for what is missing and also clearly infers that a more balanced representation of military life may be the outcome.

2.2.2: Specific search methods

Literature for review was accessed either via Northumbria University Library Services, Defence Medical Library Services or more latterly Teesside University Library Services and generated using the following keywords, subdivided into two key groupings: KW1 (Military) - military, army, air force*, navy*, war, veteran (*the prefix 'Royal' was not included to widen the focus internationally), and KW2 (Family) – family/families, spouse, wife, husband, child/ children. This work is examining military family life for members of HM Armed Forces. The experiences of military families in other nations are still useful for context but may not be wholly culturally congruent with the British experience. Exclusions were limited only to English language sources (except where reliable translations were available). Reliance on university library core collections was avoided in searching the databases, as the choice of databases accessed via a Health & Life Sciences faculty (Northumbria or Teesside) was thus limited to those with a health focus. The option of 'All Databases' was therefore used for all searches.

The literature search structure is set out below:

Primary Data-gathering Search
Web of Science
Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)
ProQuest eBook Central
JISC
JSTOR
Joseph Rowntree Foundation Reports
Focused search 1
All papers that are generated from any combination of both keyword groups.
Focused search 2

Large-scale cohort studies and systematic reviews from search 1
Focused search 3
Qualitative papers that specifically explore the experiences of military families and/or members thereof.
Revision searches
Ad-hoc as new information came to light via subscriptions, recommendations and database notifications

Following the initial scoping of the available literature, subsequent revisions to incorporate new material followed the same structure except where relevant literature was made available more directly, via email alerts and subscriptions.

Analysis of the core literature obtained at the end of the search period was carried out using the widely-known Critical Appraisal Skills Programme tool (CASP, 2018). Thematic and contextual congruence with the FAMCAS 6-point framework and the experiences of military families was then sought, to refine the assembled literature into a coherent and focused collection. Given the scarcity of literature that exclusively focuses on military family life in general, as opposed to in relation to specific problems, it was necessary in most cases to distil inferences from deficits-based works that were focused on families or constituent members thereof.

2.3: Review detail

"*In general, anyone who is single cannot be a good commander. He must have a wife and children. Maybe exceptions can be made. He shouldn't have to worry about his livelihood. He doesn't have to live in great luxury, but should be able to make a decent living. I believe that the state should take care of this if it wants to guarantee a quality military.*" David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, 1957

Despite the reviewed works being overwhelmingly qualitative, for an author from a background in patient-centred healthcare, putting processes before people is an unnatural experience and

much of the reviewed literature appears to fit the people (research subjects) into the process (the research itself), rather than the other way round. The first striking observation is that although the proposal for this work noted the paucity of UK based research, the US and Commonwealth countries have been rather more prolific and it does beg the question as to whether we British have historically been doing ourselves – or rather our military families – a disservice until recently by not appearing to take the matter as seriously as our NATO and other partners.

Interestingly, of the US contributions, few had any overt military involvement in their composition. There may have been uncredited or otherwise assumed military advice made available but this was not explicit. There is no suggestion that this should be a prerequisite, but just as ethnographic research into other cultures often requires a translator, or a researcher versed in the language and culture of the subject group, so it could be argued that there is inherent benefit in having a similar capacity within a team researching the military. There is also inherent risk in exploiting such cultural congruence, insofar as shared understanding between investigators and participants may result in viewing the subject of the research through the same lens and missing features of it that may be more apparent to an outsider (Fessler, 2010). Agazio *et al* (2013) is a prime example, insofar as it explores the work of (US) military nurses caring for serving military mothers and their families through the lens of an authorship that is almost exclusively serving or retired military nursing academics. Ergo, is the research about military families, or about military nurses? The focus of this particular example was indeed on the work undertaken by the nurses, but there were some examples of life for the subjects of their work that could be inferred from the paper and this was the basis upon which the majority of the literature review informed this work. In contrast, Everson *et al* (2013) looks at the lives of (US) military spouses during times of their partners' deployments overseas (to Iraq, in this case). There is no declared military association in the authorship (although the institution from whence the authors were drawn is adjacent to a major US Navy airbase) but their exploration of how military spouses cope during deployment is insightful and appears balanced, highlighting in particular how most spouses included in the study harboured no illusions about the challenges of military family life and shared the same sense of duty as their serving partners.

Meanwhile, of the 17 UK articles included in the review, 11 had explicit military input from academics in the lead faculty who were serving or retired military officers and, by default, provide the military-cultural contribution to the academic output. For this author, having worked

for much of his life in military mental health, there is a parallel between the academic and the clinical, insofar as delivering mental healthcare to military personnel requires at least some insight into the milieu of military service. To illuminate the point, as Snyder (2016) observes, "to become "culturally competent," civilian mental health providers should avail themselves of summaries describing resources for military and veteran couples and families … ranks of enlisted service members and officers across the respective branches, military structure (recognizing, e.g., the differences between "platoon" and "brigade"), and common terms and abbreviations (e.g., "FOB" [Forward Operating Base] or "IED" [Improvised Explosive Device])". Arguably – and in practice for this author – that information should be provided to new civilian staff with no military experience. Richards *et al* (2016) also explored what training and education was necessary, "…to provide military informed evidence based services…". That approach doesn't necessarily equip the civilian to understand what it *feels like* to be in the military, or appreciate the subtly different set of values and norms that influence thoughts and feelings for military personnel, but it does at least improve communication between patient and clinician (or research subject and researcher) in pursuit of such understanding.

As ably highlighted by many, American society has a radically different view of their Armed Forces to that which we Britons hold (De Graff *et al*, 2016; Bergman *et al*, 2014; McInnis, 2014; Laurence, 2011; Greenberg *et al*, 2007; Siebold, 2001; Murray, 1999; Segal & Segal, 1983). These authors argue that there is a cultural reverence held by most Americans in respect both of their Armed Forces and of their Veterans community that is not reflected to anything like the same extent in the United Kingdom. To have served your country is seen as the highest honour by many Americans, which doubtless explains why their Armed Forces are so dramatically better funded than ours (HM Govt, 2022) and why their serving members and veterans, including their families, are so correspondingly well supported. That, combined with the relative sizes of our respective countries, probably accounts for the greater part of the disparity in numbers. Americans seem to care more about their Armed Forces and so it should come as no surprise that they research them more.

A number of papers examined were describing questionnaire-based research (Brockman *et al*, 2012; Burrell *et al*, 2003; Davis *et al*, 2016; Kelly *et al* 2016, Oblea *et al*, 2016; Rowe *et al*, 2014; Wax and Stankorb, 2016). Such an approach is cost-effective and relatively easy to administer in comparison with one-to-one interviews, but no matter how well the questionnaires are composed, they offer only a superficial perspective that lacks the individual context and

circumstance of the respondent (Rowley, 2014). That is to say, we do not know *why* they responded (to any given question) in the way that they did. Brockman *et al* (2015) were exploring the impact of PTSD symptoms on sufferers and their families in the post-deployment period. Their approach, whilst questionnaire-based, was also clinician-led using psychometric and sociological questionnaires (Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory [DRRI], PTSD Check List – Military [PCL-M], Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II [AAQ-II]) for the subjects, guided by the Macro-Level Family Interaction Coding System (MFICS) for the clinicians, to enable them to subjectively rate behaviours during interviews. Thus although the rigour of their research method yielded pertinent results in relation to the impact of PTSD on families, the actual research told us little about life as a military family. In contrast, Wax and Stankorb's (2016) work looking at food insecurity in (US) military families was wholly questionnaire-based and methodologically and analytically quantitative and, as a result, revealed nothing of substance about military family life in the round.

In pursuit of more family focused work, of the papers reviewed only a discrete group were subject-focused and fundamentally qualitative (Agazio *et al*, 2013; Aronson *et al*, 2016; Cogan 2016; Freytes *et al,* 2017; Gustavsen, 2017; Kaptan, 2017; Keeling *et al,* 2016; Knobloch *et al,* 2016; La Vela *et al,* 2016; MacDonald, 2016; Matis, 2016; Snyder *et al,* 2016; Southwell & MacDiarmid Wadsworth, 2016). Of that group, Cogan (2016) was arguably the most interesting, looking as it did at reintegration of service members back into the family after deployment. Pertinent to the culturally competent tone of this work, she describes what she calls "'figured worlds' (taken from Holland *et al,* 1998) "…socially constructed units that are characterised by particular people and activities, and that shape identities". This supports the frequently made assertion herein that life inside the military community serves to significantly influence the sense of self held by its members, both serving and family.

Southwell and MacDiarmid Wadsworth (2016) meanwhile, looked at how families wherein the service person is female differ from those with the more traditional male military member. This work does shine some light on the experiences of both female service personnel and their male partners and how they felt about those experiences. For example, "(civilian) husbands have described feeling excluded from the military community and being treated differently in social situations, because they are a minority in the spouse population" (Southwell & MacDiarmid Wadsworth, 2016). This phenomenon is not unique to the US, as the author's wife reported that there was a civilian husband who regularly attended the 'Officers' *Wives* Luncheon Club' in

Catterick Garrison when we were stationed there. Whilst this observation highlights a negative disparity, there are references to more positive aspects in the paper, for example, "In data gathered before the OEF/OIF/*Operation New Dawn conflicts, Black, Latino, and White female service members perceived greater benefits and derived greater satisfaction from being part of the military than their white male counterparts" (Lundquist 2008, in Southwell & MacDiarmid Wadsworth, 2016; *OEF – Operation Enduring Freedom; OIF – Operation Iraqi Freedom). The paper also helpfully features direct quotes from its research subjects. In relation to the fact that healthcare (a contentious issue in the US) is free for families, one respondent said, "You get treated and it doesn't cost a dime out of your pockets…The military pays for it because they want their soldiers happy and if the soldier has a family." The popular adage of, "happy wife – happy life" could certainly be reflected by the less poetic or alliterative, 'happy family – happy soldier', one might suggest and whilst the US are ahead of the game, the same phenomenon is recognised by MOD in the UK. Perhaps significantly, in this study half of the 'civilian' husbands interviewed were in fact military veterans themselves, which would very likely give them a nuanced perspective on their role as a spouse. One such spouse observed with a sense of pride that, "We're a team…what we are doing, in fact, impacts on the military and her ability to get her job done." Another veteran spouse commented that, "There's nothing that we couldn't handle…but if we weren't in the military…a lot of these things we wouldn't have experienced that brought us together that made it tighter."

Few other papers spoke directly of the general military family experience, but many hinted at negative aspects of it for some families. Sherman *et al* (2016) looked at PTSD amongst veterans and were able to offer some direct evidence from the research subjects that were hard reading. One subject reported, ""I can't stand disrespect…I almost put him [my son] through a window…I (said) 'If you ever walk up on me again when I'm talking to you…I'll kill you'…I looked at him and he started crying." Another was reported as saying, ""I stopped being a parent to him [my son] and I become more of…somebody who doesn't care…I completely shut my feelings off…I have no emotions at all—none." Such harrowing accounts, of which these were amongst the milder examples, certainly highlight need in the military and ex-military family.

Park (2011) talks of 'strengths and challenges' in relation to military children and families, which aligns helpfully with this study's overarching theme.

"Programs that try to assist military children and families often focus only on the prevention or reduction of problems. As important as it is to address problems, it is just as important to

recognize the strengths and assets of military children and families and to promote and bolster them."

That sentiment is both endorsed and reproduced by this author and this study. Park is one of a very small minority of papers that specifically highlight strengths and benefits to military family life, when she observes, "Compared with civilian children, military children have greater respect for authority and are more tolerant, resourceful, adaptable, responsible, and welcoming of challenges". Later analysis of data in this work will explore why that might be, but to set the scene for subsequent critique it is worth noting a further observation that, "Difficult life events do not automatically lead to problems in children. In some cases, challenges provide an opportunity to grow". This approach is becoming increasingly recognised, though by no means universal. Owen & Combs are amongst the Nurse Practitioner (NP) advocates, when they suggest. "By encouraging the family to employ the attributes at their disposal, the NP can help strengthen the family's resiliency". Reprising the earlier comparison between academia and clinical practice, it is a recognised phenomenon in mental health care that growth can come from unwelcome challenge (Joseph, 2013).

2.3.1: Mapping the literature to FAMCAS

Being pragmatic however, in the face of a majority of papers that take problem-centric approaches and for the most part focus on empirical facts rather than experiential data, it may be that notwithstanding its own 'deficits-based' approach, breaking down the literature into the primary problems as templated by the Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS - MOD 2021) will serve to further interrogate the literature reviewed.

2.3.1.1: Child welfare and children's education

Adverse impact on the welfare and education of service children is a known challenge to Service families, as intimated by the volume of papers that searches produced from the keywords: (Aronson *et al,* 2016; Cedarbaum *et al,* 2014; Davis *et al,* 2016; DeGraff *et al,* 2016; Esqueda *et al* 2012, Gilreath *et al* 2016, Jain *et al* 2017, Lester *et al* 2016, MacDonald 2016, McGuire *et al,* 2016; McKain, 1973; Mustillo *et al,* 2016; Nicosia *et al,* 2016; Ohye *et al,* 2016, 2017; Park, 2011; Pinna *et al,* 2017; Rossiter *et al,* 2016; Rowe *et al,* 2014; Stites, 2016; Sumner *et al,* 2016; Taylor *et al,* 2016; Wadsworth *et al,* 2016; Yablonsky *et al,* 2016). The very existence of boarding school allowances is evidence of the military's willingness to at least try to

offset the impact of the itinerant lifestyle, but speaking from personal experience not all parents want to be separated from their children and not all children want to be sent away to school.

All of these works acknowledge to some degree or another that parental military service has had an adverse or potentially damaging effect on children's education, however few of them are dedicated to that issue. Cedarbaum *et al* (2014), for example, is looking at suicidality in military adolescents and merely recognises disturbed education as a contributory factor, in terms of limiting social networks, lack of friends and so forth. Aronson *et al* 2016 look at children's education from the specific perspective of Special Educational Needs, but of the works reviewed only Esqueda *et al* (2012) tackle the issue more broadly and directly. Their work is US-centric and touches upon some overlaps with our own systems, wherein state school attract a 'Service Pupil Premium' for meeting the needs of military children (HM Govt, 2018). In particular relation to this work the literature affords evidence that the impact on Service children's education is well known and that there are policy initiatives in most countries to attempt to moderate that effect. Park (2011) recognises the work done in the US by the Military Child Education Coalition (militarychild.org), for example. This non-governmental body uses a strengths-based focus to support both schools and students in relation to the perennially transient military student population, smoothing transitions between schools and empowering the schools to help with reorientation and educational stability. The UK equivalent (Service Children's Education) is governmental and a subsidiary of the MOD, but works similarly to advise schools, students and parents.

The challenge outlined in the introduction to this chapter is clearly illustrated by the work of Aronson *et al* (2016). The title of their work offered early promise, as it began; "Understanding military families…', however whilst there was no obvious methodological inadequacy in their work, their research subjects were Family Support Workers, rather than families themselves. As a result, their findings corroborate and support their research question in terms of the incidence of special educational needs and neurodiversity in their research cohort's populations. However, this rendered their work of relatively little value for this literature review in terms of the fact that all that could be discerned in pursuit of understanding military families was in relation to deficits in service provision for an important but minority sub-group of the military family population. In contrast, Davis *et al* (2016), studying a similar subject (experiences of military families with children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder), chose the families themselves as their research subjects. As a result, their findings revealed hitherto unknown information about

support services and access thereto by families with special needs children. Of the 189 families surveyed, the primary concerns related to access to services (78.6% dissatisfaction), frequency of interventions (57.2% dissatisfaction), continuity of interventions between postings (54.4% dissatisfaction) and the actual quality of the services provided (69.4% dissatisfaction). Ergo, whilst this information was gleaned from the source, rather than a third party, it remains deficits-based and there was no exploration of why and how a large minority of the survey cohort were satisfied. Strengths-based research into what was being done right, for those not dissatisfied, might have been a more productive way to fill the noted gaps for the rest of the population.

2.3.1.2: Deployment

In addition to what might be seen as the obvious issue around separation, when the service person deploys on operations, another common theme was the extent to which the job impinged on family life even in the peacetime home base. "He just works all the time. He never makes time for the kid's activities. He always prioritizes the job over our family and I'm just sick of it" (Cigrang *et al,* 2016). This very much fits with Segal's (1986) concept of the military and the family as greedy institutions. To this day, in many parts of the military and despite all the efforts at senior level to improve the work-life balance, the service person could be said to be subliminally occupationally programmed to subordinate everything to the military need. It gives the impression of a strong work ethic but can actually be corrosive to family cohesion and longer-term stability.(Segal 2006). Whilst it is not formally written into policy, there is a common, collective attitude across all three Services that conduct, behaviour and practice in the peacetime home base should reflect the deployed environment, as a subliminally contribution to preparedness. As a benign, anecdotal example, whilst walking on the grass is forbidden on camps by all three Services, in the Royal Navy such conduct if witnessed would be met with the call, "Man overboard!" to reflect their deployed reality. Meanwhile in the Army, the practice of being required to roll down one's sleeves between October and March and after 6pm, year round, which has only recently ceased, owes its origins to the days of the Raj in India, when mosquitoes were prevalent and more active at these times. This subliminal 'drip-feeding' of subordination to military authority is seen as part of maintaining a disciplined force, but the negative consequence is exemplified in the spouse's comment highlighted by Cigrang *et al* above.

Stepping away from culture and indoctrination as a feature of attitudes to deployment, a British study (De Burgh *et al* 2011), albeit looking at US data, serves as an example of examining a subject through a very specific lens. Whilst the paper was nominally exploring the impact of deployment on spouses of military personnel, the actual focus of the literature review related to psychiatric morbidity sequelae to deployment and the (negative) impact of *that* on spouses. Whilst such information is invaluable, it would have been of no less value to have looked at what factors assisted those who found themselves able to cope and even grow as a couple, following the stresses of an operational deployment. In this author's experience and as will be borne out later from the small cohort of this research, whilst deployments were stressful on all parties, they ultimately proved to strengthen relationships and it was voluntary separation to pursue personal interests fostered by the military culture that were more deleterious to family harmony than involuntary separation due to deployment.,

2.3.1.3: Spousal Employment

From the literature reviewed, only Castaneda & Harrell (2008) and Meadows *et al* (2016) look specifically at spousal employment, although other works recognise its impact on the family dynamic, not least Segal (1986, 1993, 1995). Many other works (Burrell *et al,* 2003; Clever & Segal, 2013; Cogan, 2016; De Burgh *et al,* 2011; Drummet *et al,* 2003; Everson *et al,* 2013; Fossey, 2011; Goldenberg *et al,* 2016; Gustavsen, 2017; Huebner *et al,* 2009; Karney *et al,* 2017; Keeling *et al,* 2016; Lester *et al,* 2016; Roberge *et al,* 2016; Rossiter *et al,* 2016; Saltzman *et al,* 2016; Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011) make passing reference to it as a contributory factor in challenges to family life and relationships, but for the most part merely as one problem amongst many. This supports the need to establish whether it is reported as an issue in this research. Castaneda & Harrell looked mostly at data from the US DOD and, for example, reported that, "The U.S. Marine Corps Quality of Life Study in 2002 determined that the least satisfied spouses were those who were wholly dependent on the Marine Corps for their household income, and the most satisfied families were those deriving at least one-fourth of their household income from sources other than the active duty Marines' pay". Which could reasonably be given as a reason for a range of interventions by governments to support the spouses of their military personnel. The word 'satisfied' however is an interesting one, which the paper does not explore. This is identified herein because given the author's inherent mental health bias, the issue of spousal employment is seen as being as much about the mental health of the spouse as it is about the family's joint income. Castaneda & Harrell highlight the practical

realities of the impact on spousal employment: "frequent moves due to reassignments may prevent (military spouses) from completing degrees, maintaining local licenses or certifications, or progressing in a career that requires continued presence with an employer", but they do not explore how the spouses feel about that, what impact it might be having on their mental health or indeed on their marriage in any detail. Castaneda & Harrell's paper also showed in their methodology that their interviews were structured to ask open-ended (Socratic) questions to capture the spouses' own reflections. Meadows *et al* (2016), who very specifically looked at "Employment Gaps Between Military Spouses and Matched Civilians", noted in relation to what the military call 'operational tempo' that, "frequent deployments may require their spouses to adjust hours, cut back on courses, or even give up employment or drop out of school in order to manage a household with only one resident adult". There are few jobs in civilian life that match the military for this phenomenon.

One aspect of spousal employment that does not feature in most of the research examined for this review is that of spouses who are also serving personnel. Huffman *et al* (2017), however, specifically examine precisely that phenomenon. In so doing, they were able to at least offer a sense of balance rather than focus solely on the litany of challenges such a partnership might face. Indeed, balance could be seen as central to the model they propose. Based on Social Exchange Theory, the model works on the basis that mutual, matched satisfaction of each individual's self interest is the key to enduring relationships in military couples. Any measurable success of the model, however, is not made explicit in their work and their conclusions recommend further research. Nonetheless, it could be said to reflect Segal's work on the military and the family as greedy institutions (Segal, 1986)

2.3.1.4: Healthcare

Given the predominance of US literature in this field, the matter of healthcare is less straightforward than it otherwise might be were the focus UK only. In the US, there is no true universal health care system as we in Europe would recognise it. Thus in a country where healthcare must be paid for, whether through insurance premiums or directly, as Southwell & MacDiarmid Wadsworth (2016) reported earlier the idea that, "You get treated and it doesn't cost a dime out of your pockets…The military pays for it because they want their soldiers happy and if the soldier has a family", sums up the sentiment of US military families. In the UK, military family healthcare is expected to be provided by the NHS. According to the most recent FAMCAS (MOD, 2021), the main problems remain the continuation of treatment spanning

relocation, that is to say being on a waiting list for a procedure in one location and then having to move to a different part of the country and therefore a different NHS Trust. As it stands, one cannot 'transfer' one's place on a waiting list between Trusts. The exception to this is IVF provision, in respect of which the MOD tries to avoid relocating families undergoing this treatment (Fossey, 2011). Dental treatment is the most problematic feature. According to the FAMCAS, "The proportion of families able to continue dental treatment, following a move, without difficulties fell this year from 47% in 2020 to 23% in 2021". However, they do acknowledge that this sharp drop is likely down to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Nonetheless, if more than half of families are struggling to find dental care under normal circumstances, that indicates an issue ripe for resolution.

Most of the literature relating to healthcare is deficits-based, most particularly in relation to limited support to partners of those suffering combat-related injury, both physical and psychological (Campbell *et al,* 2017, Cogan, 2014; Cozza *et al,* 2013; Erbes *et al,* 2017; Hacker Hughes *et al,* 2016; Kimerling, 2016; Mansfield *et al,* 2010; McGuire *et al,* 2016; Ohye *et al,* 2017; Verey *et al,* 2016). However, to their credit La Flair *et al* (2015) do approach the issue of families healthcare from a more positive perspective, if not explicitly stating a strengths base to their work. They studied primary care provision on four US military bases and were looking for 'adequacy' (rather than inadequacy). Mapping their findings on a 5-point Likert scale, in specific relation to healthcare they found a majority (67%) were satisfied with on-post (i.e. inside the military base) healthcare provision and a slighlt smaller majority (54.5%) were satisfied with on-post mental healthcare. Unfortunately, their work did not express their findings on a base by base basis, so there were no comparisons to consider.

2.3.1.5: Service Families Accommodation

This is an issue that is raised repeatedly in the UK FAMCAS (Fossey, 2011). Currently, only 54% of families are satisfied with Service Families Accommodation (SFA) (MOD, 2021), however comparatively little literature exists that mentions the quality, standard, location and affordability of service accommodation in any meaningful detail, particularly from the UK. The Army Families Federation (AFF) conducted a survey early in the development and rollout of the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) (MOD, 2016) and found, for example, that of those surveyed who were already homeowners only 12% had bought properties near their unit (AFF, 2016). Other questions in their survey led to the conclusion that most home-owning families had bought properties as homes for once they had left military life and most likely in the area where

they wished to settle. Of course the AFF are in effect a lobby group with their own agenda, but they are largely a respected voice on matters affecting (Army) families. The Centre for Social Justice (a 'think tank' with similarly respected research credentials, but also an agenda) followed this up in 2017 with a report that found that the dispersal, particularly of Army and RAF personnel, mitigated against the thrust of the FAM which they believed was to promote home ownership over publicly funded Service accommodation (CSJ, 2017). Amongst the research literature, some authors cite housing as a tangible benefit of military service (Clever & Segal, 2013, Rodrigues *et al,* 2020), who focus quite rightly on the benefit of proximity to the serviceperson's unit, family cohesion and available family support, but since dissatisfaction with housing remains such a high profile issue it is surprising that so little research appears to have followed that factor up.

Another aspect to the housing factor intersects with research into why military personnel tend to marry (and divorce) earlier than their mainstream civilian peers (Flueck and Zax, 1995; Hogan and Siefert, 2010; Segal, 1986; Segal and Segal, 2004). It is anecdotally often said in the Armed Forces that soldiers (in particular) get married 'just to get out of the block', i.e. that single service personnel to this day live under a somewhat paternalistic, supervised regime away from the workplace and that therefore the appeal of getting a house and the corresponding increase in independence and personal space is a factor in early marriage decisions. The works cited above confirm that for US personnel and it is reasonable to extrapolate that to HM Armed Forces.

Military housing in the UK continues to make headlines in both the mainstream and social media, despite the government's earnest attempts to improve matters through their Future Accommodation Model (FAM - HM Govt, 2016). Furthermore, from the works incorporated in this review, none focus exclusively on housing and accommodation. However, some information can be extracted or inferred. Specific to the UK, the Army Families Federation conducted a survey concurrently with MoD's development of the FAM which found that 50% of respondents (n=5942) were dissatisfied with the condition of their military housing and that 47% respectively were dissatisfied with the available storage space and the lack of opportunity to undertake their own home improvements or redecoration. This does not explain why 50% were satisfied with their married quarter's condition or why 53% were happy with available storage and keeping their homes as provided. However, from personal experience, corroborated later by this work's research subjects, the MoD married quarter estate is highly variable and it could be said that

being allocated a good house is, 'the luck of the draw'. Furthermore, the AFF report does not appear to explicitly factor in that military families may be happy to accept, or at least tolerate, the known negatives of military housing because of the positives of keeping the family together, being part of a military community and of subsides rents, which are often a third of the cost of rents in the civilian market (AFF, 2016)

2.3.1.6: Impact of mobility

Frequent relocation appears last in the FAMCAS (MOD, 2021) list of problems, but has an impact to a greater or lesser degree on all the others. It also features either explicitly or implicitly in a good number of the papers reviewed (Arnold *et al,* 2017; Aronson *et al,* 2016; Clever & Segal, 2013; Davis *et al,* 2016; DeGraff *et al,* 2016; Gustavsen, 2017; Jain *et al,* 2017; Keeling *et al,* 2016; Mancini *et al,* 2020; Matis, 2016; Meadows *et al,* 2016; O'Neal *et al,* 2020; Owen & Combs, 2017; Park, 2011; Rodrigues *et al,* 2020; Rossiter *et al,* 2016; Segal *et al,* 2007). It is reasonable therefore to conclude that occupationally imposed itinerance is a fundamental and essential concept to be borne in mind when considering the military family. Whether the problems it can create are offset or at least mitigated by the opportunities will be examined in more detail later in this work. For most papers the reference to relocation was passing, as a known perennial element in the military family experience, but several papers offered more. Davis *et al* (2016) looked directly at relocation, albeit through the lens of its impact on military children with autism. In particular, as highlighted in the Healthcare passage above, the issue is one of continuity of care for military children receiving support services – both clinical and educational – for their autism or, in their own words, "These disruptions may be especially harmful for military children with special needs who likely require more interventions and specialized school services than their peers who are neurotypical." Davis *et al* (2016). Their methodology was to use a survey featuring 'forced choice' questions, which whilst valid does rather mitigate against there being any evidence of how families and their autistic children thought and felt about their relocation.

Meanwhile, Rodrigues *et al* (2020) look rather more specifically at the longitudinal effects of changes in relocation over the decade since the Strategic Defence and Security Review of 2010, with a view to highlighting issues that may arise from the gradual dispersal of military communities. This dispersal, part of a wider government plan brigaded under the Future Accommodation Model, is designed to offer families more choice and flexibility, but at what cost? As Rodrigues *et al* observe, "The psychological impact of military life is potentially

exacerbated when families live away from military communities where most of the support is available". It is unquestionably well meaning and perhaps inevitable that the government would seek to offer families who so choose the ability to exercise more control over their location, in pursuit of educational stability for their children and employment stability for spouses, but as expressed earlier there seems to have been relatively little consideration of any adverse consequences of such a policy, in terms of military community cohesion.

The impact of (required) mobility is almost universally seen as a negative aspect of military family life in the works considered herein. This will be contextualised later, in relation for the cohort for this work, but from the literature there are a small number of challenges t othis negativity. Park (2011) concedes that children of military families can derive benefits and positive growth from relocation. This may take the form of meeting new people and making new friends (and by association developing the social skill-set to do that), having the opportunity to visit new places and, where relocation is overseas, to discover new cultures and experiences. Meanwhile, although the focus of the paper was on family adversity, Rowe *et al* (2014) allow for the fact that many families become highly adaptable to change and develop adaptive, robust coping strategies. This brief observation in an otherwise deficits-based paper should be the focus of further research.

2.4: Summary

In summary therefore, whilst research into the military family is plentiful, good qualitative work into the authentic experiences of those involved is lacking. Many of the works reviewed herein are essentially platforms for either a health/welfare/social intervention or vehicles for the research process itself. Whilst they are all worthy and valuable initiatives, in terms of what they offer to inform this work in both cases the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the research subjects are largely secondary to the intent of the study. In more recent times in the UK, the emergence of a number of research facilities dedicated to the military community has been led by ex-military academics whose primary interest is the subjects of their research, with whom they have an overt affinity. The literature sourced herein almost universally reinforces what is already known and sits within that body of 'common knowledge', previously caveated, that is summed up exceptionally well by the likes of Segal (1988) in the US and Fossey (2011) in the UK. The last six FAMCAS (2016 -2021) offer a more definitive summary, although they suffer from the inherent response bias of such studies, insofar as those who are dissatisfied are most likely to be motivated to complete the surveys or to rate things less favourably (Bergen &

Labonte, 2020; Furnham, 1986; Hofmans *et al,* 2008; Ostroff *et al,* 2002). Furthermore, because these surveys are annual they offer the opportunity to present the data in terms relative to previous surveys. This allows for headlines (from the 2021 FAMCAS) such as, "Families feel less negative this year", yet a closer look at the actual data indicates average dissatisfaction is still averaging around 50%.Thus the dominant themes deservedly benefit from ample research, but being deficits-based they do not capture the totality of the authentic experience of military families. For example, in 2021 it was reported that 28% of families had difficulties with their children's schooling, but that infers (though does not prove) that 72% of families did not (MOD 2021). Those difficulties certainly require attention, but none of the research captures the experiences of families who are happy with, or at least tolerant of, their childrens' schooling situation.

In terms of what to take away from the literature review to inform the subsequent research, as noted above the FAMCAS category of 'impact of mobility' has a universal influence across the other categories. Furthermore, the dissonance of there being relatively so little reference in the academic literature to housing and accommodation, versus its commonality in official surveys and research cohort reportage warrants further investigation. It has also been heartening to find support in the literature congruent with the aims and objectives of this work, for a strengths-based approach and evidence to suggest that families might value the growth afforded by opportunity as much as they struggle with the stresses associated with the known challenges. The literature review has therefore been a search for what is not reported, rather than what has been. As the problems cited across the literature thankfully affect (in most cases) only a numerical minority, there is therefore inherent merit in looking more closely at those unaffected by those problems, or who have either learned to live with them or found effective ways of mitigating them.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework and methodology

3.1:   Introduction

The very essence of the approach to this piece of work was to offer the research subjects a blank canvas upon which to set out their stories, free of the influence that might come from taking a perceived problem as the starting point and structuring the research around that (Maton *et al,* 2004), thus insulating as far as possible the research subjects from the potential interpretive bias of the researcher. The main aim was to allow the trials and triumphs of Service family life to emerge naturally from the storytelling through a first-hand account. Thereafter, the aim was that in the course of subsequent analysis further evidence of the negative aspects of Service life will emerge, to be contrasted and contextualised through balance in the evidence of hitherto little-regarded positive aspects, as well as perhaps new negative aspects that have to this point failed to enjoy the same exposure as the known problems.

Narrative Inquiry was chosen to meet the requirement identified in the original proposal and subsequently underscored by the literature review, to enable suspected but under-researched and therefore unconfirmed personal experiences to be revealed through the medium of story-

telling. The choice of methodology was not contested because not only does it fit with the modus operandi of the research, but also it fits with the experience of the researcher. Clinical mental health care can be seen as about gathering and interpreting stories from patients, in order to find a way to help them understand their own story and how to approach the next chapter (Lindsay & Schwind, 2015).

Most research, whether quantitative or qualitative, could be said to be searching for some sort of 'truth'. However, personal anecdotal stories are inherently subjective. Truth – or at least data with the most veracity – comes from the dialogical interactions between people, thus forming a synthesis of views that will be closer to the 'truth' than that of individual witnesses (Plummer, 2019)

The placing of this chapter, following on from the literature review, is worthy of explanation. Kumar (2011) states that, "until you go through the literature you cannot develop a theoretical framework, and until you have developed a theoretical framework you cannot effectively review the literature." This paradox, as he calls it, is in part neutralised by the nature and duration of doctoral study, wherein the literature must be regularly revisited as the study progresses to keep it as current as possible. This creates a 'feedback loop' that both develops the theoretical framework and refreshes the literature concurrently.

In a lengthy editorial piece, Lederman and Lederman (2015) write, "Doctoral students live in fear of hearing these now famous words from their thesis advisor, "This sounds like a promising study, but what is your theoretical framework?" ". In some respects, to this author a theoretical framework could be said to be analogous with a political ideology; a lens through which one may view things and, like all lenses, it has the potential to distort the image. Smith *et al* (2017) note that, "Most major research methods textbooks and articles remind us that theory influences the types of questions (or hypotheses) researchers generate, and consequently it influences the answers obtained from those questions." For this work, something that 'informs' rather than 'influences' is considered most appropriate given the niche area of study. Citing Peshkin (1993), the Ledermans' editorial suggests that a, "narrow definition of a theoretical framework is commonly not aligned with qualitative research paradigms that are attempting to develop theory … or research falling into the categories of description and interpretation research" (Lederman & Lederman, 2015).

Arriving at a working theoretical framework for this study has therefore been a challenge primarily because so few other works have chosen to employ this particular methodology on this particular subject that a significant body of knowledge discrete to narrative studies of military families cannot be said to yet exist. Equally, it would be inappropriate or at least questionable to look at the subject matter solely using an established theoretical framework because, in so doing, one is analysing the subject matter against a circumscribed set of pre-conceived notions or ideas. If, for example, a feminist theoretical framework were used the resulting analysis and conclusions might well be weighted toward the manifold ways in which the Service culture, ethos and construct subjugates women, both serving and spouses and perpetuates traditional gender roles (Hyde, 2015). Whilst to an extent all of that may be true, it is not the focus of this work. What is needed is a conceptual framework, informed by theory, for studying people in an interconnected but distinct sociocultural sub-group that draws its members from the mainstream of society and returns them thereto at various points, and which operates in nuanced but importantly different ways to that mainstream. Accordingly, the theoretical framework will be grounded in social constructivism, given that the subjects were exposed to an immersive sub-culture that required them to conform to externally specified sociocultural norms alien, or at least starkly atypical, to their backgrounds. This will be augmented through due consideration given to family systems theory and a strengths-based approach. The specifics of arrival at this formulation for a theoretical framework are set out below in sections 3.2 – 3.2.4.

3.2:   Philosophical Considerations

The Armed Forces throughout history could be said to have assimilated a deontological view of itself and the world. A rigid and authoritarian, hierarchical organisation places the needs of the organisation foremost in its considerations and insulates itself from the impact on individuals of its actions, which are predicated on duty- or rule-based ethics. (Mosely, 2011)

However, its' application of military force could also be seen as a utilitarian approach wherein the benefits outweighed the consequences. In very simple terms, this could be illustrated by any number of examples from military history. The bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima is still regarded as having been 'right' by most military theorists and historians, yet its consequences were horrific on a scale hitherto unseen. Nevertheless, despite the tragedy and ongoing health legacy of the attacks, they did end the war and prevent further bloodshed on a potentially greater, albeit attritional scale.

This apparent contrast can only really be understood in a wider context. The utilitarianism in the example above is borne of political decision-making, but those politicians making such decisions are reliant on the duty-bound, deontological ethical stance of their respective militaries to do as they are told. *Jus ad bellum* means something different to the soldier than it does to the politician. If a soldier has been given a mission, which in democratic countries will have been directed from their political leadership, then deontologically the mission is 'right'. This is not the Nuremburg defence however, because soldiers in democratic countries are bound by obligation to the *jus in bello* principles enshrined in the various Geneva Conventions and Protocols (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2015).

The relationship between these considerations and the family may not be clear, but they are critical. Moskos (1988) writes, "In a manner of speaking, the role of institutional membership in the military community extends to spouses…(M)ilitary families are supportive of, or adjunct to, organisational purpose." Despite the intervening three decades and transatlantic societal differences, this is still largely true for UK families, whose sociocultural sub-group membership brings them into a deontologically-orientated socio-ethical construct alien in many ways to the largely utilitarian and more socially liberal socio-political construct of wider society. Epistemologically then, the families are presented with a new social construct with which to engage or choose to resist. Adaptations to their understanding of the world will be necessary in both cases. As Blaikie (2010) observes, "In short, the issue is whose construction of reality should provide the foundation for social life." For this paper, whilst cognisance of the institution's view of itself is essential for context, it is the families' view and subsequent behavioural adaptation, thoughts and concerns that are of greatest interest.

3.2.1: Theoretical considerations

This section was originally to be entitled Constructivism vs Constructionism but in fact, there is no truly binary distinction between these two terms because they relate to overlapping concepts, the latter having built on the former (Alanazi, 2016). Both are predominantly educational theories and refer to the philosophical notion that each individual builds their own unique view of the world, based on the complex mix of pre-conception, a priori knowledge and previous experience. Actual differences between the two related theories in education are small and

impact on how the theory then supports the learner (Kritikos *et al,* 2020), but as they relate to wider society there is a key difference.

The degree to which each relates to the idea that what we see of the world is 'constructed' by a no less complex combination of social, political and educational endeavour varies between consideration of how our view of the world is constructed for us (constructivism) and how we personally influence the construct of our world (constructionism). Ergo, in developing a framework for understanding those joining an established construct – the military community – and critically what they think and how they feel about it, social constructivism is the most appropriate model.

The symbiosis is perhaps, given this author's biases, best understood in mental health terms whereby constructionism is intrinsic and the individual is the agent of construction whereas in constructivism, it is external influences on the individual that have that agency. In even simpler terms the former is how we see our world and the latter is how our world wants to be seen. How families adapt to how the military community wants to be seen is therefore the focus of enquiry.

The aim of any armed force is to achieve as much uniformity, not only of action but also of thought, knowledge and intent, as is possible. Thus day-to-day Service life is a 'construct' intended to both overtly and subliminally reinforce hierarchy, structure and discipline. How discrete individuals rationalise and contextualise that is an example of their constructivism. Conflict between those two positions can lead to difficulties and whilst most service personnel are content to a great or lesser degree to subordinate themselves to the artificial construct of service life, family members may be less inclined.

In considering an appropriate theoretical framework for this study, the aim was to find something that rendered the popular concept of the 'military bubble' into more suitable and appropriately academic language. In pursuit of this, Clandinin (2013) talks of the 'sociality commonplace' and of the 'place commonplace', but since 'place' in the context of a military family is not fixed, it would be the sociality commonplace that best fitted the bill. However a descriptor of an interconnected but distinct sociocultural sub-group remains potentially cumbersome. Given that one might reasonably define a bubble, in this context, as a construct it seemed that constructivism would be a good place to start. What is understood by the 'military bubble' is a socio-occupational construct in which not only the service person's work is directed, but also to

varying degrees their moral compass, values and standards, home, friends and social life (Segal, 1988; Sorensen, 1994; Greenberg, 2007). This highlights the essential and culturally unique extrinsic aspect to the construct – that almost all aspects of military life are pre-constructed for you. How the individual then rationalises their relationship with that construct is where the constructivism comes in. If, therefore, "social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others" (McKinley, 2015), the military have provided the social situation and the individual's knowledge has to be constructed through interaction in that *socio-occupational* context. For the service person that is provided through basic and subsequent specialist training, but for the families there is no such 'indoctrination'. The individual service person, by acceding to the hierarchy, structure, purpose, culture, values and standards of the military is thus validating the social construct of the military 'bubble', but their families may or may not so accede. From personal experience there were leaflets available to new spouses, or spouses of new service people, in the late 1990s that told those spouses that whether they liked it or not, they had 'joined' the Army too. There is a genuine wish at MoD level to make life easier and better for families, but the centuries of subordination of family need to military expediency seems to be a cultural habit that is taking a long time to break, lower down the hierarchy.

3.2.2: Strengths-based approach

As has been explained, this study sought to approach the subject matter as neutrally as possible, neither from a problem- or 'deficit'-centred approach, nor as an exercise solely in seeking out positives from the narrative stories gathered. The concept of a strengths-based approach (SBA) achieves the right balance between acknowledging the existence of problems, but looking to positive strengths to adaptively cope with those problems (Green *et al,* 2010; Hiemstra & Van Yperen, 2015; Maton *et al,* 2004). Park (2011) acknowledges, "More family support programs that address strengths as well as problems are needed. Existing programs need not be replaced but expanded. A focus on what goes well does not mean that what goes poorly should be ignored. Indeed, strengths-based interventions complement and extend problem-focused interventions". Ergo, the manner in which some families adaptively cope may illuminate ways in which other families may benefit from shared knowledge of coping with the eccentricities of military family life.

Albeit not focused on military families, Green *et al* (2010) look specifically at the needs of children and families and propose a Strengths-Based Practices Inventory for those practitioners engaged with that client group. This work informs both the method and methodology for this work, subdividing the SBA approach into four categories; Empowerment, Cultural Competency, Sensitivity/Knowledge and a Supportive Relationship (Green *et al,* 2010). For this work, those four categories could be merged into two, grouping Cultural Competency with Sensitivity/Knowledge and Supportive Relationship with Empowerment. For this researcher and this research, both groups are symbiotic with prior experience and practice as a military mental health nurse. All of which leads to another important concept that has grown in prominence in recent years – that of resiliency. It features in healthcare as well as business and government, meaning slightly different things to each group but nonetheless being grounded in a strengths-based approach (Zimmerman, 2013). In addressing the deficits-based approach of more traditional approaches, Zimmerman notes that, "…they are problem-focused reference points that often translate to change strategies that emphasize amelioration. In contrast, a resiliency paradigm orients researchers and practitioner to positive factors … that become the focus of change strategies designed to enhance strengths" (Zimmerman, 2013). Consequently, this research takes a strengths-based approach in the terms set out by Green *et al* (2010), that is to say that the researcher is culturally competent, sensitive and knowledgeable in respect of both the research subjects and the milieu in which they lived as a military family and that the manner in which the research will be conducted will be supportive, built on individual relationships and intended to empower military families.

3.2.3: Institutional/Occupational model

Moskos *et al* first described this model as a vehicle through which to understand the transition of armed forces from a vocational, deontological and 'institutional' entity built on response to national threat and conscription of personnel to something more akin to an occupation or profession as it would be understood in contemporary terms (Moskos *et al,* 1988). This is a key component of the overall theoretical framework as the aforementioned construct of the military bubble has moved in evolutionary terms – and one might say at an evolutionary pace – from a history grounded in compulsion and duty to a contemporary need to recruit to a career (Hockey, 1986; Downes, 1988; Taylor *et al,* 2015). In a prescient choice of title, Moskos and Wood chose "The Military: more than just a job?" for the work they co-edited in 1988, as this question

continues to hang over the culture and ethos of the military and arguably is more pertinent to families than the service personnel themselves.

3.2.4: Family theories

Family theory is an entire academic discipline of its own and this study will draw upon Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1966). Organisational behaviour theories could be applied to a greater or lesser degree to the military, but given that the focus of this work is the family it is perhaps more productive to examine and analyse the service family experience from the family perspective rather than the service perspective. However, Bowen's model is predominantly therapeutic in focus and so it will be the broad-brush principles that will be used as a guide to the overall theoretical framework.

The therapy focus can be seen in the first of the eight principles of Bowen theory. It is entitled 'Triangles' and expounds the notion that a group of three is the minimum needed for 'stability', insofar as a two-person grouping risks polarisation without recourse to a third member (a therapist). This could be said to apply in terms of the conduct of data capture, wherein the ideal would be to have a couple recounting their story in the presence of the researcher as the third element.

The second principle is 'Differentiation of self'. Bowen theory highlights the potential difficulty of familial 'group think' and therefore recommends that the participants are encouraged to think of themselves more individually. It is certainly a factor to consider that in some military families it may be that the serving person will take the lead and it will be necessary to be mindful of gaining a contribution from the partner that does not simply echo what the lead participant offers.

The third principle is 'Nuclear family emotional process'. Of course, the nuclear family itself is a relatively recent construct and although societally it is taken to be the 'norm', the reality of families is that they can be much more complicated (Heaver *et al,* 2018). Nevertheless there is relevance to the Service family population precisely because Defence policy in relation to the provision of housing and welfare is built upon the nuclear family assumption. Even today, entitlement to SFA is based on marriage. Same sex marriage is recognised, but currently long-term unmarried partnerships are not, although this is likely to be a feature of the Future

Accommodation Model (MOD, 2016). Ergo consideration of the family dynamic in government policy for Service families has historically been in the context of the 'traditional' nuclear family.

The fourth principle is 'Family projection process' and without levity this principle seems entirely consistent with Phillip Larkin's poem, 'This be the Verse':

> They f**k you up, your mum and dad.
> They may not mean to, but they do.
> They fill you with the faults they had
> And add some extra, just for you.
>
> But they were f**ked up in their turn
> By fools in old-style hats and coats,
> Who half the time were soppy-stern
> And half at one another's throats.
>
> Man hands on misery to man.
> It deepens like a coastal shelf.
> Get out as early as you can,
> And don't have any kids yourself.

Aside from the obvious, in terms of the intra-family dynamic, what is compelling about this element is to consider it in the context of the Armed Forces as a family. It is commonplace to hear particularly soldiers refer to the 'Regimental family' (and the implications for personnel not employed in regiments will be considered elsewhere) and, just like Larkin's fictitious family, the Regimental family perpetuates internal tensions, internecine strife and 'wisdom' handed down through generations in much the same way as a domestic family (Hockey, 1986).

The next principle very much ties in with the last. Entitled 'Multigenerational transmission process', it is easy to see how learned behaviours handed down through generations of personnel can lead to the amplification of historical problems and perhaps lend additional credence to the oft quoted notion that those who fail to learn from the mistakes of history are destined to repeat them. I do not cite this quotation precisely because it, or variants thereof, have been quoted by so many people that it is all but impossible to isolate its originator. The notions of projection and transmission in the last two elements are also pertinent, because they speak to the influence on families of life in the 'military bubble'. One can also see the genealogical extension of the military family as sons follow fathers who themselves followed theirs, as several subjects of Caddick's (2014) thesis study had done.

The next principle is that of 'Emotional cutoff' and is one that is seen all too often in wider society as well as in the military. It refers to the inability of a child to deal with the emotional challenges and influence of the parent other than to cut themselves off from it to a greater or lesser degree. In my experience many recruits to the Armed Forces join up as a means of emotional cutoff. Bowen theory seems to support this, stating, "People who are cut off may try to stabilize their intimate relationships by creating substitute "families" with social and work relationships". As a result the problems go unresolved and, linking in to previous principles of the theory, are likely to resurface when the serviceperson starts a family of their own. Children too will instinctively seek substitute families particularly when the service person is detached or deployed from their peer groups at school and elsewhere, as Alfano *et al* (2016) note, "peer relationships are of increasing importance as children participate in a greater number of school-based and social activities".

The seventh principle is 'Sibling position' and has influenced many other theories examining the family dynamic*. (For example, my wife and I are both the eldest of three and, according to Stroup (1965) as I am an older brother of a younger brother and my wife is the older sister of a younger sister, we are statistically more likely to divorce than other combinations. That we have been happily married for 32 years hopefully demonstrates our exception to the rule).* Nevertheless, it seems clear that sibling position does have an influence on both the intra-familial dynamic and on the subsequent development of individuals in their own personal relationships. It is possible to speculate that families nurtured within the 'military bubble' may have their internal hierarchies accentuated by the extrinsic influence of the military hierarchy.

The final principle, 'Societal emotional process', may in fact be the most pertinent to this research study. The theory states that, "(t)he concept of societal emotional process describes how the emotional system governs behaviour on a societal level, promoting both progressive and regressive periods in a society" (Bowen, 1966). In the case of Service families, that 'society' is in the majority of instances the aforementioned 'military bubble'. Thus, the influence of the 'society' on the family and vice versa is critical to understanding the Service family experience. For example, anecdotally it is common to hear of children being excluded from social groupings at school and elsewhere around the military community because of the rank and/or role of their military parent(s).

Bowen theory, therefore, appears to offer an opportunity to analyse both the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the Service family experience and allows for the military itself to be seen in the context of its strengths and weaknesses as a 'family'. In a theoretical framework, however, it cannot stand alone. Other theories, upon which some of Bowen theory itself is based, will influence the overall analytical picture. Another prominent US family therapist, Salvador Minuchin, uses social constructionism as the basis for his own Structural Family Therapy (Minuchin, 1974). Social constructionism essentially expounds the notion that individuals existing within a wider social construct will form their understanding of reality based on joint, shared assumptions. For families growing within the bounds of a military societal construct their assumptions of reality are going to owe a great deal to assumptions shared throughout the community.

3.2.5: Other theorists

John Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958; 1969) links in with several of Bowen's principles, but perhaps most prominently with the 'emotional cutoff', insofar as those who join up to escape what Bowlby might have called 'an unstable base' then forge new attachments to the 'Regimental family' and potentially go on to establish families of their own that may well feature similar dysfunction to those the service person sought to escape in the first place. Thus, Piaget's suggestion that children develop from a state of egocentrism to one of sociocentrism (Genovese, 2003) can be seen to be potentially problematic if the societal construct into which they develop is eccentric or atypical to wider society. This position is echoed by others, for example those of Vygotsky (cited in Reiber *et al,* 1997), but arguably has never been elucidated more clearly than by Piaget himself.

3.2.6: An eclectic theoretical framework

Having identified four key theoretical areas with which to formulate a theoretical framework, it should be understood that social constructivism is the overarching, 'umbrella' theory in relation to the way in which military families learn and adapt to new or different external influences and expectations. Thereafter, in terms both of considering the relevance of the literature and analysing the data gathered from the research subjects, that learning is then interrogated from the perspective of strengths-based approaches, family theories and institutional/occupational models. This work sought to try and bring together aspects of different approaches with a view

to a bespoke theoretical framework wherein overlaps between approaches may prove beneficial for qualitative work. A feature of many research projects seeking insight into the military is that it has found itself trying to examine and analyse the military through a civilian lens to varying degrees. Thus, in healthcare, where until the last decade or so the overwhelming body of research evidence was rooted in the civilian domain, when health challenges in the unique and atypical military environment are examined, they are frequently manipulated to be congruent with the civilian model. In the case of this work a familiar quandary thus presents itself. With the exception of a comparatively small body of work that focuses on the military family, the bulk of research reviewed is built around assumptions that are largely grounded in the civilian 'norm' and quite how far from it the military community deviates. Whilst there may be merit in that line of enquiry, the theoretical framework for this study must have capacity to reflect the in-group (military families) whilst remaining cognisant of perceptions from the out-group (mainstream society).

Given that the Armed Forces appear to reinforce traditional class distinctions, examining both the literature and the data using one of the 'Conflict' theories – Marxism, Feminism, Postmodernism, etc, was considered - However, the nature of this research is to try and capture the authentic Service life experience and so to analyse the gathered data on the basis of looking for evidence of conflict seems to be retrospectively applying an adversarial bias to subjects' narrative accounts. Of course, Marxism owed a great deal to the analytical triad of 'thesis, antithesis, synthesis' first conceptualised by Georg Hegel (Mueller, 1958), which should be familiar to any student of critical analysis, but beyond that such conflict theories are of minimal use.

In summary, to reprise the opening gambit of this section, the aim of this framework is to look from the inside, out, in terms of the Service family experience and rather than looking at families through an organisational lens to look at the Services from a family perspective.

3.3: Methodology

To paraphrase Marx (Groucho, not Karl) *Research* (as opposed to *Politics* in the original) could be said to be, *"the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies"*. This might seem like a facile and unscholarly observation but it speaks to an important truth about the chosen methodology for this piece of research. The

greater part of work in this field to date has been problem-centric and deficits-based. The researchers have, by methodological design, gone 'looking for trouble', albeit with the best of intentions. Thanks to their efforts we now know there are a host of problems, both potential and actual, faced by military families and so in our view it is timely that we conduct a piece of research that seeks as balanced an appraisal as possible of how military families get along with military life's challenges and to what extent there have been benefits as well as burdens in their shared experiences, lest we overcompensate in our eagerness to address problems and, in so doing, impact negatively on the benefits. This therefore requires a methodological approach for things that are unknown, or suspected but insufficiently documented. In that sense it must be exploratory as distinct from confirmatory, since that which is sought is indistinct. The aforementioned incorporation of a strengths-based approach into the theoretical framework might point to a methodology that went looking for strengths, but that would not offer the balance required as it would merely furnish a binary view.

3.3.1: Narrative Inquiry

"*This paper will make the case that narrative is the bread and butter of qualitative work, that qualitative research is always about story reporting and story making and that narrative is a democratising factor in social science research*" (Jones, 2004)

Narrative inquiry is based on the premise that human beings live 'storied' lives (Plummer, 1995, 2019; Trahar, 2009)…that is to say that the way in which they experience life and subsequently record and review those experiences in memory produce stories to both explain the experiences to themselves and communicate them to others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim 2016). For the subject, meaning derives from both their memories and what influences them to represent those memories to themselves…and to others. As a result there is rich data to be gathered from those stories and, furthermore, the manner in which stories are themselves constructed can assist in subsequent analysis (Andrews *et al,* 2013).

The term was first coined by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connolly in the 1980s (Wang & Geale, 2015) and was originally used in the qualitative study of teachers and teaching, but as with any field of human thought its genesis is owed to a trend within the humanist academic disciplines that arose out of the ashes of the second world war. Positivist empiricism was seen to be fatally flawed and a more holistic and person-centred approach was sought (Andrews *et al,* 2013).

Many of the qualitative methodologies can appear so esoteric of concept and malleable to the research need that they border on being indistinguishable. In the original briefing to candidates at the start of this doctoral journey, the Research Director differentiated between qualitative and quantitative approaches thus; "You're either talking to people…or counting stuff!" Yet the different approaches all have their adherents who will insist that their particular way of talking to people about their experiences is unique and clearly different. By way of example, early in this project the author was counselled against using the term, 'lived experience', on the grounds that this was a term exclusive to another established methodology – phenomenology – yet the two are linked (Kim, 2016) and so the term should enjoy validity in both. The difference is nuanced. In phenomenology the lived experience may be captured through dialogic narratives, but in narrative inquiry it is the nature, form and meaning of those narratives of lived experience as stories that is pertinent. In its essence, narrative inquiry is a process for eliciting stories from research subjects and subsequently analysing those stories, mindful of the influences on their composition. Narrative Inquiry had been specified as the intended methodology even before the author applied for this PhD, however it is worth taking a moment to look at why it is the most appropriate methodological approach. For both the author and the supervisory team, all of whom were drawn from the world of mental health nursing, that is what we did every day as clinicians. Furthermore both the author and the principal supervisor belong to the same military/veteran sub-group of society as the research subjects and so the stories gathered using a narrative approach in this work are being communicated in a culturally competent exchange (Clanidinin, 2013).

3.4: Method

3.4.1: Sample selection

Sampling was originally intended to be purposive in order to select subjects whose stories were most likely to yield pertinent information (Kelly, 2016). The initial intent was to interview a representative family from each of the three rank strata (junior ranks, senior ranks and officers) of each the three Services (Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force). However, conducting such interviews would quite rightly attract the interest of the MoD Research and Ethics Committee (MODREC) and whilst it was felt that clearance from that body was achievable, it added an extra layer of complexity and potential delay to proceedings. Therefore the study design focused on Veterans, who were recruited initially through the author's network and subsequently

by snowball and convenience sampling. LinkedIn was used as the starting point for recruitment and snowball sampling evolved from that first trawl. An attempt was made to enlist the assistance of the three Service Families Federations and following email was sent to all three:

Email to Service Families Federations

Dear Colleagues

I am a (fairly) recently retired RAF Squadron Leader, Army Reservist Major and PhD student with the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research at Northumbria University.

I'm currently in the process of recruiting families for my study. The intention is to interview ex-Service families without any precondition or priming, using Narrative Inquiry as my methodology. Pretty much all the research that exists into Service families has been deductive, starting with a premise that there is a problem with 'x'. We all know what the common 'x' problems are. Narrative Inquiry is more inductive and is looking to gather data without introducing the initial bias of it being a study into the effects of problem 'x' on Service families, i.e. a blank sheet of paper upon which Service families can tell me the story of their Service life, so that we can see what falls out from it in the later analysis. I fully expect lots of the usual problems to feature, but there may be problems that have hitherto passed unnoticed or there may be stories of positive growth and life-enhancement that emerge which might help us to present a more balanced picture of Service life.

If you know of any families that might fit my bill please let me know. My inclusion criteria are pretty flexible by design, but what I'm ideally looking for are families of ex-Servicefolk who have left within the last three years (-ish) and who served for at least nine years (again, -ish!). At the moment I only have three families and I need at least nine. If it were possible to either host a 'flyer' on your website or link to a Northumbria University webpage I would be happy to put something together for that.

Thanking you in advance

However despite those efforts no response was forthcoming. The inclusion criteria were also adapted to meet the realities of recruiting to the study. As above, families of veterans were

targeted in preference to those of serving personnel to obviate any need to refer the work through MODREC. There had been an initial intent to specify a minimum period of service of nine years but in the end all research subjects had served for considerably longer than that. Initial plans at the proposal stage had envisaged restricting the cohort to those who had left the Services within the last three years but this was revised to take in anyone who had served during the era of Operations TELIC (Iraq) and HERRICK (Afghanistan) as the resultant experiences were judged to be contemporary. Beyond that the inclusion criteria were left as broad as possible to increase the likelihood of a wide sample that represented all three Services and rank ranges. In the end, the sample failed to include a representative subject family from the Royal Navy. In other circumstances, Dr Kiernan might have been a candidate but as he was the principal supervisor there was an obvious conflict of interest. Neither was there a family of a Junior NCO, however given the inclusion criteria and the targeting of Veterans, it was quite likely that experiences commensurate with those of a JNCO's family would feature in some stories, as generally those who had served long enough to have a family story worth telling were likely to have moved up through the ranks.

3.4.2: Interviews

Data collection was carried out by unstructured interview and where questions were asked for clarity or depth, Socratic questioning was used. The parameters of the story were left to the narrator. For example, if the story were to be constrained to starting at the point of the serviceperson's enlistment, as originally conceived in the project approval, that might exclude rich and relevant data from the period before enlistment such as social and family circumstances and motivation to join up. Similarly the details of transition and veteranhood provided more quality data which would have been missed had the story parameters required conclusion at the end of the service career.

The matter of positionality for the researcher was also considered. The reality of being a *bona fide* member of the community being researched brings with it both strengths and weaknesses (Berkovic *et al,* 2020) and both had to be acknowledged in contemplating the conduct of research/subject interaction. In clinical practice, the benefits of cultural congruence in therapeutic relationships is well researched (Finnegan, 2013), but at the same time the disadvantages are not dismissed. Translating that principle to this research cohort, it was necessary to plan for possible issues around positionality, insofar as there might be tensions

and potential impediments between researcher and subject. Drawing on self-experience, there are established internecine tensions for example between Teeth Arms soldiers and those in support roles such as the author's. There are also potential tensions between the socio-occupational strata of the military (Williams *et al,* 2020) and four of the nine subjects were non-commissioned officers who might potentially allow their own feelings toward the 'officer class' to impede the flow of their stories, however unconsciously.

To obtain the most accurate, properly contextualised picture it was felt to be important that subjects should *volunteer* the evidence about their military family lives, rather than be led to making statements solely about positive or negative experiences. In search of stories and narratives that thus contained a balanced and authentic account, unstructured interviews were felt to be the most appropriate data collection approach because they are most likely to elicit unexpected or unprompted data (Kim, 2016). Any structured or semi-structured approach searching for hitherto little researched experiences (whether negative, neutral or positive), no matter how well constructed risked influencing the subjects toward those experiences and thus dislocating their stories from their natural path. Ergo, the approach was to invite subjects to tell their stories - good, bad or indifferent – so that the entire story was told in context, with no specific values placed (by either the researcher or the subject) on the experience.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face, via Skype or via telephone and were on average of 90 minutes' duration. Data obtained were marshalled through the use of Nvivo and subsequently analysed thematically and by relevance manually.

Telephony was the least preferred option because, as a mental health nurse, the author is naturally attuned to reading as much from non-verbal communication as from the spoken word, however realistic practicalities of geographical separation and simple diary scheduling resulted in over half of the interviews being conducted over the telephone. Voice recording equipment was supplied by the university and consent for its use was obtained from all subjects.

3.4.3: Analysis

Data analysis began with simple thematics (see Appendix 1) in order to get a sense of direction for the analysis (Butina, 2015, Plummer, 2019) . Thereafter each story was dissected and scrutinized individually, initially using NVivo to marshal the information. Unfortunately the utility

of this software exceeded the author's IT literacy by a fair margin and analysis reverted to old-fashioned pen and paper notes. The weighty sense of resignation to this was moderated by noting that Clandinin & Connelly (2000) held their own reservations about the use of such software in narrative inquiry. However in keeping with the methodological approach the thematic findings were supplemented by a structural and dialogical analysis considering how the stories were constructed, why they were presented the way they were and what influences were brought by both story-teller and researcher (Butina, 2015). There is thus an inescapably hermeneutic quality to the analysis that resonates with the search for meaning mentioned by most authors (Andrews *et al,* 2013; Clanidinin & Connolly, 1990; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Plummer, 1995; Kim, 2016; Trahar, 2009; Wang & Geale; 2015). In addition to the subjective meaning to the story-teller, there may be an additional, interpretive element of meaning for the researcher that may not appear to correlate with the original intent (Wang & Geale, 2015). There is a further underlying ontological feature of this research insofar as the meaning derived from stories told within the same cultural construct may not readily translate to an out-group readership whose sense of being and reality is grounded in the mainstream civilian paradigm. Consistent with the approach used for the literature review, the analysis mapped the storied data to the six FAMCAS (MOD, 2021) areas of interest. Subsequently, ten discrete themes were seen to emerge that could be expressed and explored within the FAMCAS areas but which offered greater clarity if kept distinct.

3.5: Summary

Approaching this work from a perspective of social constructivism, preferred for its intrinsic nature as opposed to the extrinsic nature of constructionism, the research was conducted through narrative inquiry and further informed by strengths-based and institutional/occupational considerations. Analysis continued to enjoy the influence of this eclectic theoretical framework and in addition to narrative interpretation also weighed stories of family experiences against Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory, both internally within families and extending it externally to notions of the 'regimental family'.

Chapter Four: It begins…

4.1   Overview and cast of characters

As noted in the methodology chapter, the original intent had been to interview nine families, with a representative family from junior ranks, senior ranks and officers of all three Services. Unfortunately that proved to have been overly optimistic and the recruitment approach switched to convenience/snowball sampling very quickly once the difficulties became apparent. Given that we had elected to interview veterans rather than serving personnel, there were no families of those who had left the Services as junior ranks amongst the respondents to the social media recruiting trawls and subsequent word-of-mouth recruiting. Furthermore, perhaps as a consequence of geography or the composition by Service of the author's network, none of the respondents interviewed were from the Royal Navy, leaving only Army and RAF research subjects.

The first attempt to analyse the demographics of the research cohort were conducted on paper which offered the opportunity to visually compare and contrast the different members of the cohort. This helped to visualise the information and begin to make connections and identify differences. The flip chart breakdown can be seen reproduced in the chart below. Service should be self-explanatory. Rank level is also as detailed earlier. The suffix 'LE' in parentheses for officers denotes an individual who first enlisted as a soldier or airman but who later commissioned and is so identified as 'Late Entry'. The use of the term 'Echelon' refers to the position of the role the SP undertook in relation to the 'front line'. In contemporary military doctrine we have moved away from a linear concept to a more amorphous 'battlespace', however for organisational purposes the military still divides its activities into three tiers, 'Teeth Arms', which in the Army is the Infantry (including Special Forces), the Cavalry and the Army Air Corps. In this study there was no representation from the next tier of organisation – Combat Support – and all others belonged to the final tier of Combat Service Support. The next column

identified those who were in established relationships on entry, whether solemnised or not. A family history of military service on either side was felt to be relevant in relation to motivation to serve, but also for the spouse in terms of their potential pre-exposure to the military lifestyle. All families involved had children. Three families had children on joining up. Most families had served overseas in either British Forces Germany (BFG) or Cyprus (CYP).

Table 2

Family analysis

Subject> /Family	Service	Rank Level (JR/SR/OFFR)	Echelon	Married/in relationship on joining	Family h/o military	Children	Overseas posting(s)
1	Army	SR	Teeth Arms	Yes (2nd marriage for spouse)	Yes, but not on spouse's side	Yes, 2 from spouse's previous marriage	Yes (BFG/CYP)
2	RAF	OFFR (LE)	Teeth Arms Eqv Aircrew	No	No	Yes, from 1st marriage	No
3	Army	SR	CSS	Yes	No	Yes, on joining	Yes BFG
4	RAF	SR	CSS	Yes	Yes (SP)	Yes, on joining	Yes BFG
5	Army	SR	Teeth Arms	No, but knew before	No	Yes (1 born in BFG)	Yes BFG

7	Army	OFFR (LE)	CSS	No	No	Yes, from 1st marriage	Yes BFG – caused end of 1st marriage
8	Civ/Army	Civ/SR	CSS	N/A/No	Yes/Yes	Yes	Yes BFG both
9	RAF	OFFR(LE)	CSS	Yes (not married)	No	Yes	Yes BFG/CYP
10	Army	OFFR	Teeth Arms	No	Yes	Yes	No

This was a continuous thirteen-column chart when first rendered, but for reproduction herein it has been broken down into two parts. In this second section, the first column refers to separated service undertaken out of choice, rather than that dictated by operational circumstance and usually features later in SPs careers, when they have sought to offer their family some stability and moved location alone on posting. Spousal employment is one of the consistent features of FAMCAS and so was next included. Relationship breakdowns were a fact of service family life for some families and so were recorded herein. The term 'service attributable' is an interesting one, insofar as it is used commonly in medical assessments, where 'fault' is accepted by the military in relation to an illness or injury, facilitating the claiming of compensation. In this case, from the evidence in the narratives, it is clear that the relationships that did fail did so because of the pressures of service life, hence the use of the phrase. Safe for children is inescapably subjective but as it was a feature of most narratives it bore inclusion. Finally, examples of positive growth were also a regular feature for some or all of the military families interviewed.

Table 3

Family analysis 2

Subject /Family	Married unaccompanied	Working spouse	Divorced/separated (svce attributable)	Service before self	Safe for children	Positive growth
1	Yes (whilst SP in BFG)	Yes. Opportunistic low paid no career	No	Frequent examples	Yes, esp BFG/Cyp – Military Community	For children
2	Yes	Yes (2nd wife)	Yes, "married too young"	No		For 2nd wife
3	Yes & as veteran	No	No	No	Yes	Yes for all
4	Yes & as veteran	Intermittent employment	No	No	Yes	Yes for all
5	No except dets/ops	Yes – on camp usually	No	No	Yes – regt family	Yes for all
7	Yes in both marraiges	Yes for 2nd wife	Yes	Yes ++	Yes	Yes for children
8	N/A/Yes	N/A/Yes	Yes both	No	Yes	Yes for 8a

9	Yes	Yes (RGN)	Yes	Yes++	Yes	Yes for SP + children
10	Yes & as veteran	Yes (Serving)	No	Yes	Yes	Some

The following chart more overtly refined out the marital circumstances of cohort members, with additional information to capture a potentially important element of their service life in terms of their career pathway, as represented by the difference between their rank on joining and their rank on exit. As regards SP2, it bears explanation that as he was RAF aircrew he effectively joined as a sergeant (although he would have initially enlisted and completed his basic training as an airman). The lowest rank possible for RAF aircrew is sergeant, however and on graduating from basic training he would have been an Acting Sergeant until he completed his flying training.

Table 4

Research Cohort Marital Details

Subject	Service	Echelon	Rank on joining	Rank on exit	Marital status on joining	Marital status on exit	Notes
F1	Army	Teeth Arms	Pte	Sgt	Married	Married (same partner)	
F2	RAF	Teeth Arms eqv	Sgt	Sqn Ldr	Single (married young)	Married (2nd wife)	
F3	Army	Combat Service Support	Pte	Sgt (later rejoined and commissioned)	Married	Married (same partner)	
F4	RAF	Combat Service Support eqv	JT	Warrant Officer	Married	Married (same partner)	
F5	Army	Teeth Arms	Pte	Sgt	Single (married young)	Married (same partner)	

	Army/RAF/Army	Combat Service Support eqv	Capt	Maj	Married	Married (same partner)	*The author*
F6	Army/RAF/Army	Combat Service Support eqv	Capt	Maj	Married	Married (same partner)	*The author*
F7	Army	Combat Service Support	Pte	Maj	Single (married young)	Married (2nd wife)	
F8a	Civilian						
F8b	Army	Combat Service Support	Pte	SSgt	Single (married young)	Married (2nd wife)	
F9	RAF	Combat Service Support eqv	JT	Sqn Ldr	Single (in stable relationship – later married)	Separated (from 1st wife)	
F10	Army	Teeth Arms	2Lt	Lt Col	Single	Married (same partner)	Separated after service

Of the nine service personnel (SP), four came from the 'Teeth Arms', i.e. the combat-facing, fighting element of the Armed Forces. Three were from the Infantry and the fourth was RAF Aircrew. The remaining five all came from 'Combat Service Support' units. Three were nurses (one Army, two RAF), one was from the Royal Army Physical Training Corps and one from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Eight of the nine joined in the ranks and, of those, three took commissions whilst serving. Three were married on enlistment, with the remainder marrying in service. Of the nine, five left with their original marriage intact including the three who were married on enlistment.

To preserve the anonymity of the subjects their experience will be referred to as 'Family' 1 – 10 and the individual 'lead' subject as 'SP' (Service Person) 1 - 10. Family 6 is the author's family and included only for comparison.

The structure of the stories gathered through narrative inquiry is in some respects as significant and revealing as the content of the stories themselves (Clandinin & Rosiek 2007). The analysis herein is therefore structured around Beginnings, Middles and Ends (Andrews *et al,* 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Plummer, 1995; 2019, Kim, 2016). However there is a further dimension to the stories told by this particular research cohort. Communication in HM Armed Forces is a key enabler and central to any military activity (JSP101-MOD, 2018) and from basic training onwards, military personnel are taught to communicate in a particular way which can and often does persist into veteranhood. As a very simple example, in a verbal exchange where one party has either not heard or fears they have misheard the other, a civilian might say 'excuse me?', or 'pardon?' whereas anyone schooled in the use of radios and it's attendant, formalised 'Voice Procedure' (VP), is likely to ask, 'say again' – a term prescribed by VP for situations where a radio message was not clearly heard and chosen to avoid the word 'repeat', which has a specific meaning in artillery circles and means to 'repeat' the previous barrage on the target (National Army Museum, nd). However more broadly, trained and experienced soldiers, sailors and airmen are used to giving information in precise and concise terms. To refer again to former artilleryman Spike Milligan, he commented on a terse entry in the Regimental Dairy for his unit with the observation that, *"If brevity is the soul of wit, this diary was written by Oscar Wilde!"* This was most notable with SP2, who by dint of having spent a working lifetime as aircrew was deeply attuned to the aforementioned brevity and specificity of communication and for whom the first ten minutes of the interview had to be given over to an explanation as to why there were no questions, structured or unstructured, in the conduct of the interview. Fortunately however, like Spike Milligan, service personnel also have their own oral tradition of telling 'war stories'…often embellished, apocryphal and alcohol-fuelled, but nonetheless told as stories, rather than as terse briefings on factual matters.

Family 1.

This was the only opportunity to interview a husband and wife face to face. In all other cases except Family 4 and Family 8, which were conducted remotely via Skype or telephone, the wives declined to be interviewed. It is also significant that the recruiting trawls did not produce any female veterans, whose military family life story might have been quite different to those based on traditional roles.

Perhaps predictably, SP1 felt the need to contextualise the beginning of his story with how he became a member of the Royal Irish Regiment, given that he was not Irish. He had joined the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) in 1977 and left in 1984. When he re-joined in 1988, this time as an infantryman, he had been working in a variety of jobs in the construction industry alongside a number of Irish colleagues and felt inspired to join the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) and went on to serve a full 22 year engagement and retired as a Sergeant.

He met his wife in the period of time he was out of the Army and they shared a home together, with her children from a previous marriage. He re-enlisted prior to their subsequent marriage which presented issues which will be explored later.

Family 2

Service person 2 was a retired RAF officer, who had worked his way to a commission through the ranks. However for context he had worked his way up as a member of the aircrew career pathway, which starts at Sergeant. He had been what the RAF used to call a 'Loadmaster', which in his case had meant that he was a helicopter winchman and had spent most of his career on RAF Search & Rescue helicopters. Since his retirement, he has been doing the same job for a company who fly helicopters in support of the offshore oil and gas industry. He had married young, as many Service personnel do (Hogan & Siefert 2010) and gone on to regret that decision. Nevertheless, this offered the opportunity to hear about two different Service family experiences from one research subject.

Family 3

Service person 3 was a Commonwealth soldier who had arrived in the UK from the Caribbean to study and had seen an Army recruitment poster on the London Underground. Back in Trinidad, he had been a police officer but was looking for a career change, of which his university studies were a contributory part. He originally joined the Royal Logistics Corps (RLC) and served for several years with them, before transferring to the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) to study to become a mental health nurse. He was married and had children even before enlistment, which was unusual in the Army but not unheard of and thus offered the opportunity to hear about an atypical Army family experience. After fourteen years' service he was forced to go home to Trinidad for family reasons and returned to the UK

some time later to work in military mental health nursing as an agency nurse. He then joined the Army Reserve wherein he subsequently commissioned and then took a Full Time Reserve Service post in Cyprus, where he was joined by his wife. His two daughters, by this stage, were independent adults and stayed in Trinidad.

Family 4

Service person 4 was an RAF Warrant Officer. Like SP3, he was already married on enlistment but unlike SP3 he was already a trained mental health nurse when he joined up. His prior life experience and character led him to pursue a career and service life path that earned him great respect across the rank range but which cut across that rank range in a manner not often seen in service personnel. In retrospect, we agreed that he would perhaps have been better advised to choose commissioned entry, however he asserted that the route he chose did neither him nor his family any harm and resulted in a rewarding and memorable career. As with a significant number of other Veterans, he continues to work for the MoD as a civilian, in a role where his service knowledge is invaluable.

Family 5

Service person 5 was another retired infantry Sergeant who had served a full 22 year career, in his case in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (RRF). He enlisted as a single soldier but met his wife when on leave back in his home town and married her within a year. At the time of interview they were still together and their Service family life had inspired their two sons to also join the Army, which has to serve as some sort of testament to the opportunity for a good life in the Forces. Despite his origins in the North West he chose to settle close to Catterick Garrison, which is in North Yorkshire, where he still has peripheral contact with the military community. Indeed, such is the prominent nature of the garrison that the surrounding towns and villages enjoy, if that is the right word, a high level of settled veterans including at least one former Chief of the General Staff and the author.

Family 6

Family six is my own family, included for the purposes of informing the reflective elements of this thesis.

Family 7

Service person 7 is an Army major, serving on what is known as Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) terms and so it was decided that this did not contravene our self-imposed restriction on interviewing serving personnel. SP7 was previously a Regular officer in the Royal Army Physical Training Corps (RAPTC) and like the majority of their number, had worked his way up through the ranks. It is not possible – unlike in the other two Services – to join the Army directly as a Physical Training Instructor (PTI) and so he had originally enlisted in the Royal Scots (SCOTS), before transferring to the Royal Military Police, solely because unlike his original unit, they would support him in doing his PTI course. He had been accepted to the RAPTC by the age of twenty, by which time he had also married his first wife. The nature of his job and his own adventurous spirit meant he was away more often than at home, which ultimately led to the breakdown of his first marriage. In the way of these things, his second marriage came much later in his career, as he was already quite settled and he was fortunate to find an FTRS job within comfortable commuting distance of his settled home.

Family 8

Family 8 are something of an anomaly in the research cohort, insofar as the primary respondent has never served, however she was the child of an airman and in later life married a soldier. Thus in terms of Service family life there was a prime opportunity to get a historical perspective from her and a more contemporary experience from her second husband, who had been married before and experienced Service family life with his first wife and children. He served a full 22 year engagement in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) as an aircraft technician working with the Army Air Corps and retired as a Staff Sergeant to do much the same work as a civilian.

Family 9

Service person 9 was another Commonwealth serviceman, although in his case he left Zimbabwe to join the RAF. Also a mental health nurse, like SP4 he was trained on enlistment but in his case not married at the time. Nonetheless he was in an established relationship that was later formalised in marriage. Like many military nurses who are perhaps misadvised by

Armed Forces Careers Office staff who rarely deal with professionally qualified people, he joined in the ranks and only later was encouraged to apply for a commission. He achieved the rank of Squadron Leader before leaving the Service early for family reasons, specifically the death of his father back in Zimbabwe and his obligations to his birth family to sort out his late father's affairs. This course of action was in part contributory to the break-up of his marriage.

Family 10.

Service person 10 is a recently retired infantry Lieutenant Colonel, and at the time of interview was married to a former QARANC officer. His account is the most typical thereof, of the classic direct entry Army officer. He began his career as a thrusting young officer with no interest whatsoever in being tied down to a family, seeing it as an impediment to both his career and his social and extra-curricular interests, yet as his story unfolds he is inexorably drawn into a similarly classic Service family life experience, with no shortage of Service-induced problems and challenges. Even now, in his civilian employment, he has found himself living the 'married unaccompanied' lifestyle that in part contributed to his decision to leave the Army. He settled his family in the 'M4 corridor', which normally offers a range of potential postings that all remain within commuting distance in what is effectively an unofficial variant of the RAF 'Basing Strategy', whereby they try to post people to similar units within the same geographical area. Unfortunately for him, the job he found on leaving the Army was in London and led on to appointment to a job somewhat further East.

So, notwithstanding the naivete of the original strategy, the cohort that resulted from snowball sampling is sufficiently diverse for this study's purposes and generated a wide range of experiences, both good and bad, which resonates with the overall intent of using narrative inquiry. As acknowledged earlier it would have been preferrable to have had some RN representation but there was at least some indirect, secondary information on Navy family life to be gleaned from my supervisor Dr Kiernan.

4.2: How did we get here? Beginnings

Consistent with the chosen methodological approach, the output from the interviews was broken down into Beginnings, Middles and Ends. That approach infers a natural chronology, and most subjects told their stories chronologically (Boyd *et al,* 2020). SP5, however, began his story with a reflective summary of what he viewed as having been a good experience for all the family.

"We've had a good service life, I mean, at the end of the day, the army do look after you, I spent, like, twelve years in Germany, which was alright because, as I say I've got three kids that have been brought up within the army, two of my lads have actually joined the army, one's in Tidworth, he's a fusilier, and my youngest lad is twenty-four, he's in 3RHA (3^(rd) Bn Royal Horse Artillery) at Albemarle so they're both serving soldiers, both NCOs, both getting up the ladder. We've had a good life in the army, you know, you're looked after, it's just after you get out you don't hear much about it then, you know what I mean, it's just with Facebook you hear what's happening, with the life that we've had it was great."

In one paragraph, Family 5 can be seen to have interfaced with the theoretical framework on several levels. There is a fusion of familial group think, societal emotional process and multigenerational transmission process from both the military and domestic family perspective, with children brought up within the social construct of the military naturally progressing to embark on their own military careers, much like those of the author. Furthermore, SP5's positivity is congruent with the strengths-based element of the theoretical framework, in that his opening gambit was to set out how he and his family had gained personally and socially from military family life. What is also important to note is that SP5 served in the Infantry, one of what the Army calls the 'Teeth Arms' and upon which the structure of the rest of the Army is based, but only nominally. Teeth Arms units are very strong on what they call the 'Regimental Family' (National Army Museum, undated) and work hard to give families a sense of community. However, in many other parts of the Army and certainly in the RN and RAF, service personnel are seen more as individuals. One key example of this is that mainstream Army units move as formed units, so when a soldier in such a unit is posted from A to B, his whole unit is often also moving from A to B, so the partners and children of everyone in the unit are moving together as a cohesive, albeit itinerant, community. Though not one of the research subjects, a patient seen relatively recently by the author whose father had been a serving infantry soldier during the patient's childhood commented about the disruption to his schooling and observed that as the

whole battalion was moving together, all his schoolfriends moved with him every time, which made things much easier. All of which serves in stark contrast to the author's experience, wherein the family have had to say their goodbyes to friends and start all over again making new ones all too often. For Combat Service Support Corps' like that of the author and for the other two Services, it is more likely that the individual will move between units, leaving partners and children to have to sever ties with friends and community support in one location and re-establish these things in their new location. In some respects, this emotional cut-off could be seen to make families more self-reliant but in some cases and for some families it may come at a cost to their integrity as a family unit and their mental health. This is borne out by many papers that featured in the literature review, but most particularly by Hogan & Siefert (2010) who encapsulated both the phenomenon of earlier marriage amongst service personnel (in the US) and also that of earlier divorce. As SP1's wife said, "*, 'whoa how does this work then?'. You know you're over there I'm over here, doesn't kinda work in my head.*"

Returning to Family 1, this family were arguably the most compelling, interesting and useful of all the interviews conducted, largely for the benefit of having the verbatim views of the civilian partner incorporated and the interview having been conducted face to face. Most noticeable in the interview was that the manner in which SP1's wife told her part of the story was peppered with more military in-group language and colloquialisms than her husband's, despite her having had no contact with the military prior to their relationship.

In relation to the prospect of becoming a Service family, she had no idea at the time what she was getting into:

I had no erm concept of, of what army life was cos no one in my family or my peer group or my friends support had ever had anything to do with erm...any of the armed forces so I…I there was no expectation cos I didn't know what it was gonna be. Erm (coughing) excuse me. But erm T went away to Germany, didn't you, you were posted to Germany, which I found, initially very difficult cos it was a bit like, 'whoa how does this work then?'. You know you're over there I'm over here, doesn't kinda work in my head.

In terms of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, this could have been an example of how 'differentiation of self' can be challenging in an immersive social existence. She was also keen to include the impact on her children from a previous marriage early in her story:

So you kinda introduce two children to a potential new partner and then he leaves again and goes off to Germany its hang on a minute as they were very young and you've gotta always be mindful of how that is interpreted from their behalf as well.

M: Yeah

J: This new guy on the scene who's trying really hard and then he disappears again and then he comes back again so it's a bit disjointed. So erm it was easier when T was transferred back to UK, cos he was home more frequently it helped with developing the relationship

M: Mm hmm

J: Erm the boys don't really remember a time before T. Especially my 2nd son he was only 2. so there was no pre T but at the time. It was it was a bit of a conflicting time for them and I suppose for myself.

This was important data structurally and chronologically. It highlights the reality at the time (1988) that Service Families Accommodation was strictly for married couples and that their domestic situation did not stabilise until they married, some time after SP1's re-enlistment. It's inclusion early in their story was a necessary scene-setter to the narrative that followed (Boyd *et al,* 2020).

SP3 and SP9 brought an international flavour to their stories, being both recruited from Commonwealth countries. Thus in addition to having to adapt to the 'societal commonplace' (Clandinin, 2013) of Britain, they then had to further modify that adaptation to make the transition into military service. Interestingly, from a narrative perspective, both came from cultures where the practice of oral histories being passed down the generations through stories was more contemporary than in European countries (Ritchie, 2014). Thus both stories began, albeit in different ways, with some contextual scene-setting in terms of how they had both come to enlist in HM Armed Forces. SP4 had come to the UK to study, without considering joining the Armed Forces, whereas SP9 came directly from Zimbabwe specifically to join up. Though it did not feature in the stories of either research subject, there is a further cultural consideration to be made in respect of the fact that many Commonwealth cultures remain more conscious of duty,

in a deontological sense, than the UK itself (Cesarani & Fulbrook, 1996), which may explain the attraction of military service to Commonwealth citizens.

As noted earlier, it took some time for SP2 to adjust to the fact that he was being asked to tell a story, rather than report information in response to a set of prepared questions, despite this having been explained in the Participant Information Leaflet. Once he began his account however, he too followed a linear, chronological structure and recounted details of his first marriage, echoing Hogan & Siefert's (2010) findings with the words, "*I married too young*". He continued to require prompting throughout the interview, suggesting perhaps that despite being a volunteer he was not that comfortable with talking about family and encouragement and empathy was required (Kim, 2016).

Despite the preliminaries of the interview being truncated by technical problems with the recording, SP4 launched immediately into a story grounded in the family experience, interspersed with service-related content for context. Principally, he focused on the married quarter accommodation and the safe spaces for his children to play and grow, which remained a feature throughout his story. Having come as a family from a terraced house in East Lancashire, he and his family found the housing and the location thereof much to their liking:

Six weeks later we moved into an even more reasonable Quarter, it was temporary accommodation, had quite a nice house which the kids thought was great because they could run out of the front door and not get squashed on the road – major factor

The tone of his interview and the early inclusion and prioritisation of his family's experience in his beginnings was heartening. Although he was clearly looking for a career, from the outset he was also minded to consider how his chosen path could also benefit and support his existing family, another phenomenon noted by Hogan & Siefert (2010), who found that the incentives offered by the military in respect of family support (in the US) was an inducement in recruiting.

Like SP2, SP7 had also married young and his story began naturally with his first marriage, when he was a young infantry soldier:

I was Royal Military Police, and prior to that the Royal Scots. I transferred from the Royal Scots to the Military Police because they offered me the opportunity to do my PT course. And from

that I just bounced from course to course to course. And be the age of 20 I transferred to the RAPTC as it is now. In general terms, married life in the service was good. Particularly in the '70s, in Germany.

Again, like SP2, there seemed to be an almost apologetic and perhaps contrite tone to SP7 recounting the early days of his first marriage. SP2 had commented:

And I think, you know and reflecting back on erm, erm the kinda marital side of things, yeah could have gone differently, pfft (sic) who knows?

In reflecting on his own conduct early in his first marriage, SP7 acknowledged that he had perhaps got his priorities wrong:

For me. And, I have to be perfectly honest, I took opportunities that I need not have done in order to pursue that personal trait of excitement and challenge and...

This feature highlights the dichotomy illuminated by many authors of having to forge a career – and a career that appealed precisely because of that 'excitement and challenge' - whilst also meeting the needs of a young family (Clever & Segal, 2013; Fossey, 2011; Park, 2011; Mancini *et al,* 2020; Rossiter *et al,* 2016; Segal *et al,* 2007; Southwell & McDiarmid-Wadsworth, 2016).

Family 8 were a different proposition in terms of their joint stories. As earlier detailed, the primary respondent (SP8a) who answered the recruitment call was the daughter of a serviceman and had married a serviceman (SP8b), but had not served in uniform herself. Thus she provided an invaluable account of the life of a service child alongside that of a service spouse. Her story began rather historically insofar as she detailed her family's military past, going all the way back to her great-grandfathers, which led her to contextualise her immediate family with a wry observation that despite 'knowing what it was like' her mother still joined up (RAF). This 'hereditary' phenomenon is surprisingly absent from most papers examined for this study, save for historical reference by Ugolini (2016), perhaps due to the deficits-based health focus of many, but since it featured in several of the narratives collected it therefore featured in the earlier demographic breakdown of the research cohort. Furthermore, it presents a discrete observation about the nature of an important sub-group of military families who have an extended history as such. Two of the author's children now serve and they are the fourth

generation of our family to have done so, from their great-grandfather (Border Regiment) through their grandfather (Royal Army Ordnance Corps) and their father (Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps). One of the two in particular feels an affinity with his military ancestry, insofar as although he is capbadged as Royal Logistics Corps, his particular trade – bomb disposal – was formerly within the purview of his grandfather's Corps, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

SP8a's account was rich with reference to early privations, such as having to live in a caravan for some time as a result of there being insufficient married quarters and how her mother had had to cope with three young children and move location without her husband:

just how scared they would be taking three small children to live in that environment. And it doesn't... It just doesn't bear comprehension. I think the other thing that I've often mentioned is the fact that dad went in January, and mum and the three of us went off in March. Meaning that she had a one-year old, a three-year old, and a six-year old - she had to clean the quarter, do the march out, do the … pack, get herself to the airport... She didn't drive. She didn't learn to drive until she was (inaudible). And, unlike the army, which has a regimental support (inaudible) the families officers were inadequate to say the least. If she hadn't had a neighbour across the road to help her out - how would you do that? Everything was done by letter. There were no phones. And yet, it happened. But it was just expected that, you know, you'll make this happen.

SP1's wife made similar comments about the expectation that wives would just get on with it, using another military colloquialism as she described the attitude towards wives struggling with the practical challenges of military life with the words, "*Suck it up, Buttercup!*" Tonally, there was a sense of exasperation from both contributors, whose recollections dated prior to the contemporary era.

SP10 presented his story initially in a very factual way similar to that of SP2, which was consistent with his background as an infantry lieutenant-colonel. However, again using empathy and an informal, 'chatty' approach it was possible for him to relax and avoid his story taking on the quality of a factual briefing. Reflexively, this represents the researcher bring to bear their own engagement skills to elicit useful data (Kim, 2016). To further exploit reflexivity, it has been the author's experience in working with veterans for many years that former senior officers (and

many senior NCOs) seem unable to 'talk normally', such is the degree to which they have been indoctrinated to assimilate information rapidly and communicate as much as possible as quickly and succinctly as possible.

SP10's narrative opened with a similar example of the 'hereditary' notion to that of SP8:

Okay, so there is a bit of a backstory. And I wouldn't try and remember what I said last time. I'll talk as it comes to me this time around. Also, I joined the regular army since 19. I had been in the TA since I was 16. In the cadets since I was 12. And running around, playing soldiers, since I was about one. Since I could run around and hold a stick, to be honest. I came from a… An RAF family. Both of my brothers joined the forces at the… The RAF and the Navy, respectively. So, we had a tri-service family at one point. So… It was something that was always going to happen.

Whilst this study has no brief to explore individual respondents' motivation to enlist and their attitude to service, it is clear that this is a factor to be considered in relation to subsequent family life. As SP7 illustrated earlier, whether in pursuit of adventure or merely career advancement, there were those who however intermittently gave their families a lower priority than their personal investment in the military. This work/life balance is not exclusive to the military by any means, but it is arguably potentiated by military culture (Cogan, 2016; Keeling *et al,* 2016; Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011).

4.2.1: Singles and couples

All respondents aside from SP5 began their stories to some degree or another with their family status and circumstance on enlistment, or inclinations in that regard. Of the nine subjects, three (SP1, SP3 and SP4, but also including the author) were married on enlistment and all subsequently left the service still married to the same partner. This suggests that the nuclear family emotional process was sufficiently well established at the point of enlistment to have a reasonable chance of surviving the subsequent challenges to that family integrity.

In SP1's case, he married his partner during the period in between his first enlistment and his second and she already had a home and two children from a previous marriage, which

presented challenges not only in respect of their own relationship, but also in respect of developing his relationship with his new step-children.

As SP1's wife commented; *"This new guy on the scene who's trying really hard and then he disappears again and then he comes back again so it was a bit disjointed. So erm it was easier when [SP1] was transferred back to UK, cos he was home more frequently it helped with developing the relationship."*

From a Bowen Theory perspective, SP1's wife had a group of three established as a single parent with children and there were clearly difficulties introducing the 'new guy on the scene'. This links in to the nuclear family emotional process as the nuclear model had been broken and was in the process of being rebuilt, impeded however unintentionally by the Army's demands on the new parent. Throughout Family 1's narrative account there were either overt or suggested examples of emotional cut-off on both sides, where the wife had to carry on regardless and the husband had to focus on the military task in hand, even when it was skiing. As Agazio *et al* (2013) note, "Increased emotional detachment in varying degrees by each family member is often reported as a protective mechanism". Additionally in this case, the latter point about skiing is interesting because Adventurous Training (AT) is often seen as a 'holiday' by families, despite the fact that military policy (in theory) requires all service personnel to conduct at least one week of AT per annum. Tangentially, this also causes friction sometimes between uniformed personnel and MoD civil servants.

In the case of SP3, his existing family was the main motivation for him to enlist;

"The main reason for enlisting was one, to offer better quality of life and stability for my family, … Having completed my basic training … the Army, were able to provide a married quarter for me while in phase 2, and that in itself meant that my family could cohabitate with me".

As highlighted above, his nuclear family was already established prior to his joining and were fully cognisant and supportive of his career ambitions, which was important to all parties in terms of family emotional process.

SP4 hints at questioning his decision to join during basic training, but then deciding it was worth it for the family;

"*four months later…wondered why on earth I'd joined, whether I actually needed all the crap that I was getting, decided I did so carried on. Left after six weeks, down to (RAF Hospital) Wroughton I was in the block for about three weeks and, and Alison and the children who at the time were 8 and 4 joined me..*"

It is worth noting that, in those days, married quarters were managed by each of the single Services separately and accommodation for RAF junior ranks was in general much better than it was for Army junior ranks. Some degree of emotional cut-off is essential during basic training, otherwise the emotional impact of enforced separation becomes potentially overwhelming. One can speculate that whilst modern technology, unavailable to SP4 in his day, has enabled recruits to stay in touch with family either openly or covertly, there was and perhaps still is merit in teaching recruits to exploit emotional cut-off such that they can cope with longer, operational separations without impacting upon their mental resilience. SP1's wife commented that even before the era of 24/7 news coverage she avoided watching any news reports relating to where her husband was (Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq) in order to shield herself from emotional distress.

SP10's story, in contrast, celebrated the single lifestyle in no uncertain terms:

Now, I was determinedly single, having come from a broken home. My dad had left from, I think, I was nine years old. A great many of my family – wider family – were also, you know, divorced, separated. And I saw no value in that. And as a typical young man with no great thoughts of longevity or consequence or future, I just wanted to live that, you know, irresponsible… In a, sort of, personal sense, lifestyle and just have fun and be… Be a soldier. You know, I spent my… My twenties shagging my way around various garrisons and nearby towns and cities. And having enormous fun doing it.

Four of the other subjects were single on enlistment, of whom three (SP2, SP7 and SP8b) married young and subsequently went on to separate from their first partner. In all three cases, this was attributed to the pressures and demands of Service life and a considerable source of regret to the individuals involved. All three confirmed to a greater or lesser extent that the pressure to marry was based primarily on two things; getting out of single accommodation

(which in all of this cohort's cases was actually living in a multiple-occupant barrack room) and also as stability and security against the effects of their itinerant working lives. This is consistent with research into the subject by Keeling *et al* (2016) who found that in comparison with the mainstream population military personnel were more likely to be married and particularly in the age range 18-29. Looked at with the theoretical framework in mind, the lived experience of the single service person was starkly different from the nuclear family construct all of the subjects had hitherto enjoyed. There are and were soldiers, sailors and airmen whose pre-service background was less typical and who once benefited from shared accommodation but today, except in isolated cases, all service personnel are accommodated in single rooms with none of the shared experience that could help them with their emotional cut-off from their pre-service norms as a surrogate family. Furthermore, in terms of multigenerational transmission process for the military family, much of the learned behaviours and reinforcement of military cultural norms were previously acquired socially, whilst off duty, which the contemporary experience has eroded.

SP2 expands on the phenomenon of marrying 'too young' and the subsequent impact of that decision in his narrative as follows;

"*Got married young, married her err 21, erm so she then had to erm kind of up-sticks, erm and move with me that time to Waddington into married quarters... And we separated probably about 2, 2 and a half, probably 3 years into that. Erm I, and I just continued along with erm, my career.*"

During that time, SP2 and his first wife had a baby and SP2 continued to provide for his son, who is profoundly deaf, until he reached adulthood. One could read too much into simply expressed observations of this nature, but it seems from his story and the manner of its telling that notwithstanding his regret at their marriage ending, the RAF effectively offered him a surrogate family which continued to provide some stability, both emotionally and circumstantially (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Ormsby & Harrington, 2003).

SP7 also married young and in his case things started out well. It was only later in his career, with him being away from home so much, that his marriage finally broke down. Perhaps Bowen's (1972) notion of triangulation in families, extended to seeing father, mother and children as the constituents thereof, is pertinent in terms of the difficulty in sustaining the

stability it imposes when one side of the triangle is repeatedly absent. Also, the importance of differentiation of the self, whilst seen as essential to family health in the model, can be seen in these sorts of cases to have run out of control in that both parties are afforded too much differentiation, to the point where the marriage may become both unstable and unsustainable.

One subject (SP5) married within a year of enlistment and is still married to his original partner. As noted above with regard to those enlisting when already in established relationships, there are perhaps clues to the longevity of SP5's marriage in the manner of its establishment;

"*She's from my local town in Bury, **from the same place as me** (my bold). So I met her, I knew of her before, but when I came home on leave that's when I bumped into her, I met her 'cause my first posting was Cyprus, so it was when I was home on R&R, I was posted from Cyprus to Canterbury, and we had the two or three months' off, you know, where the Regiment sorts everything out and comes over, that's when I met her, and within a year I was married.*"

This hints at precipitous behaviour but in this case thankfully it transpired to have been a sustainable decision.

One subject (SP9) was in a stable, long-term relationship and subsequently married his partner. They have since separated, but this was not as a direct result of Service life experience, although that experience was contributory. As noted earlier, SP10 entered service as a dedicated single man, intent on making the most of what the Army had to offer a young officer, but after a number of years began a relationship (with a then serving QARANC officer) that was later solemnised in marriage. Even then, to use a colloquial phrase of common usage, they were happy to be DINKies (Dual Income – No Kids) and exploit what the lifestyle had to offer, but eventually they succumbed to biology and instinct.

In the cases of SP7 and SP9, they were both willing to admit that their relationships broke down principally due to their own selfishness in putting their career first and foremost. Furthermore, in addition to their core career obligations, they would both also be away from home a lot on sporting or adventure training activities, which was poorly tolerated by their spouses. Returning to the triangulation explanation offered earlier, it seems reasonable to observe that absence may not in fact make the heart grow stronger, indeed the opposite seems to be more prevalent.

All marriages need to afford space to the participants, but too much space may potentiate an increased differentiation of self. As SP7 noted,

"*Life was becoming a little bit more troublesome at home with the... The fact that adventurous training meant I was actually being fed the very thing I liked doing. So I... You know, climbing in Wales, or climbing in Scotland or... Snow work. Whether one sort or another in the winter. So, I was up and down the country a lot*"

The Armed Forces would baulk at the notion of any liability in this sort of case, but nevertheless as SP8b opined, 'the Army is a single man's game'. As SP7 earlier noted,

"*For me. And, I have to be perfectly honest, I took opportunities that I need not have done in order to pursue that personal trait of excitement and challenge and... So, climbing, canoeing, skiing... Whatever was offered, I was off doing that*".

It is perhaps important to remember in relation to the needs of military families, that the combination of Service need and the 'single man's game' mitigates directly against family stability in many cases. This was the central premise of Segal's seminal notion of the military and the family as 'greedy institutions' (Segal, 1986) and despite the sociopolitical and cultural evolution of the intervening thirty-five years, 'when push comes to shove' that notion appears to remain extant.

In SP7's case, as a PTI with qualifications in Adventurous Training, the lines between core work activity and personal leisure pursuits became dangerously blurred, at least in relation to his marital stability, however it does serve to illustrate how the military lifestyle is an all-encompassing, immersive experience. With two sons having joined the Army during the time of this study, the author knows from their experience that this is still how the Army is 'sold' to recruits. There is (unsurprisingly) minimal focus on the mundane, boring work carried out in barracks, day-to-day and maximum focus on all the fun things they will (potentially) be able to go and do. One can hardly blame the Army for that, but the net impact on the Service family experience *can* be detrimental as service personnel seek out the experiences they were attracted by in the first place. When the author was serving in Germany, my unit organised Adventurous Training (AT) in Bavaria for all staff. To the Army, AT is an integral part of the training cycle and it is not seen as leisure, but paid work. Unfortunately, to my wife and others,

it was seen as a 'jolly' – a free holiday away from wives and families. Without going into detail, the strain that week in Bavaria placed on our marriage, on top of everything else my wife was having to contend with (including post-natal depression – the revelation of which to the chain of command still did not result in my being excused), brought it close to breakdown.

SP9 elucidates further, "*Yeah, it just started to take its toll. And I think so early on in your career as well. Because I was only... It was about three or four years into the military. You're still driven, and you're still, sort of, ambitious. You still want to see how far you can go. You're still deciding which pathway to take. What to concentrate on. Really, you know, reaching your potential. So, I was so career-focused. And I think young commissioned officers as well, you... You so much want to prove yourself, isn't it? So, I was doing so much volunteering, pretty much for everything. And I was loving it. [but it] took its toll. The sports - which was one of the big things which made me join the military. You know, that exposure to sporting... So, at the time, I was playing for the RAF in the national league - volleyball. So, that was a massive commitment. So, it's all well professionally setup anyway. You've got a proper professional coach who's on a proper payroll. But the training and everything took you away, almost every other weekend. Plus all the other military bits and bobs. So, you were hardly at home.*"

SP9 hints at a phenomenon that is by no means unique to, but very prominent in parts of the Armed Forces that recruit already-trained professionals directly from civilian life. As a trained mental health nurse, his motivation to join up was to experience all the other things – apart from his day job – that the military could offer. How else could we recruit? If all there was to being a healthcare professional in the military was doing exactly the same job as one did in civilian employment, with the added 'embuggerance factor' of military duties and responsibilities, we would likely struggle even more than we do now to recruit.

As a tangential point, but one that is highly relevant to understanding the military culture, recently we have been doing exactly that which is cautioned against above – restricting military healthcare professionals to a sole focus on their clinical roles. But at the Army Chief Nursing Officer's Symposium (March 2019), the visiting Chief Nursing Officer of the US Army, Maj Gen Barbara Holcomb, gave the following advice; "Remember, what you do in your day job is NOT what you're here to do!"

What did she mean? To her audience, it was well understood, but to a civilian reader of this work it may appear confusing. In 1999, when the staff of the Duchess of Kent's Military Hospital in Catterick moved *en masse* to the new Ministry of Defence Hospital Unit at the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, many of our civilian counterparts were similarly confused. In response to their queries as to why we were there my response was, "I'm just here to keep my hand in until I have to go and do this in a tent somewhere." That is the dichotomy of military healthcare to which Maj Gen Holcomb referred. Our job, in military healthcare, is to take our clinical skills to wherever in the World the government sends the Armed Forces and deliver healthcare to those forces to the same standard as we would her in the UK. Ergo, our day job in the UK is nothing more than 'keeping our hand in', until we get to go and do our *real* job. In that we are no different to many parts of the Armed Forces. An infantry soldier's job is not to wash down vehicles, clean and tidy buildings, maintain equipment and so on but, as SP10 said in his interview, to "*make holes in Her Majesty's enemies*." Thus, what soldiers do in their day job is NOT what they're there to do. Hopefully Maj Gen Holcomb's advice now has cultural context and non-military readers will thus be able to follow the logic of the 'Military Bubble'.

What may be less readily understood, however, is how the families are indoctrinated into the Military Bubble. As Spencer (2015) observed in a piece to the Telegraph, "the government is taking advantage of the Army's "can do" attitude. The military is well known for this, and the ethos filters down to families, who "make do" with poor housing, constant separation and a thousand other frictions which come as a normal part of the service life package." This transference of the ethos from the serving member or members fits with both the family projection process and the multigenerational transmission process operators in Family Systems Theory. The popular military aphorism, 'Improvise, Adapt and Overcome' is attributed to The United States Marine Corps but it features prominently in the military culture and ethos of all three UK Services and fosters ingenuity, creativity and resilience in service personnel. It should surprise no-one, therefore, that this culture and ethos is adopted by many service families as they try to make the best of whatever situation their military family life has generated. There is a certain indomitability inculcated in the mind of the average service person and it rubs off on families. Considering this theoretically, this suggests that the military family community may well respond positively to more strengths-based solutioneering and that there may be within their collective experience ways in which struggling families can be more effectively supported. Giving wider consideration to what it is that thriving military families draw upon is part of the purpose of this work.

4.2.2: First impressions

The lack of first hand accounts from spouses is prominent amongst the regrets held about this work and were it to be repeated or supplemented, it would be explicit in the Participant Information that the study needed to hear from the spouse as well as the lead subject. Children also could have been included, but for this particular cohort on the (now adult) child of Family 4 was available for interview. Nevertheless, there are some useful observations in some of the transcripts. Families 1, 4 and 8 were the only three opportunities to interview couples and in the latter case it was two separate stories from partners who had re-married. Therefore SP1 provides the most useful and pertinent data.

As above, SP1 was already in an established relationship on (re-)enlistment and his wife owned her own home in the North West. Their first experiences, therefore, were of an absentee father-figure until they decided as a family that they couldn't sustain the relationship over such a (relatively) long distance and elected to join him, first in Catterick Garrison in North Yorkshire.

As noted previously, SP1's wife had no previous experience of provision for military families and so had no particular expectations; leading her to be content with their first married quarter. However, as she later discovered, their initial housing allocation was not representative.

And I suppose because it was the first quarter I'd ever had, erm I was quite accepting of it, erm in hindsight it was the best quarter we ever had. Cos it was huge.

However in their case first impressions were deceiving because;

…then we moved to Warminster and that was a little town house…So it was a bit more like hmm you know, that's when it starts to sort of go on you don't get a choice. That's it….Take it or leave it.

SP1's wife felt that it was "*a bit of a downgrade*", but with the benefit of hindsight was able to understand what had happened:

I think we only got that house in Catterick the way we did because it was all that there was.

At the time, in the late nineteen-eighties, Catterick Garrison was not the place it is today, with a large shopping centre featuring many high street names, a cinema, a hotel, leisure centre, restaurants and so forth. Even basic amenities were lacking; "*Cos there was no supermarket. You'd to go to Northallerton for your supermarket"*. Northallerton is about twenty minutes away by car. Since their first experience of Catterick Garrison, millions of pounds have been spent on improving the social and community experience, with miles of cycle tracks and the identification of leisure walking routes. The married quarters, too, have seen a major refurbishment and rebuilding project that have made it a far more attractive place to live and work. However for the family the privations of Catterick at the time were nothing compared with what was to come, when SP1 was posted to Cyprus:

Moving to Cyprus was the biggest culture shock cos it was erm I remember sitting in the community centre and being given a pint of milk and a loaf of bread and a key and then getting into the minibus and being driven to the quarter and looking at this wriggly tin hut thinking you've gotta be having a laugh. I've spent 27 hours travelling over here and you want me to live in a garage you can do one. Get me a plane out of here this is not happening.

From the transcript account, it seemed the unit Families Officer had a mutiny on his hands (possibly led by SP1's wife). Bearing in mind that this episode occurred nearly thirty years ago, if nothing else it reinforces the observation made in Chapter One that historically families have not been readily nurtured and supported, but rather merely tolerated and, as SP1's wife said previously, were expected to 'suck it up' and get on with it.

As families settled into life in the Forces, so they discovered some of the advantages they could exploit. Early in his career, SP5 was fortunate enough to be able to arrange a posting back home;

I just got a posting to ACO Bury so I was going to go back to my home town and recruit in Bury, …. I lived in Ashton under Lyne, in Smith Barracks for two years while I was posted at Bury doing the recruitment for the Army.

This was a boon for the Army, who particularly in the case of Teeth Arms units still tend to this day to recruit from geographical areas, so a 'local boy' is a good candidate to get local

prospective recruits through the door. When my own sons went through the Careers Office in Middlesbrough, three of the staff were from the Light Dragoons, who are the local North East cavalry regiment. It was also good for the family, though, to give them a couple of years close to extended family and wider social support. Later in his career once the nuclear triad of his family was established, he was posted to Germany and managed to stay out there for twelve years, up until his discharge date, with his family's full support.

Another feature of service life is the provision of an allowance for boarding school, in order to give the child some educational stability, a feature borne out and cited as a positive in the work of Jain *et al* (2017). SP4's two sons both went to boarding school, but their parents' initial reaction was negative;

P had asked, he came home one night and said "Can I go to boarding school? Everyone's going to boarding school." Simple and straightforward answer: "No." What is the point in having children if you send them off to boarding school?

However it was when SP4 contemplated how long he would be in his current post (he was in Germany at the time) and where they might find themselves next that they reconsidered. Their younger son B did not want to go initially, but when he was told, "*that's fair enough, you don't have to*", he responded with the capriciousness characteristic of children with, "*Oh, Good… Oh, I think I'll change my mind*." The author went to boarding school for two years, for similar educational stability reasons to SP4's children although my father was a career police officer and many of my peers were children of Service personnel. Additionally for Family 4, their nuclear emotional stability derived from having been an established family when SP4 enlisted was a positive contributory factor. As Arnold *et al* (2017) found in their study of family structures as they relate to mental health and academic attainment, "youth in military families in instances where biological parent relationships are intact and persistent are less prone to depression and report doing better in school." SP8a was also sent to boarding school, as her father was in the RAF and spent a lot of his career out in Germany. She did not greatly take to the experience however and although she did not offer any specifics she observed that,

That whole boarding school thing is, you know… Our boarding schools in the '70s weren't anything like they are now. And I know a lot of people who were damaged by that."

As someone who began boarding school in the late 1970s the author can attest to that observation and its conclusion. The psychological sequelae to that experience were still featuring in therapy sessions until very recently, some forty years later.

Another aspect to the Armed Forces' supportive attitude to children's education was the ability to (at least request to) leave the family in one location when the SP was posted somewhere else, to allow for a child to complete state exams. Again in the author's case, we did this with our eldest son and retained our married quarter at Brize Norton for another year after our entitlement officially ended. SP3 did the same when he was posted from Aldershot, also to Birmingham, to undertake his mental health nurse training;

The reason I mention that, is to again, show how the Army has been very supportive to the family as a unit, because at which time our older daughter was undertaking her GCSEs. … So we found out about this initiative, and that allowed our older daughter to stay put in Aldershot along with her mother and younger sister, and to compete her GCSE's.

He then did the same when his younger daughter was coming up to her exams. This arrangement does, however, require the serving member to have to proceed with their posting and live what is called the 'married unaccompanied' lifestyle. That is to say, they report for duty at their new unit and are accommodated as a single person. For senior ranks and officers that will be in one of their respective mess facilities which for a non-military readership are analogous with a hotel, but for junior ranks in times past it would have meant living in a multiple-occupancy room in a barrack block. Even today, with what is called Single Living Accommodation Model (SLAM) buildings, the experience is akin to a university halls of residence and, for someone used to the support of family around them, can be a lonely experience. For subjects with a long service history, the SLAM development is recognised as a mixed blessing. SP5's early service experiences were of living in multiple-occupancy rooms and he found it highly beneficial and mutually supportive. He has a dimmer view of more contemporary arrangements:

And now these lads here in the SLAM, are finishing work at half-four, five o'clock, they don't go to Sodexo for the food because it's crap, so they're going out buying something from McDonald's, or going to Tesco's, buying stuff from there, or whatever it is, going into their room, five o'clock, they'll be in their room, closing the door, locking the door, sitting in there playing

their Xboxes, drinking or whatever they're doing and watching telly. There's no bonding. And then, come Friday dinnertime when they're finished, they go back to the room, grabbing their bag and going home, and not coming back till either Sunday night or early hours Monday morning. So there's no bonding like it used to be when we was in the Army.

In some respects, it is too early to draw any conclusions about what unintended consequences we may encounter as time moves on. During most of the recent era of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the SLAM project was being developed and implemented and so we will have to wait and see whether there are tangible, measurable effects on morale and cohesion of having lost that 'bonding' experience of which SP5 spoke.

Another dimension to the married-unaccompanied experience is the potential for resentment from the spouse, whereby one is effectively living a single lifestyle whilst away from the family, but SP8a expresses it thus:

Dad would come home on a Friday night saying, "You know, I've been to the pictures and seen this film." Or, "I've been fishing with Bill and we've done this, that and the other." And she would be, "And I've been at home, doing all this…!"

This is a difficult circle to square, even today. On the one hand, it seems unreasonable to expect a married SP living away from home to practice some sort of monastic existence, but on the other hand the spouse left to cope with the children, the bills, the inevitable hiccups of home life will be understandably unimpressed by tales of single man high jinks from her partner at the weekend. There is the additional element of the distance between duty station and home to consider as well. As SP7 put it:

"200-and-odd mile weekend trip was just manageable. Around about the 18-month point was when it became a real drudge."

Reflection:

When I first started working in the Defence School of Health Care Studies my family were still in Brize Norton while my eldest completed his GCSEs and the ninety-minute journey between the two locations was sufficiently manageable that I could 'pop home' if the need arose.

Thereafter however, when we settled the family down in Yorkshire and I had a three and a half hour journey to Birmingham to contemplate, as SP7 said it became a real drudge. To maximise time at home I was able to arrange a clinic in the Catterick mental health team every Friday, so I could travel home on a Thursday night and have three days at home each week, but even still the married-unaccompanied lifestyle took its toll.

Returning to provision for family circumstance, to mitigate the need for an SP having to undertake the married-unaccompanied option, it is possible under certain circumstances to extend in one's post for welfare reasons such as children's education or in other cases so as not to interrupt ongoing NHS treatment, for example, but although provision exists, it is not a right and from the perspective of single Service manning desks (military human resources departments) the exigencies of the service will always take priority.

Whilst it hasn't always been the case, the Armed Forces today make an extra effort to help spouses when deployed overseas. As SP9 noted in respect of his wife who was also a registered nurse:

So, for Cyprus, the last one, it was the best thing that could've happened to them. ...There are protected jobs for dependants. Which are only given to dependants, anyway. So, you're almost guaranteed that, if you've got the skills they need up there, you will get a job. So, she was able to walk into a job.

SP1's wife, too, was found employment when they were posted to Cyprus a few years earlier; "*I actually was one of the lucky ones as I got a bit of a part time job in the bar, at the pool, so I had something…It wasn't much but it was it was a bit of pocket money and summat to do*".

Only very recently (17th September 2019), there has been an initiative launched to establish a Forces Families Jobs website (forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk) in recognition of the need to assist the families of a highly mobile workforce to find suitable employment as they 'follow the flag'. As noted elsewhere herein it would be encouraging to see particularly the major national employers embrace the Armed Forces Covenant and offer internal transfers to employees married to service personnel. This could be an initiative within the public sector but also for bigger companies with national reach like the major high street chains. Equally, it may offer the prospect of greater recognition of transferrable skills. The author's wife's impression from her

own job hunting, however, has been that many employers are reluctant to employ Forces spouses because of the relatively short (to a civilian employer) time they will be living in that location before their next move. The overall direction is nevertheless positive.

What also warrants inclusion in considerations regarding support to the military family is whether or not the spouse actually wants employment. As SP7 noted in relation to a fortuitous posting to a location close to extended family:

The stable base was the fact that my wife wasn't working. So, she was at home, looking after the children…The children were happy in school. The wife was happy, because she was only a stone's throw from my family, that she could visit. And they visited regularly.

For some spouses, the challenges of running the family home and doing so in such a way that it does not matter whether the serving partner is at home or away is sufficient to keep them occupied without their having to go out and seek work. As SP8a commented:

Dad disappearing for all of the day and mother having to run everything syndrome, which I think is very common in forces families.

This will, however, vary from family to family and particularly in the early career stages of several families in the cohort, the military salary of the husband was insufficient to meet the family's needs, resulting in an economic imperative for the wife to find work. In this modern era, the notion of the 'housewife' is becoming increasingly demeaned by general society and rapidly falling out of favour (Ziff & Garland-Jackson, 2019), however if as is postulated herein that a stable family is an effective force multiplier that may potentially enhance the mental resilience of the SP, it should not be underestimated. It is an accepted working principle of military psychology that if an individual is under a lot of stress at work, but has a stable and supportive family or vice versa, they are less at risk of developing mental health problems, however if the individual has significant stress at both home and work then there is a higher likelihood of them developing problems (Briggs *et al,* 2020; Lapp *et al,* 2010; McCauley, 2016; Pye & Simpson, 2017; Thomas *et al*, 2018).

4.3   Summary

Adapting to changing circumstances and assimilating the new experiences is a feature of all beginnings in embarking on a major career move (Cigrang *et al,* 2016; Hockey, 1986; McCloy & Clover, 1988; Sumner *et al,* 2016). As Cigrang *et al* (2016) record from a (US military) spouse, "*He just works all the time. He never makes time for the kid's activities. He always prioritizes the job over our family and I'm just sick of it."* In terms of 'Beginnings', early adjustment to the uniqueness of Service family life seems to have been dependent upon a range of factors. Being in an established relationship appears to have proven, at least for this cohort, to be a positive predictor of adjustment, insofar as the challenges presented are faced as a committed couple. Notwithstanding the small size of the sample and the associated lack of generalisability, that observation may be worthy of further research. It would appear to be accepted that those who marry after joining up are at higher risk of marriage failure. Hogan & Siefert (2010) writing in Armed Forces & Society found that service personnel married earlier and subsequently divorced earlier than the general population, but their research was based on those who were single on enlistment, like SP2 who admitted, "*I wouldn't get married at the age I did, it was too young. I was 21 when I got married*". Therefore it would be worthwhile to consider looking more closely into whether being married prior to enlistment truly is a protective factor to that marriage, not least in order to generate further discussion about how to better support service personnel who marry in service in order for them to be able to maintain their relationship. From a mental health point of view, marital and relationship issues feature disproportionately in the predisposing factors to mental health referral (DeBurgh *et al,* 2011). This accords with the author's own professional experience as a military mental health nurse and further reinforces observations about the currently underestimated potential force multiplication effect of improving support to families.

From a narrative perspective, as can be seen throughout this work, the reflective accounts within the stories told do seem to keep returning to a 'making the best of it' approach, but most particularly from the families who were established prior to enlistment. The strengths derived from some of the features of Bowen's Family Systems Theory also support this adaptability and growing resilience which, if properly nurtured, can facilitate stable family life whilst in service and also on transition and in subsequent civilian life. For the service person, basic training for all ranks operates on the basis of an initial period of total immersion in the military culture and experience, where they are intentionally isolated from as many external factors as possible. For

the military family, there is no such indoctrination and the speed and efficiency with which they adapt to the military lifestyle appears to be a further predictor of future family stability. If they embrace it and work with it, positive outcomes can be gained, but if they fight against it there may be a less positive experience. From the point of view of 'beginnings', the cohort divides into those whose family experience pre-dated their military family experience and those whose military family experience was grown and developed from within the military community. Superficially, one might expect that families that were forged in the fire of the military lifestyle would be the stronger but at least in relation to this modest cohort that seems not to be the case.

Chapter Five: The squeezed middle

5.1   Overview – "Suck it up, Buttercup!"

In this chapter, we find our cast of characters having completed the adjustment and transition from civilian to military life and finding their own ways to make the most of the lives they find themselves leading. Serving in the Armed Forces is 'designed', albeit in a somewhat organic, traditional and historical rather than a planned and deliberate way, to foster resilience in its membership. The same can be said to a point with regard to families. Much of the research into such resilience appears to focus on the mental health perspective of the attribute, rather than the broader psychosocial aspects. Some of the families included in this research thrived and survived despite all the challenges of Service family life, seeking out opportunities and minimising threats, whereas others did not. The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on what has contributed to the resilience of some families over others and the earthy, 'squaddie-talk' sub-title is deliberate, being a quote from Family 1's spouse of a common military expression that sums up the military attitude to adversity. It was interesting, therefore, that it was the civilian spouse rather than the veteran who used the phrase, 'suck it up, buttercup', in relation to her assessment of more recent Army wives. In other observations of the Army wife, such as 'Gumboots & Pearls' (Jones, 1990), which was subtitled, 'The life of a wife of…', there is more of a sense of functional acceptance of, but passive resistance to, the demands the Army places on spouses. It should be borne in mind that Jones' work was an intentionally humorous, 'coffee table' book but given that it was semi-autobiographical the experiences it recounts should not be dismissed. More academic works, such as Braun-Lewensohn & Bar (2017) take a more structured and analytical look at the lot of military wives. Braun-Lewensohn & Bar's work is interesting and different because it is looking at the spouses of Israeli Defence Force personnel, who generally don't deploy overseas to the extent that we do, yet circumstantially find themselves under far more regular threat. Thus their coping strategies offer insights into military family resilience and it was interesting to note that the top strategy employed by IDF wives, as it

is here, is distraction which is consistent with the Bowen model notion of emotional cut-off (Bowen, 1966). In the case of the military family however, it would seem that many thousands of years of evolution has refined that instinct down to the expression, 'suck it up, buttercup'. That brutal epithet belies the cultural challenge to expectations experienced by contemporary spouses. As SP1's wife appeared to do in the manner in which she told her story, one could view modern military spouses as less resilient in comparison with previous generations who were made perhaps of sterner stuff, although Dandeker *et al* (2006) found there was still a high degree of resilience in Army wives resident in garrison towns. It also reflects the family projection and multigenerational transmission operators from the Family Systems Theory for those 'military' families where previous and subsequent generations have served or are serving, but most curiously the same disdain for up-coming generations features within the military organisational culture itself (Soeters *et al,* 2006) and the 'everyone had it harder in their day' attitude persists. Clearly, that is unsupportable and ill-founded, but it is a feature of the human condition that cannot be ignored. With time comes change and human adaptation to that change, such that the very psychological make-up of each generation will be subtly different to the last. One can choose from a host of examples, but to choose one that fits with the more contemporary developments in the area of military families let us consider homosexuality. For the 'old and bold', as the military refers to its longer-serving members and veterans, it will be within their living memory that homosexuality was forbidden in the military (Boene, 2006). Yet now, same-sex couples are afforded the same military family rights as heterosexual couples. The aforementioned 'old and bold' might conclude that society has gone soft, but time only moves forward and the military, like all other facets of civilised society, will have to adapt. Young people of today, contemplating marriage to a member of the Armed Forces, may well have an entirely different set of expectations to that of previous generations (Clever & Segal, 2013; Dandeker *et al,* 2006) and are far less likely, one could speculate, to be willing to 'suck it up'.

5.2   Casualties of war

As the families settled into the Forces life and made the adaptations noted in the previous chapter, the next challenge came in the shape of their serving member(s) going off to do the thing they joined up to do – deploy. Interestingly, separation was second to least remarked upon in the narratives when the transcripts were analysed. That is not to say it was considered unimportant, but it was not the focus of the stories that were presented by this particular

research cohort. This may be in part because it offered scope for 'differentiation of self' and in some cases for positive individual growth (Knobloch *et al,* 2016), or it may be that it was considered a 'given', in the same way that spouses of firefighters expect their partners to have to go and fight fires. Nevertheless, it ought not to be ignored because it is key to the SPs' military, cultural and personal identity and sense of self (Moelker & van der Kloet, 2006) and is also the focus of so much of the research. Dimiceli *et al* (2009) quoted one of their (US) research subjects on the matter thus:

"We only recently joined the army and had an established life before this and 3 kids. The changes have been astronomical. Our children have adapted well for the most part, except our 6 year old daughter during this current deployment. She has never been without her daddy before, and now he is gone for a year. She cries every day, and even said she feels like he has died. She gets to talk on the phone with him, etc., yet still she grieves deeply. She has also been having tantrums. I do everything I can think of to help her, console her, try to help her cope, but her grief hasn't gotten any better. This has been extremely stressful for me and her two older brothers."

This raises some interesting questions. As was mischievously noted in the Methodology chapter, the motivation for much research is to go…*looking for trouble,* which was then more academically refined into said research being 'deficits-based'. No-one would doubt or seek to diminish the impact that operational deployments and other occupational enforced absences from home have on the families of service personnel. However, relatively little research, whether formally strengths-based or simply exploratory, has been carried out into why the majority of families may not be adversely affected to the same degree as those who are and whether the coping strategies, mitigations and strengths of those families could be identified, quantified and operationalised more widely.

Three works from the literature reviewed looked specifically at coping strategies (Braun-Lewenshon & Bar 2017; Dimiceli *et al,* 2009 and Lapp *et al,* 2010) however the contribution by the latter was focused on Reservists, for whom the families thereof are predominantly rooted in established civilian communities and often with attendant extended family and friends support (Lapp *et al,* 2010). Dimiceli *et al* (2009) however looked at coping in families of deployed active duty personnel. Their work is useful, because it encapsulates both negative and positive coping strategies. They describe problem-focused coping (PFC), wherein the strategy is based around

practical attempts at trying to solve the problems which separation generates and emotion-focused coping, which largely resolved down to emotional cut-off (Bowen, 1966), avoidance and distraction (Dimiceli *et al,* 2009). The authors acknowledge this, saying, "Furthermore, when a stressful situation and the resulting coping strategies do not correspond, dysfunctional outcomes may ensue." In clinical practice, we subdivide coping principally into 'adaptive' and 'maladaptive' strategies. Ergo here at least we see examples of both and there is scope to potentially build upon the adaptive strategies identified, acceptance, planning, active coping (undefined) religion (more prominent in the US) and emotional support (Dimiceli *et al,* 2009). It should be noted however that amongst the EFC strategies listed in this paper is humour, which is arguably adaptive.

Braun-Lewenshon & Bar (2017) add some further useful context by asking some of the questions raised about coping strategies. Clearly in no community, homogeneous or diverse, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution and so they explore the differences in their community (Israeli Defence Forces wives) as follows:

"1. Are there differences between religious and non-religious wives in terms of coping strategies and quality of life?
2. Are their differences in ways of coping and quality of life according to different levels of socio-economic status?
3. Are there differences between women who have children and those who do not have children in terms of coping strategies and quality of life?"

Question 1 is congruent with the socio-political and theological nature of Israeli society and, whilst not irrelevant to other nations, is not as prominent a factor for consideration. Meanwhile, questions 2 and 3 are easily transferrable. In this research cohort there is a wide spread of experience that is covered by these two questions, sometimes from within the stories of individual subjects. SPs 2 and 7, for example, both began their careers at the lower end of the (military) socioeconomic scale (Yoong *et al,* 1999), as entry-level Other Ranks (ORs) and both married young. Later on in their service life when they had commissioned as officers and thus moved toward the top of the socioeconomic scale, they had separated and remarried and had no further children. Sadly in both cases their spouses and former spouses did not wish to be interviewed, but of the two SPs, SP7's story offered something to set against these two questions. As noted in Chapter 4, SP2's background and current occupational focus led him to

account for himself and his family in a very matter-of-fact, military briefing style that did not offer much in the way of nuanced story-telling, but SP7 was a little more forthcoming. He had reached the rank of warrant officer (in the middle of the military socioeconomic scale) and was working alongside RAF colleagues in Germany before his wife began articulating concerns:

"That was the first time we had those musings of why do you keep going away climbing or canoeing? And it was... I enjoy it, and it allows other people to explore it. So we were... I was doing... Probably seven or maybe nine weeks away outside of deployments that we had to do. And that was the same when I was at the Grenadier Guards. We... We were deploying... We deployed twice to Northern Ireland and... So, it was only, as I say... We started, sort of... My wife noticing that none of the RAF people were deploying, but I was off doing things, so…"

The operational tempo, as it is known, of different units and services is often not apparent when those units are isolated from each other but when, as in this case, co-location means that the military family community are mixed, spouses will inevitably notice if their partner is away from home much more than their neighbours, which could potentially cause friction between both the neighbours and the couple in question. The standard deployment cycle for the Army is based on a six-month rotation or *roulement* whereas the RAF deploys its personnel rather differently. Aircrew usually only deploy for 6 to 8 weeks before relief, as do other groups like bomb disposal teams. This can seem unfair when viewed from an Army perspective, but of course shorter deployments generally mean that they come round more often. At the height of Op TELIC and Op HERRICK the Army roulement was based on six months preparing to deploy, six months deployed and then a further six months recovery. In other words, soldiers would deploy for six months out of every eighteen month period. During a sustained and enduring operation, RAF aircrew might deploy two or three times a year, but for a much shorter period. More widely and reflected in much of the US literature included in my initial literature review, the US Armed Forces deployed their personnel for significantly longer periods of over a year and, in some cases, up to eighteen months. Agazio *et al* (2013) note the impact on young mothers who were serving US personnel and had to deploy for such periods, leaving behind young children. So many developmental milestones were missed by the mother as a result.

Reflection. In some sort of contrast, on my second operational tour to Bosnia I was only away for 3 months, but in that time my twin sons had transitioned from babies into toddlers

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and having missed that reduced me to tears, so one can only imagine the effect on a mother who has missed over a year of their child's early development.

In terms of coping strategies, SP7's wife had previously enjoyed relative proximity to her family and had therefore had emotional support (Dimiceli *et al,* 2009), but now isolated in Germany she appeared to be running out of options. They were still together when they returned to the UK, but this time they were posted to Ripon in North Yorkshire, over 200 miles away from his wife's family, and he was back in his career comfort zone of adventurous training:

"Life was becoming a little bit more troublesome at home with the... The fact that adventurous training meant I was actually being fed the very thing I liked doing. So I... You know, climbing in Wales, or climbing in Scotland or... Snow work. Whether one sort or another in the winter. So, I was up and down the country a lot. "

To her credit, his wife continued following his career around, through further postings and also a spell of 'married-unaccompanied' and the associated weekend commuting before things came to a head:

"I went from Ripon and then was offered the Chief Instructor's role in Bavaria for two years. And that's when the camel broke its back, really. "Oh, I'm not going with you." Hang on... I said, "Well, it's not going to be easy to get back. It will be possible, but financially it will be an expensive beast, coming back and forward." ___ is a fair hike to get the airport. Whether it's Munich or Stuttgart. It's a... You know, it's 120 miles. So, that's a train or renting a car. And I did both. And... It started to fall part, as it were. We went through a very, very difficult divorce, in one way or another. I have to say I maintained all the usual things of paying for the house, all the contributions that I made... I didn't skimp in that. I wasn't trying to save money in any way. I was doing the right thing. It's just we couldn't... We couldn't live together after that. There was a... That change was quite difficult for everyone concerned. There was no notion (why) she would not come across to Bavaria. I'm not sure where there was one of those... Why that was. She never actually said why that was. But it did just... It just didn't work out."

There was a palpably regretful tone to SP7's story at this point and both his choice of language and overt hesitancy intimated his emotional state in recounting these details. This was a face to face interview and for the author felt very much like a clinical consultation as SP7 told this part

of his story. This made it difficult to differentiate between acting as a researcher and inescapably being a mental health nurse, but in the latter capacity it appeared obvious that he felt the need however subconsciously to justify his actions; a characteristic of his narrative that featured throughout the interview and upon which Plummer (1995) comments in relation to stories from gay men in less permissive times, who were similarly passively defensive in search of self-justification.

A further family, Family 9, also found that the frequency of separation was a direct contributor to their marriage failing, although in both cases the separation was not due to the SP being deployed on military operations, but rather going away for other reasons. In the case of family 7, the SP was an adventure training (AT) instructor and most adventurous training is conducted in remote areas, often overseas. However – and he is candid in admitting his selfishness in this – he was also away from home a lot doing adventure training purely for his own interest. In the case of family 9 it was primarily sport, specifically volleyball, that saw the SP away from home on a regular basis. One could legitimately speculate that taking additional time away from the family, over and above that which the employer mandated, was what distanced them from their original partners (Burrell *et al,* 2006). There were additional reasons in SP9's case, insofar as he volunteered for special duties that required lengthy additional training and then resulted in frequent, irregular and short-notice absences from home.

> **Reflection**
>
> In my own experience, however, the differentiation is sometimes unclear to partners. In 2003, I was effectively 'ordered' to participate in an adventure training exercise in Bavaria to meet my mandatory AT requirement which, as mentioned elsewhere, is Army policy. As far as my wife was concerned however, I was just leaving her to cope alone with five young children while I went on holiday with my work colleagues. This echoes SP1's wife's observations about her husband, who when he wasn't away soldiering was away skiing instead.

On the impact on first marriages, from a narrative point of view, there was contrition and regret evident in the storytelling of those events that lead to marital breakdown and an acknowledgement of guilt to varying degrees. Both respondents recognised that early in their marriages they were focused on their careers far more than their families and both alluded to the organisation being complicit in encouraging that in them. SP2's first marriage was also in

large part a casualty of his frequent absence from the homer, compounded by the stressors and tensions of sharing care for a profoundly deaf child.

Moving on, in interview, SP5 had to be prompted to actually even talk about the impact of deployment and was typically matter-of-fact:

"I think the wife put up with it, she gets used to doing it, you know what I mean? Some of the wives in civvy street, whinging cause their husband's working away for a week, and stuff like that, you know, when I'm away, I mean, first Op TELIC, (UK deployment to Iraq), I went and I was six months before I actually got in touch with her"

Looked at from an interpretive, narrative perspective it must be acknowledged that the opinion of SP5's wife on this was not available and the fact that SP5 had to be prompted to even consider the matter might infer one of two positions; that he didn't think it was an issue or that the fact that it wasn't raised as an issue from a couple that were still together infers that both just got on with it, suggesting acceptance (Dimiceli *et al,* 2009) on the part of the spouse. Certainly as SP1's wife put it:

"Like I say we used to stand at the coaches and go, 'see ya!'…And then just get on with life."

The Armed Forces have superficially robust welfare and compassionate policies and these can and have worked well for many, but aside from policy there is often still a cultural undercurrent of disdain from those who 'can do' levied against those who, for whatever reason, 'can't do', which crosses into families in some cases. As SP1's wife noted in relation to wives who couldn't cope when their partner was deployed and exploited the compassionate system to have them returned:

"If one of the Irish wives had even dared do that she would have got a slap off her husband and she would have got a slap off her mates as well."

It is significant in the wider context of the aims of this research that there is a high degree of focus on the effects of separation due to deployment in the literature. Of the titles included in the original literature search, a third (and thus too many to list here) either focused solely on separation or made extensive reference to it in their work, yet as noted at the beginning of this

section it did not appear to be of proportional significance to this research cohort. One could speculate as to whether the fact that most of those articles were of US origin made any difference, given their much longer deployments (typically 1 year+) and returning to a central theme of this work's methodology it may also be owed to the fact that the research conducted had been deficits based. Turning it around, in medicine if there were a particular and significant cohort of people who did not succumb to a new ailment there would be great interest in researching the reasons why. As Briggs *et al* (2020) note:

"Many military families are resilient despite exposure to deployments and other military life challenges, so understanding the potentially buffering role of adaptive family functioning in the face of military operational stress has important implications for the development and dissemination of interventions that promote and support resilience".

Ergo, since for most of the common themes raised in the FAMCAS (MOD 2021) and the wider research, it is a minority who are reported as having difficulties, it seems appropriate to look to those who have not, or who have managed their difficulties actively and positively and experienced growth, to suggest ways to support the others (Knobloch *et al,* 2016).

5.3: Roger so far, over? Communication with home

In terms of absence due to deployment SP1 and his wife were the richest source of material, delivering the most telling stories. There is, of course, a chronological context to be considered insofar as their initial separations due to deployment were occurring earlier than our most recent conflicts and their account was able to span that generational difference, having experienced both. As an example of multigenerational transmission, their children also serve or are married to servicemen and they can and did compare and contrast their experience with that of their offspring. When SP1 was away his wife didn't know where he was or what he was doing because mobile telephony and the internet were in their infancy and communication with home was restricted to official airmail letters (Blueys – so named because they were pale blue in colour) or intermittent and very time-limited phone calls:

"They've got Facebook they've got Twitter accounts they've got text messages they've got mobile phones…There's too much. When they were away half the time I didn't even know

where he was. I certainly didn't know when he was coming home but I didn't know what the f*** he was doing while he was there."

This aligns with the US experience as documented by Knobloch *et al* (2016) who also acknowledge the dichotomous perils and benefits of more modern telecommunication. In the nature of story-telling we swapped anecdotes in the course of the interview and the author was able to recount how weekly 20 minute telephone calls home from Bosnia generally consisted of 19 minutes of abuse…followed by a minute of 'but I love you really!' This resonated with Family 1's experience. However, particularly in relation to their daughter who is married to an RAF serviceman, they felt that she had too much information about where he was and what was going on, made worse by the 24/7 media coverage that characterised the TELIC/HERRICK era (2001-2014). Echoing earlier observations about distraction and emotional cut-off as a coping strategy (Bowen, 1966, Dimiceli *et al,* 2009), Family 1 felt that not knowing was better and helped the spouse to focus in on home and the children.

Reflection

Even when I deployed on Op TELIC in 2006 our personal mobile phones were prohibited because it was believed that the insurgent forces could intercept our calls. I considered myself extremely fortunate that I was based with the Americans and not the British, because I was afforded unlimited non-military internet access and was also able to use US communications via the purchase of a US phone card. SP5 employed a novel approach to the issue on one of his Iraq tours, whereby they were hosting a journalist who had a satellite phone in order to submit her reports and SP5 and some friends bartered the use of their shower facilities for use of her satellite phone.

An additional wrinkle to the communication challenge was when posted to a more overseas location from whence the SP then had to deploy, brought into focus again by SP1's wife:

"*Once you rang me when we were in Cyprus but I got a message to be at the med centre at such a time as he was gonna ring me I was like what? We didn't even have a house phone in Cyprus let alone a mobile phone. There was nothing there was no public phone of any description (but) there was a phone in the med centre."*

This was the nineteen nineties, not the eighteen nineties. Again it is noteworthy, since this was a face to face interview, that the tone of delivery was light and borderline comic, rather than bitter or resentful. With both partners the conversation felt very much like a bar-room chat rather than a formal research interview, with all three parties to the conversation competing for the silliest examples of military bureaucracy and intransigence from our personal and chronologically overlapping histories.

When SP5 managed to phone home, via the satellite phone he had bartered for the use of, his wife was out:

"…so I phoned wife up: she was at a barbecue, families' barbecue, left a message, that was it."

However his point was to illustrate that as an infantry soldier, the 'Regimental family' looked after its own:

"They looked after them, I mean, when I deployed, there's a lot of stuff and, because it's fusiliers it's like one big family, you all know everybody else and the families' officer gets involved a lot because he's, we had the camp, in Celle we had our own camp, you see, so it's just our camp there, we had no logistics or anyone posted in there just REME attached to us, and you know, the pools and everything they had in there, they had the money, welfare-wise, minibuses, you know, to run people about, pick people up from the airport, you know, R&R and things like that and run the wives to and from. The wife was happy, she had the car, she'd got the kids to keep her busy. Yeah, she was looked after."

In relation to the effect of separation on children – another prominent feature of my initial literature review – SP9 found that, perhaps because of the age of his children at the time, they hardly noticed his absence:

"The kids didn't even notice my absence. They loved it. I think they got all the help they needed as well. You've always got someone, you know, ready to help you. Asking the questions. Or so they say. But they loved it. They didn't even notice I was away. I tried to ring the kids and... "Hi, dad, how are you?" And then they're off somewhere."

This reflects an element of emotional cut-off in the establishment of the 'substitute family' that can emotionally sustain children in the absence of a parent (Jain *et al,* 2017) .

Green *et al* (2010) document the pros and cons of increased communication with home from deployed operations. Communication challenges can reasonably be said to be receding in significance as technology continues its seemingly exponential development curve, but there will still be times when it is problematic. Depending on the particular type of employment of the serviceperson, the location they deploy to and the geopolitical circumstances at the time, it is highly likely there will still be a need to restrict communications on security and operational grounds (Green *et al,* 2010).

5.4:   Positive growth

Adaptation to the military lifestyle can and does offer many opportunities for personal growth (Knobloch *et al,* 2016; Kritikos *et al,* 2020), although this will be moderated by the individual families' constitution and coherence. It is noteworthy for this small cohort at least that those families (including the author's) who were already established and coherent prior to the SP's enlistment were still together once the military phase of their family life was over. For those spouses and children who could learn to functionally adapt they became more resilient and independent (Knobloch *et al,* 2016; Kritikos *et al,* 2020), It may also be worth considering, however, that the observations about failing marriages from the previous chapter may be owed to spouses coming to realise their own autonomy and perhaps then questioning their need for the supposedly symbiotic relationship of marriage (Keeling *et al,* 2016). Their 'differentiation of self' may thus mitigate against rather than in favour of marital and familial stability. However, as was found in the thematic analysis, examples of positive growth and experience were the second most numerous theme to feature of the stories gathered. Under the circumstances it should hardly be surprising since storytelling is central to military culture and the invitation to 'pull up a sandbag' is rarely turned down. Even in one's own daily experience one often finds oneself swapping tales from previous operational deployments or from day to day practice with colleagues (or patients, in the pursuit of therapeutic engagement), so there is an inherent shared experience, which is often yet more powerful when the experiences recounted were pretty unpleasant, challenging or dangerous at the time. In relation to the literature though, whilst there are some minor acknowledgements of benefit from service family life in some places, only Jain *et al* (2017), Kritikos *et al* (2020) and Park (2011) actively highlight those

positives. As made clear in Chapter 3, this research was approached in an intentionally counter-cultural way so as not to focus on known problems, whereas deficits-based research into those known problems might well not pick up on positive experience. Park's study noted that, *"As important as it is to address problems, it is just as important to recognise the strengths and assets of military families"*. This is one of only a handful of times evidence of that recognition appeared in the literature. In Jain's study, which asked adolescents about the best and worst aspects of having a father in the military, the top return was pride in their father, which might be psychologically positive, but doesn't necessarily infer a sense of positive growth for the respondent, particularly when balanced against the negatives. Lack of contact with the father was cited as the most negative aspect. What was interesting about Jain's findings was that the second most common positive response was moving house and/or location, whereas for SPs and partners that more often correlates with negative responses. Certainly as a child, the author enjoyed moving house a lot and didn't come to reflect upon the effect it had had until much later in life. There was something very exciting about the whole moving process and it is interesting to see that reflected in formal research. It also highlights another significant difference between the military family community and the general population. Although any job can result in house and/or location moves of varying frequency (ours was because our father was a police officer) the majority of the civilian population are relatively static in comparison with their military counterparts (Drummet *et al,* 2003).

The most obvious source of reflections on positive growth from the research cohort comes from opportunities to serve and therefore live overseas. The apocryphal recruiting slogan, 'join the Army and see the world', applies just as much to service families 'following the flag' and six of the nine families made the most of that experience. Family 5 in particular managed to stay in Germany continuously for thirteen years, before returning to the UK for a final tour of duty before retirement. It is compelling to speculate as to whether the locational stability they were afforded early in SP5's career, when he secured a posting back to his home town, helped the family through the beginning of their military life story and strengthened them such that they could make the most of their overseas posting. To further highlight this, the author had been working in the operating theatres of the military hospital in Catterick as a civilian before joining the Regular Army, and continued in the same location as a military officer, affording the family some stability and a gentler introduction to military family life. Families 1, 4 and 9 were posted out to Cyprus and although Family 1 had a poor introduction to the island, they went on to enjoy and value the experience. SP5 also served in Cyprus, but before he was married. All three

families who relocated to Cyprus felt they had benefited from the experience to one extent or another. Strangely enough however, the single Service manning authorities intermittently have problems providing staff to Cyprus, as SP4 intimated:

"*we were then offered Cyprus because nobody wanted to go to Cyprus, which was quite nice, we were quite keen*"

Reflection

To an outsider it might seem to border on the unbelievable that anyone could be offered the opportunity to go and live and work on a Mediterranean island, but it is not uncommon. When I was offered the opportunity, my wife was not keen. It was not the potential location, but rather its isolation from her extended family support that was the issue. We were in Germany when cheap flights to the Continent were coming into vogue and our relatives could fly out to see us for as little as one pound, thanks to Ryan Air. Cyprus was an altogether different proposition, where getting home in a family emergency would be costly and stressful and however beguiling the location, family visits would be considerably reduced.

More tangibly, in terms of positive growth, SP4's wife directly benefited from the experience;

"*A did her best to learn Greek, at the time she'd been a Teaching Assistant in a school in Cyprus and also doing OU classics course because she was fascinated by the archaeology and everything that was all around us, so she was learning classical Greek and eventually Latin, got the classics degree eventually.*"

In fact, SP4 himself used the Cypriot working day routine (start early – finish early) to his advantage and also enrolled with the OU on a psychology degree. SP4's wife corroborated this in a separate interview:

"*Because of the heat, the temperature, well D finished work at around one in the afternoon and so did I, which was quite good because we had the rest of the afternoon to sort of mess around…well actually we started doing Open University then…*"

As an example of making the best of the circumstances with which one is presented, this was encouraging to hear as both partners were sharing a developmental opportunity together and both earned degrees as a result.

For Family 9, Cyprus was their last posting before SP9 had to leave for family reasons back home in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, his reflections were very favourable and inferred positive growth and experience for his family.

"Yeah, I think Cyprus was probably the best posting we had. I don't know the posting - I think family-wise they kind of got better and better. So, for Cyprus, the last one, it was the best thing that could've happened to them".

Family 4 also spent quite some time in Germany, with the spouse learning to speak German and the children both (eventually) taking to boarding school life which according to their younger son has enhanced their academic and professional standings in adulthood. He also talked about a common phenomenon for service children of being somewhat chameleon-like:

"One of the advantages of being in the Forces…moving around a lot and having to find a way to fit in…to survive. You become quite adaptable to social and work situations, different people and so on. It teaches you how not to be an outcast. So now for me it's not too difficult for me to just blend in enough to get on."

Family 7 also served in Germany and took great advantage of the travel and cultural opportunities that being on the continent offered. More recently, the UK government has been progressively drawing down the force levels in Germany and so that opportunity is now lost to current and future military families. But in the space of only three decades we have moved from a situation where almost everyone who had served, at least from the Army and RAF, had spent at least some of their time in Germany and there is an enduring Germanic influence particularly on the social and linguistic aspects of military culture, with many slang words in common usage being corrupted versions of German words. Many units with strong links to Germany will still hold Oktoberfests, for example and although the force levels have been reduced, insider knowledge from SP7 suggests that there are no plans to close the many ski lodges and adventure training facilities in Bavaria.

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5.5 Summary

All of the stories were chronologically linear, but the greatest body of information for each would vary depending on each family's circumstances. Beginnings and endings were easy to identify, but quite where the middle was, was difficult to determine in most cases. Also, from the storytelling perspective, the flow of each account carried the listener from beginning to end quite seamlessly, without obvious breaks in the tale. Thus it was left to the researcher's judgement to decide where the middle actually was and whilst that decision was considered, it was also to an extent arbitrary. Family 1's middle began with accounts of separation:

"*That's pretty much what they did off skiing in the winter and off causing a war somewhere in the summer. That's pretty much what happened for 3 years. So he came home in-between and caused havoc and buggered off somewhere else.*"

That comment pretty much sums up the experience of many military wives in a few sentences. Away on a 'jolly' (as such things are known in military colloquial parlance), or away somewhere dangerous, causing domestic problems and disruption when at home and then going away again.

Reflection

When I returned home on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) from Iraq for a week, my wife later concluded that it would have been better for her and the children if I hadn't and had been able to have an extra week of post-tour leave instead. On the same deployment a colleague declined the travel home element of his R&R for precisely the same reasons and merely put up a sign on his office door in Baghdad saying 'closed' and amused himself for a week without work interference.

Family 2, like Family 7, told a story that related to a family with children in a first marriage followed by a second marriage with no children. Although this meant that their 'middle' started later in the story, this did afford a natural division of the tale. Again for both families, the SP would admit to 'marrying in haste' due to Service factors. In both cases, as the storytelling was bilateral, we did explore whether the military lifestyle of the single SP was a contributory factor to early marriage. Hogan & Sieffert (2009) as cited earlier, identified that the contrast of a single

room (if you were lucky) in a barrack block versus a proper house and home was a driver for early marriage for many service personnel.

For Family 3 the transcript was relatively short (owing to the SP being back home in Trinidad when the interview was conducted via Skype) and a true middle was difficult to identify. His story, however, was punctuated by circumstance, insofar as he had to leave the service for family reasons and return to the Caribbean and then later was able to return to the UK, join the reserves and then secure full-time service. His family have been loyal to him throughout. Other families tales were divided more by my design than their circumstance and there was little that could be inferred, from a narrative point of view, from those divisions.

In the case of Family 10, the fact that the early part of the story focused on resistance to becoming 'tied down' to a family allowed for the occasion of their marriage and subsequent 'DINKie' lifestyle to form the middle of the story. Both partners were serving at the time and despite SP10's observation that, "*In the first eighteen months of marriage we were only together for six",* each was individually career-minded at the time and neither were particularly keen on starting a family. Their middle, then, was the only one of the cohort not to feature children who came along later in the story and given that SP10 was the only direct entrant officer (i.e. the other officers in the cohort had commissioned from the Ranks) that may go some way to explaining the chronology of his narrative.

As noted earlier, the storytelling from these veterans universally featured a degree of nostalgia and fondness in recalling that typifies the way all people, not just military people, tell stories (Kim, 2016; Plummer, 1995) and, as Plummer notes, "At the personal level, 'memories' may be seen as our *best stories"* (his italicisation). The process of recollection seems to diminish the difficult times and heighten our sense of having derived positive experience from our past. Everyone smiles for a photograph, but once time has passed few can remember what difficulties, challenges and stressors the subject may have been wrestling with when the photograph was taken.

Reflection

In my view, particularly as a mental health nurse, memory works in much the same way. One feature of all the interviews I conducted was prominent – laughter. Even when talking about

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dark times there was reflective humour in the accounts that were given and it is my belief that sharing their stories with a fellow veteran – as I was then – provided the genesis for that levity and laughter. At some point, I plan to look formally and in depth at what I believe to be the essential, psychologically protective attributes of humour in the military and my experience in gathering these stories has only heightened my interest in so doing. Certainly the tenor of the 'research interviews' I conducted was more akin to 'telling war stories' and, for a piece of narrative work, I contend that was deeply appropriate. Jones' Relational Qualities model (Jones 2004), whilst not a great tool for interrogating my gathered literature, recognises that a sense of shared habitus can be an important tool to the qualitiativist in pursuit of meaningful data. There is also a parallel with my clinical work with service personnel, wherein being able to call upon shared experiences (of the military) can break down barriers and enhance the quality of the therapeutic relationship. So for me to swap yarns and generate humour with my research subjects was a powerful aid to getting the best out of them.

At the time of data collection there was no real opportunity to dwell too much on the clear delineation of beginnings, middles and endings and it was only upon beginning the analysis that the significance of the 'squeezed middle' (a phrase stolen from contemporary politics) became apparent. In general however, I saw the middle as that period within the family narrative of consolidation and relative stability, after the 'shock of capture' and before contemplation of a return to civilian life. What is interesting in terms of the richness of the data is that most of the anecdotes contained within the stories came from beginnings and endings. One might conclude that the middle is where the experiences of military families have been normalised to their circumstance and they are just getting on with it, which either made the experiences from that period more tolerable or perhaps just less memorable.

Chapter Six: ENDEX!

6.1   Overview – So here it ends

As mentioned in Chapter Five, identifying the beginnings and endings of the subjects' stories was much easier than identifying the middle. The research design, avoiding the added complication of additional ethical scrutiny by MOD that would have been required had there been any currently serving families involved, resulted in a cohort made up entirely of veterans and so the circumstances of their leaving and their transition into civilian life was therefore an implicit component of their stories. Also, however, as the interviews and the stories came to a natural end, respondents were given to anticipated episodes of reflection on their Service lives. Of the nine families, six left at the end of the SP's contractual engagement, giving them a full career of Service life on which to reflect. Two of the other three families (SP3 and SP9) left for personal reasons to do with wider family. Only one left prematurely without overt reason (SP10), although he had achieved a great deal and reached a relatively high rank (Lieutenant Colonel) before doing so. In his case, the manner of his leaving was partly down to dissatisfaction with the Service, partly down to having dropped behind the pace of accepted career development, but also as a result of having something valuable to a civilian employer. He began hinting at his reasoning fairly early on in the interview, when he commented:

"But I realised just how much I would have to prostitute myself to reach whatever potential I might have. And, you know, you see people who are on their… Yes, they might be sporting a nice, shiny star, but maybe on second or third marriage or… You know, divorced or, you know, miserable wife… And you see it. You see it around the… you see it around the garrison."

It is likely that SP10 was not alone in starting to question his career choice long before his eventual exit (Kleycamp *et al,* 2021). However for him and the wider collective narrative of

military life it is probably significant that these thoughts began to emerge during combat operations:

"Yeah. And… I think I took a conscious… It was conscious, decision. And I think this was… It sort of coincided with, you know, feeling pretty shitty after Iraq. I mean, like, I guess, everyone else who goes to their first… You know, I wouldn't call it war, exactly… But something a bit more than Northern Ireland or Bosnia. And they get involved with proper shooty, blow-ey up stuff… It is a baptism of fire. You know, I've been in, what? 13, 14 years... By the time I, you know, first traded gunshots with people. And really, really feared for my life on a daily basis. But we went out there, because at the time, you know, it hadn't been exposed to be the bag of shit and lies that it subsequently transpires to have been. But I still came out of it afterwards feeling a bit discomforted."

For someone who, by his own earlier account, had been running around with toy guns dreaming of being a soldier since primary school, it is telling and not a little sobering to find that exposure to real combat operations left him 'discomforted'. Nonetheless, he continued with his career for some time thereafter, although his rising cynicism and 'discomfort' was plain to see in the manner with which he expressed himself as his story continued:

"Unhelpfully, I went to staff college straight away afterwards, where I had to compete with all the shiny-eyed Kool-Aid-drinking proto-Brigadiers. You know, who believed their own ___ and made... Went there to show the DS just how great they were to be that chief of staff and get that battalion and, you know, sniff at the blue list. And you think... And I just wasn't like that. I'm not like that anyway. But I think, you know, Iraq did kick the stuffing out of me a bit,"

To indulge in a tangential observation, this particular quote is a good example of the benefit of having a culturally congruent researcher, insofar as SP10's language here is discrete to the military in-group (Higate & Cameron, 2006). One could speculate that had he been interviewed by a civilian researcher he would have chosen his words rather differently (Williams *et al*, 2020), but because we had a shared socio-occupational and cultural understanding, he could express himself in terms that came more naturally, confident in being understood. To translate, 'staff college' means the Advanced Command and Staff Course (ACSC) at the Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC), which is part of the UK Defence Academy in Shrivenham, Wiltshire. Attendance at ACSC is a prerequisite for advancement into command

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appointments and thereafter upward to the highest levels of command. There are many other courses run at JSCSC, indeed both the author and his principal supervisor completed the Intermediate Command and Staff Courses for their respective Services, but the year-long ACSC is the college's main output, hence being known colloquially as 'the long course', and so in military circles 'going to staff college' is taken to mean attending ACSC. The reference to, "*shiny-eyed Kool-Aid-drinking proto-Brigadiers"*, is a disparaging epithet for wholly career-focused young middle-ranking officers whose sole aim is to reach the highest ranks at any cost…sometimes also referred to with similar disdain as 'Junior Generals'. 'DS' is universally understood in the military to mean 'Directing Staff', in other words the instructors on the course, and at JSCSC this is a mixture of serving military officers and academics from King's College London. This latter aspect supports the availability of an optional MA in War Studies in return for some extra academic work whilst completing ACSC. Finally, the 'blue list' refers to the list of those picked up for consideration of promotion to full Colonel (the beige list is for promotion to Major, the pink list is for promotion to Lt Colonel and the Green list is for promotion to Brigadier).

Ergo at this stage, SP10 was uncertain about his lifelong career ambitions and mindful of the impact they were having on his family. The third consideration though is pertinent to story-endings; his potential in the civilian jobs market. A great deal is invested by the military in resettlement of its personnel and particularly since the advent of the Armed Forces Covenant (HM Govt 2010) there is yet more help available to those returning to civilian life from the Third Sector. SP10 rather colourfully summarised his resume as '*making holes in Her Majesty's enemies'*, but the spread and depth of experience accrued by service personnel across the rank range should not be underestimated. Even something as simple and potentially intangible as 'work ethic' sets the average veteran apart from many civilian competitors in the employment market (Ashcroft, 2014). Many employers actively seek ex-Forces people and not just in the security and civilian defence sectors for precisely these reasons. Even at relatively low ranks, most ex-Forces candidates will have a grasp of logistics, administration and personnel management that is higher than that of many of their chronological peers from the civilian recruiting pool (Scottish Veterans Commissioner, 2016). In another paper, Figinski (2019) found that military service (in the US Reserves) increased the likelihood of invitation to a job interview by 19%, but that was in the US, with their aforementioned 'cultural reverence' of their military. Whilst advising judicious caution in the interpretation of statistics, the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) 2022 report into employment outcomes for HM Armed Forces Service Leavers (MOD, 2022) found a significant increase in employability of the subject population in

comparison to the civilian population (83% vs 75%). However, to take the counsel of caution, it should be considered that apart from those leaving via the medical discharge route, who may have significant physical or mental health challenges, the majority of service leavers will be relatively young, fit, holding relevant qualifications and transferrable skills and entering the labour market directly from previous full-time employment. Another factor to consider is that those leaving at their pension point will still be relatively young in comparison with the civilian labour force, particularly those retiring from the Army from a standard 22-year engagement at around the age of 40, and thus having all of the aforementioned attributes as well as being in receipt of a pension as a financial buffer allows them to be more selective and confident about their civilian employability (Hennekam, 2015).

To illuminate the issue further, a former patient was a sergeant in a cavalry regiment but, when faced with the prospect of a return to civilian life on medical grounds his retort was, '*what can I do? All I know is how to drive a tank*" But when we went systematically through everything that was required of him as a troop sergeant in a cavalry regiment he soon realised that he had health & safety skills, equipment management knowledge, personnel management experience and administrative expertise that would be highly attractive to potential employers, all on top of that military work ethic of punctuality, reliability and meticulous attention to detail (Ashcroft, 2014).

In an interesting echo of the observations in the early chapters of this work, a brief, ad-hoc literature search into 'veterans employability' found that the balance of articles lent toward a deficits-based exploration of difficulties encountered by veterans seeking civilian employment, rather than citing the strengths of veterans or highlighting success stories. However one article (McAllister, 2015), whilst also focusing on difficulties in civilian employment, quoted one of its research subjects thus:

"After being medically retired from the army I had a difficult time adjusting to the corporate/civilian workforce; particularly the profit driven, self-centred mentality versus the selfless, mission focused approach of the military. I struggled with my identity and how it fit in the organization."

Albeit that this was a US paper, it neatly illustrates the ethos of the military versus the ethos that is more commonplace in civilian, particularly corporate employment.

Reflecting on the aforementioned sergeant's case in the context of the theoretical framework, it is compelling that in the socio-occupational construct of the military, he had relatively little self-worth until his abilities and attributes were spelled out for him. This could be ascribed to an undercurrent of negative reinforcement that still pervades in some areas of military culture, wherein doing well is what you get paid for and not worthy of comment and organisational assurance of good performance is sought by punishing, whether formally or informally, poor performance (Bergman *et al*, 2014; Soeters *et al*, 2006). It is no doubt significant then that the most recent Army recruitment adverts focus on strength deriving from learning from failures (MOD, 2022). This sentiment is expressed (on Twitter), for example, by the current Garrison Sergeant Major in Catterick as, "The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." This is socio-occupationally significant to the military community because Garrison Sergeants Major are key influencers in wider Army culture.

In the context of story-telling it was interesting that all of the respondents, in one way or another, expressed the sentiment that they knew it was 'time to go', whether leaving routinely or in more difficult circumstances. SP1's wife was characteristically blunt in her summation:

"I enjoyed the army life, I did enjoy the army life, but at the same time I'd had enough when it was time to go, enough was enough. Because as an army wife you are the accessory, you are the add on, you were the luggage."

Ouch!

In the case of SP5 however, he recounted warmly how he had been well supported by his regiment in placing him where he planned to settle well in advance of his official exit date and essentially placing him on 'gardening leave' for the last six months of his service. Interestingly, in terms of narrative, this information appeared early in his story rather than toward the end. Of the subjects interviewed, his was the most reflective because the detailed and specific story of his Service was quickly despatched within the first fifteen minutes or so and the remaining hour of the interview was taken up with reflections on various occurrences as the conversation developed. It was still chronologically linear in most respects, but the way he told the story was through reflections triggered by the subject of the moment as we talked. He and SP1 in particular shared the most positive experience of ending their careers which to my mind is

attributable to the 'regimental family' construct typical of Teeth Arms units. It is a shame that despite being required to operate around a generic Teeth Arms format, most units of Combat Support and Combat Service Support often fail to capture that same sense of regimental family.

Reflection

In our last military married quarter before I finally left the military in April 2022, on medical discharge, we were housed amongst the members of a Royal Logistics Corps transport regiment, who were the sole occupants of a semi-remote camp which had formerly been an RAF airfield. Perhaps because of that geographical isolation and the fact that almost everyone housed there was from that same unit, there was a tangible sense of 'Regimental family'. Furthermore, I was heartened to find that the unit's welfare and community staff very deliberately included us in their considerations, inviting our children to participate in organised events and inviting us as a family to join their Regimental family. Had we been living in a Garrison setting, we would almost certainly not have had any such association.

SP2's tale of the end of his career was somewhat bittersweet. He had formally left, handed in all his kit, equipment and his ID, only to then find that he had been awarded an MBE for his services to Air Sea Rescue. He then found that trying to get his old unit's support for things like uniform for the ceremony and so forth were met with indifference and obstruction, which after thirty-five years of service felt like a low blow:

*"The biggest thing about that was erm, that was … for me, that was, yeah chuffed and proud. But the journey from, erm getting it and being told , and getting the award was absolutely disgraceful. It was almost as if, err, we were locked outside the door and you know rightly so, I didn't exist… to the point where I'd ask if erm I could have been told I was getting it, after I'd left should I keep my uniform?, 'you can't wear your uniform, we kept it'. And 'you can't be wearing a uniform without a key card', OK fine. To the point where when you get formal letters that say you **can** go even as ex servicemen in uniform. To get that uniform I had to basically, they wouldn't support it, I had to borrow a ground crew officers uniform, have it converted and then have to, erm kind of go around the station, erm trying to find all the little bits that make it an air crew uniform. I know this sounds, kind of sounds, sounds quite trivial, but actually it kind of to me kind of epitomised, … how the air force treat their people, they had washed their hands of me, that was it finished"*

SP10 also found it hard to accept that he was no longer 'wanted', commenting:

*"…the army that you'd wanted to be in ever since you were sentient, doesn't want you anymore. That... That was a kick in the ****."*

The dislocation they experienced is common (Williams *et al,* 2018) and as Bergman (2014) notes, "Individuals may feel disorientated or overwhelmed as they realise that they are dislocated from their 'comfort zone'." Bergman (2014) also recognises the perceived loss of status experienced by many retirees as they transition from an organisation where deference and respect are integral to all interpersonal interactions to a civilian world where such notions appear to be in significant decline.

Reflection

I remember bristling slightly when I arrived at RAF Marham to work as a locum mental health nurse, when the RAF corporal in the guardroom referred to me as 'mate'. I had only been out of the RAF for a few weeks and suddenly I had gone from being 'sir' to 'mate'. Even now, I notice when retail or catering staff in civilian businesses call me 'sir'…and also when they don't. I also notice that the former are more likely to benefit from my repeat custom.

Family 1's spouse was characteristically succinct:

" *I enjoyed the army life and the experiences that we had and the experiences that the kids had but for me it was enough".*

Whereas her husband has kept an active interest and role in the military through his work with the Royal British Legion,

"*For me it was a bit different, same as [SP5] as well, things have to come to an end, but my involvement with the Legion, my association, I always wanted to give something back as I've seen lads that have left that have struggled and fallen on hard times, and doing what I'm doing now I know I can make a difference".*

From the author's work with veterans and much of the literature that speaks of veterans, it is clear that there are many like SP1 (Bergman *et al,* 2014; Elnitsky & Kilmer, 2017; McAllister *et al,* 2015). Whether it is a case of not being able to let go, or of wanting to give something back, or a combination of the two is a matter for another piece of research. SP7 for example was able to migrate from regular service as an officer at the Army Foundation College at Harrogate into a full-time reservist role, in the same rank, at the Infantry Training Centre at Catterick. One could speculate as to whether that was because he couldn't let go, or whether it was because he had long before bought a house in Ripon and both locations were an easy commute.

SP10 ultimately left for a very common reason. As an officer, there is a definite albeit largely unwritten career pathway to follow and once you fall off that pathway for whatever reason, you appreciate that any further progression is unlikely. The Army refer to this phenomenon as that of the 'passed-over major', i.e. a major who is not likely to be selected for a command appointment and who is likely to see out the rest of his career at that rank. Ironically for SP10, although that appeared to be his fate, he did in fact pick up promotion to Lieutenant Colonel in order to fill a specific staff post in Warminster, but by that stage his expectation was that his career was effectively over and he was merely marking time until he was pensionable. Nevertheless, the realisation that his career progression had (apparently) stalled was enough for him to begin reflecting and considering his options.

SP9 left for more complex and challenging reasons, as he was Zimbabwean and his father died, leaving him as eldest son to take on the patrilineal mantle. With him then being back in Zimbabwe for long periods after having had a difficult Service family life due to his frequent absences, he and his wife separated. Nevertheless, despite all of that, he too recalled his service life with fondness and described how his children begged him to re-join…provided they could be posted back to Cyprus!

SP4 left at the end of his contractual service but continued to serve as an MOD civil servant, in a complimentary if not identical role to the one he had undertaken in uniform. He was fortunate, like SP7, in that his permanent residence was within commuting distance of a location where he could do that (this information was obtained outside of the formal interview). SP2 also left and moved seamlessly into an almost identical role, albeit with a civilian company:

"I think (it's) interesting, kind of the psychology of…kinda jumping, from the air force into civvy street, you know for some that's a massive, erm leap. But for us the transition has been, had been, it's kinda been levelled and diluted a little bit because were doing the same job different uniform…

… the journey has been, overall positive. Erm in most aspects for us. But I think that's because we made it that way and moved across, most of us have moved across together so that's, we've still got that kinda military ethos, erm and were a mix here of erm Navy, RAF … and civilian (inaudible) guys, so there's kinda that, that kinda ethos that we have in the military still there. So it's not kinda you're jumping into a huge civilian environment you know,"

Finally, SP8 also left at the end of his service and moved into almost identical work:
"I've got no regrets. I ended up joining the enemy. I worked at Westlands …, after I finished with Apache* down there. And then some consulting work with British Aerospace. And then, yeah, teaching. But I do that part time. But, no, it was good. So, my experiences really haven't been that bad. " (*Apache is the Army Air Corps' combat attack helicopter).

To reprise an earlier observation, most of the research was looking at problems with veterans' employment. Transferrable skills are accepted (Ashcroft, 2014) but in many cases it can be the entire job role that is transferrable. In the author's case as a nurse, along with three of the research cohort, the central job role in the Armed Forces is directly transferrable. This was also true as above for SP2 and SP8 who continued to do more or less exactly what they had been doing in uniform, but for a civilian employer. Furthermore, through planning and circumstance, both were able to transition their employment without relocating their families.

6.2   Can do attitude

From a personal perspective, my work and my academic study both have heightened my appreciation of the ready employability of ex-Forces personnel. The notion of a 'can do attitude' is something of a hackneyed phrase, but nevertheless it seems commonly understood that those with any significant length of service in the Armed Forces have a positive work ethic and high moral standards that lend themselves well to worthwhile employment. In SP2's case for example, both he and his wife were able to move almost seamlessly from what they were doing

during his service career to complimentary roles in civilian life. He moved from RAF Search & Rescue to work for Bristows Helicopters, servicing oil and gas platforms in the North Sea, whereas she moved from a media job with the MoD to a media job outside. Meanwhile, SP8, who reflected that, "*There was no stage during my career where I thought, I've got to get out of this. This really is driving me daft",* went to work for Westland as an aircraft engineer, doing more or less the same as he had been doing when he was serving and often on the same aircraft type.

For wives, meanwhile, being freed from the cycle of postings and house moves offered a positive opportunity to develop their own careers (Keeling *et al,* 2019). Families two, three, seven, nine and ten all had spouses who were already in established and, to an extent, mobile and transferrable careers, but for the other families it has given the spouses and children some welcome stability and predictability. Perhaps therefore it offers something by way of explanation for the positive reflections of all of the families in their own way, that having emerged from the Service life experience they have generally thrived and can therefore reflect comfortably on what the experiences they have either endured or enjoyed have given them in the present.

6.3:   It wasn't like that in my day

The phenomenon of, 'old soldiers telling war stories', is commonplace in popular and even classical culture (Ivie *et al,* 1991) but it has not passed unnoticed in the academic literature. Long *et al* (2021) for example, substantiated the notion that particularly older veterans transposed the socio-normative values of their time in uniform to their views of the military – and wider society -today. But even with a far smaller time gap between experiences, each tranche of service personnel will insist that they had it tougher than newer intakes, highlighted often by the derogatory terms aimed at less experienced newcomers (Hockey, 1986; Finnegan, 2016).

Given that this research cohort was comprised of veterans, most respondents indulged in varying degrees of reflection on today's Armed Forces as they perceive it versus the one they left. In some cases the comparisons were not flattering. SP1's wife had a blunt assessment of the need for welfare support, which was somewhat ironic given that is now her husband's primary role with the Royal British Legion:

"*with our regiment, with the Royal Irish Regiment you didn't have what always used to be known in the army as welfare cases. It didn't happen. Never existed. Because they were built of better stuff, they were tough, and they just got on with it.*"

This was consistent with much of Family 1's account, which harked back in their view to a generally tougher time but one which seemed, when viewed through the lens intimated by Long *et al* (2021), to produce generally tougher people. The British Social Attitudes Survey 29 (Park *et al* 2012) foe example found that 92% of UK over-65s had a high or very high opinion of the Armed Forces, compared to only 72% in the lower age range. This could suggest that older generations are content to overlook, ignore or even in some cases endorse the retention by the military of social values more akin to those with which they grew up, but which give younger generations pause, or raise serious concern.

This phenomenon of cultural lag in the military, whereby sociocultural standards therein can seem outdated or even archaic (Keegan, 1994; Soeters *et al*, 2006; Greenberg *et al*, 2007), is borne out in much of the literature relating to veterans' engagement with healthcare – and particularly mental healthcare. This is best exemplified by Fraser (2017), who observed that, *"Stigma was a major barrier to care; traditional masculine virtues such as strength and fellowship were highly prized and efforts were made to normalise problems whilst in the military to avoid appearing weak or letting down comrades"* He quantifies that further with a quote from one of his own research cohort, a retired officer, who said:

"It's just part of the culture in the military. So you don't go sick, you man up".

SP8's account was interesting in that respect because he was of a similar vintage and yet could not speak highly enough of the welfare support he received for his disabled son and praised the lengths the Army went to, to support him and his family. His disdain was for the local government services when he finally came to resettle and who he found to be most unhelpful in trying to secure appropriate help for his son. Even then, in the early 1990s, their approach appeared to him to be to look for reasons not to help, rather than actively trying to support him:

"The civil agencies in the UK, were atrocious. I was sitting at my desk in ___, yeah, and I phoned ___, which was the educational ___ then. And I said, "Look, I'm coming back to the UK. My son has got muscular dystrophy. Can you tell me the schools that are there?" And they

said, "We can't do that. Give me an address, and I can tell you the schools." Given… This is '80s. So, even then, it's the funding round… I said, "Look, I haven't got an address. You tell me where the schools are and I'll live there." I got nowhere."

In the case of Family 3, there was a lot of good family support initially as SP3 had brought his family with him to the UK from Trinidad when he enlisted and the Army were very supportive, however when it came to his reason for leaving, that support then became a victim of policy, or perhaps more accurately policy interpretation. His mother-in-law, back in Trinidad, became seriously ill (and later died) and his family wanted to go back to Trinidad to help. Had it been his own mother, he would have had a case for compassionate leave, however because it was his wife's mother he had no such case. As a result he left after 14 years service, yet his reflections remain wholly positive,

"I also should give credit to my family because, no doubt the Army would have done certain things to provide and cater for our needs, but equally the family as a unit has to also embrace that and build on it. They too appreciated the opportunity to move around to various parts. They too reflect on the positives in terms of preference to certain schools when we moved. Certain areas that we have lived and certain experiences that we were able to benefit from…I think from a family perspective and looking at the journey from service life to post service life, I can only reflect on it with fond and pleasant memories."

This phenomenon of nostalgic, rose-tinted positive recollection is commonly understood but only minimally researched (Batcho, 2020; Wildschut *et al,* 2019). However, in story-telling it is an inescapable feature. Given that stories gathered in this methodology are inherently reflective. It is worth remembering that the word itself – nostalgia – literally means 'the pain of remembering' and at one time was not merely a euphemism but a diagnostic label for what we now know as PTSD (Jones & Wessely, 2015; Wildschut *et al,* 2019). Yet for this research cohort and people in general, there is often a minimisation or perhaps rationalisation of past pain that renders it warmer and perhaps more humorous than it was experienced at the time, thus bolstering self-esteem and a sense of cohesion with those with whom memories were shared (Batcho, 2020). Much of the literature that posits nostalgia as affect-positive also point to a link with learning for the future insofar as adverse memories are linked to recollections of having adaptively coped with and survived the adversity, predicting a similar likelihood in future (Batcho, 2020; Biskas *et al,* 2022; Wildschut *et al,* 2019).

6.4   Lessons learned

Thus nostalgia and reflection lend themselves to identifying lessons learned as a psychological resource (Bialobrzeska *et al,* 2019), both for the research subjects and for wider consideration. Meanwhile Leunissen *et al* (2018) look specifically at organisational nostalgia which, whilst not focussed on the military, explains much about the nature of story-telling amongst service personnel as a mechanism for reinforcing cohesion and unity of purpose. In Leunissen *et al*'s work their consideration is that employees keep work and private lives separate but as has been shown herein that is, or was, counter-cultural to the immersive military ethos.

Nonetheless, in relation to this work it is abundantly clear that job satisfaction is important, but so is quality of (family) life, as SP7 illustrated with this comment,

"*Highs and lows - I had many, many more highs than lows. The most difficult time would be the breakup of a marriage, and the breakup of the family."*

For him, as an adventure training specialist, the military was almost the perfect job,

"*the good thing about my army career is my...my hobbies were my job. And, in amongst that, was a bit of military stuff.*"

But he regrets that it was imperfect when it came to his family cohesion. Several respondents (SP1, SP5, SP8) commented in one way or another that working in the Armed Forces was, 'a single man's game'. It is perhaps significant that all three were Army other ranks and that no such sentiment was expressed by the other respondents. It is also noteworthy that they all joined up during the Cold War era and therefore are likely to have retained much of the military ethos as it was then, when families were more tolerated than accommodated (Segal, 1988; Moelker & van der Kloet, 2006). In terms of lessons going forward, there appears to be little prospect of being able to plan on assumptions that service personnel will be content with the single, all-encompassing, immersive lifestyle that the military used to be. Change in society has for many decades outpaced the military's ability to accommodate for that change and there are grounds to suggest that it should be somewhat resistant to outside influence (Greenberg *et al,* 2007), but the balance between the two positions also shifts and that balance needs to better enable a synthesis of work and family life. The recent initiative of the Future Accommodation

Model (MOD, 2016) is indicative of attempts to regain ground and more recognise in principle the notion of work/life balance as a positive development.

SP10's lessons learned were rather darker and less positively nostalgic than the others. As noted earlier it had been a lifelong ambition to join the Army but on reflecting upon the experiences he had had and the impact on his family, he was sanguine and regretful:

"And that is... Is something that, you know, I... I very much hold close to my chest. Because, you know, I've seen the aftermath of conflicts. You know, the funerals where most of the attendees are young, strong, rugby-playing soldiers with two or three limbs missing. And... And it's... It's the understanding that this is now, you know, lifelong alteration of the being for so many people. And then because, you know, the system itself is so badly broken that they've been put through some clumsy... Oh yes, let's just slice 20% off the workforce and it'll all be fine. You know, no sense of consequence as to the effects on the... The morale of the remaining organisation that's left to cope, and the impact on mental health. You know, people like me who... You know, dedicated. And never wanted to be anything but. You know, there have been times... And I've been out the army now for five years, and I... I have... I've not been unemployed…some income coming in. I've been a consultant, I've worked for companies and I now work at a university. And I'm doing reasonably well. But it has been hard, and it has been hard on my family. Because I... I currently work away from home. And I have been, broadly, since I left. Because, obviously, having chosen a house that was perfect for military employment, there's no fucking jobs in Wiltshire. Not unless I want to go and, you know, manage a branch of Aldi or whatever and... You know, do something utterly generic. So, you know, I'm trying to invest in myself here, so I can have more agency in the job market. Because I'm frankly very well aware that my son misses me horribly during the week."

His sense of betrayal was not merely palpable, he had earlier expressed it directly, blaming not any one individual but the system itself. Outside the formal interview we had previously discussed the nature of the organisation and how it seems to have an unerring ability to deflect blame away from itself by placing it on the individual, so the notion that it was the system at fault resonated in this part of his story.

Meanwhile in terms of wider lessons, developments seemingly driven more by austerity, adoption of commercial and business practices and the pursuit of efficiency have eroded the military community upon which Service family life was once based. As SP5 put it:

" *I think it's all changed now… Since Sodexo have taken over, cause all your bars, you know, over in Germany you had all your bars, family bars, corporals' mess, Sergeants' Mess and all that sort of stuff within the camp. But now they've come back to UK and everything's run by Sodexo they're limited to what they can do. You know, you've got a corporals' mess bar that's open once or twice a month; Sergeants' Mess bar that's open till probably twelve o clock at night, so a lot of them tend to think, like "I'm in England, I can go home, I can be home in three hours", so at weekends it's all quiet. It's like this garrison here, this camp: it's Thursday now, but Friday dinnertime they don't even bother trying to get customers to see the computer or see if we can go into fix the computer or whatever, because the camp's quiet. Like the RAF, RAF Leeming, you go to Leeming tomorrow and at dinnertime it's quiet.*"

These observations relate to something that is multifactorial. The last decade has seen most, though not quite yet all, single SP accommodation transformed from barrack rooms of anywhere from four to twelve occupants, to new blocks of single room accommodation, with en suite facilities (Project SLAM, MOD 2002). As a result, on most camps, there is no longer any collective social life apart from pre-arranged and intermittent social events. Soldiers, sailors and airmen finish work and disappear into their rooms until it's time to report for work the following morning. Being in the military is no longer a lifestyle choice, despite the television recruiting adverts and has become 'just a job' for many, reflecting the predictions of Moskos *et al* (1988) coming to fruition. Occupation has triumphed over institution (Segal *et al*, 2007). Along with this, the introduction of 'Pay As You Dine', provided by private contractors like Sodexho cited above, has impacted on the collective messing experience that was not only enjoyed by single personnel, but often by families as well, particularly in the Sergeants' and Officers' Messes (SP7). SP2 also noted this effect:

"Erm in fact one thing the wife kinda, her observation well I kinda thought well that's interesting, actually the privatisation of mess facilities, err ISS taking that over. Erm and she said because she was in a mess, the officers mess and she said it was noticeable that that was kinda the death of you know, people going to the mess, the social aspect as you can only do a certain amount of functions and it didn't become the hub anymore, it wasn't a focal point, it wasn't a

family meeting point. I think that was a big big mistake, OK save lots of money, erm the food is probably not as good as it was and you move that whole focal point and I think that's probably the biggest change. From a family's point of view, that not like dining in nights on mess nights where you can encourage you take your wife to reward her,, you know for what, she's had to put up with you know, a really nice environment get get to dress up and that."

Thus the social fabric of the military community appears to have been somewhat eroded and the longer term effect of that cannot yet be known. Even the aforementioned Future Accommodation Model may further impact on the sense of military community that was reflected on so positively by most respondents. It is not hard to imagine that many Service families will consider that living on (or adjacent to) camp is much less attractive than living in a privately rented house out in the local community. Certainly, given that Aldershot was one of the pilot sites for the project, the author's family would have far preferred to find a place in one of the outlying villages rather than staying in a rather sub-standard military quarter in Aldershot Military Town.

Another factor to consider is that as the military shrinks, it may be that only the cohesive units will maintain any sense of community. For service personnel employed in non-formed units there may then be no tangible sense of military community anymore. Even for formed units (such as an infantry battalion), the shrinking military footprint and the development of 'super-garrisons' means that their cohesion will be affected. SP1's wife talked eloquently of the fact that having previously been in one location with the regiment, when they were moved to Catterick the families were dispersed across the garrison estate, so no longer were your neighbours all from the same unit.

"Cos it's not like when you were in Cyprus and all together we were all sorta flung all over the place…and it broke the regiment up. (We were) all over the place, we didn't even know there were quarters in Darlington. It did break the Reg(iment) up I mean, where we were in Catterick, I mean there were people lived next door. They were… I don't even know where they were from. They weren't Irish. It broke it up and then again everyone in the same or similar position to us you know the financial shock of moving back to UK and the implications of that. The social side disappears cos you have no social money. So you know you saw you're erm friends at the school gate and that was it."

It may seem like a small thing, but without that proximity and social familiarity, military community relationships lose their strength (Huebner *et al,* 2009; Thomas, 2018).

6.5:   Summary

Reflection is a key element in storytelling and contributes to effective narrative inquiry, as by definition an account of past events and one's feelings about that time of one's life rely upon reflection. As noted earlier, it is common to the human experience for our memories to change over time and for events that were difficult, unpleasant or indeed dangerous to become subjects of fond, even humorous recollection. Combined with the strong oral tradition of storytelling amongst military folk we are rewarded with powerful narratives that speak to some key shared knowledge about the nature, conduct and experience of military family life. It is that shared knowledge and experience that gives such stories their power and which contribute to the shared habitus into which those who serve and who have served can reach for reassurance and self-knowledge. It is rare to find veterans who move on from their military experience without a backward glance, or who deny or diminish their service. By the same token, it is more common to find veterans who cannot let go and who keep their military experience alive through a range of endeavours, some fruitful and some less rewarding. Organisations like the Royal British Legion, Walking with the Wounded, Help for Heroes, the three Cadet forces, the Scouting association and more benefit from those who wish to maintain some degree of contact with that experience that has dominated a significant part of their lives. This then extends to families, who as in the case of several respondents choose to follow their fathers into military service, or spouses who become active in service charities or cadet forces. The timeless adage that 'old soldiers never die, they simply fade away' can often be seen to apply to families too.

Chapter Seven: It's the way I tell 'em! (after the late Frank Carson)

"I keep six honest serving men, They taught me all I knew; Their names are What and Why and When, And How and Where and Who.." Rudyard Kipling

7.1 Narrative analysis

The running analysis through the last three chapters has been largely paradigmatic, seeking the themes, threads and patterns reported by the research cohort in relation to themselves and the context of their circumstances (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Details of the thematic analysis are in Appendix 2. This chapter however is more interested in the narrative mode of analysis, wherein the themes and patterns observed form the plot of the stories (Kim, 2016). Clarke *et al* (2015) explore the benefits of combining analytical methods and indeed Kim (2016) proposes precisely that – to bring the paradigmatic observations into synthesis with a narrative analysis. Thus the considerations of temporality, sociality and place suggested by Clandinin & Huber (2010) form the 'when', 'who' (as a collective) and 'where' for this research cohort, but in seeking a deeper understanding of the stories told, this section will also consider the 'what', 'why' and 'how'. Specifically, we will explore what can be learned, inferred and potentially concluded from the data, why the stories were constructed in the way they were and how they were presented. Unsurprisingly, given the apparent symbiosis between narrative inquiry and psychological theory, this could be characterised as a search for 'meaning'. However there is more than one facet to meaning; did the manner of the telling, or the content, or the nuanced inferences give the story meaning for the teller, or did it intend to impart meaning to the researcher? What did the teller seek to communicate in their story? Telling stories is commonly meaningful for the teller, whether they are seeking validation, sympathy, admiration, approbation or some other secondary gain to the exchange. However, what is also sought in telling stories or 'swapping yarns' is some form of connection. If the listener has no interest in the story they are unlikely to listen but if there are elements to the story with which they can empathise or identify, there is a meaningful, storied conversation (Chałupnik, 2022). Thus far,

the only excerpts from the transcripts have been taken from the research subjects' contributions but, to illustrate the point here are some examples of exchanges between researcher and subjects:

SP2: *spent 2 and a half years flying SH (*Support Helicopters*) on Wessex on 72 squadron, err and then of course ended up on sea kings, err flying on erm SAR (*Search and Rescue*), and then between that a whole work of others err various bits and pieces with various agencies all over the world.*

M: *Well erm as I said in my email when I was out in Bosnia as medical staff years ago it was 845 NAS (*Naval Air Squadron*) specifically, we err, were allowed to do winch training…*

SP2: *Yeah OK*

M: *So we were going into medical incidents, close to the ground by the winch cos (sic) of the mine threat*

D: *Yeah*

M: *So I've spent a little bit of time looking up at a sea king!*

This is an example of 'building rapport', which is essential in clinical consultations and intrinsic to the author's practice. This subject has spent most of his career on helicopters and was employed at the time of interview in the same role, so the author sought to build a connection with the subject by citing his own experience of working with helicopters. The utility of this approach in relation to narrative data capture is that it energises the interaction into a conversation and encourages the subject to speak more fluidly and freely, consistent with the recommendations of Kim (2016), illustrating again the symbiosis between the researcher's professional expertise and the chosen methodology. Furthermore shared understanding of key personalities, places and locations assist in the 'plot progression' (Boyd *et al,* 2020) and just as readily feature in psychological rapport building in a clinical context.

Another example was early in the interview with SP5. Mindful of the internecine rivalries within particularly the Army and interviewing a former infantry sergeant, there seemed to be a need to establish some small element of credibility:

Mark: And what cap badge did you join up with?

SP5: Fusiliers, First Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

Mark: We inherited some Reservist RRF when I was in Reserve Medics, when we had "options for change", if you remember "options for change"… and basically all the fusiliers got told, or this particular company of fusiliers got told: "right, you guys are either out of the TA or you've got to rebadge as medics."

SP5: Where was that?

Mark: Oldham.

SP5: I'm from Bury.

Mark   Oh, okay. Well, that was 1995

SP5: Still got fusiliers at Oldham

Mark: We inherited a company of fusiliers, which was brilliant for us, because that meant all our military skills and stuff, skill at arms instructors went up a notch, you know, because medics generally aren't known for their basic military skills, let's be honest!

And further on there was another brief opportunity to capitalise on commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Huber 2010) when talking of his sons:

"SP5: he left school, got out, he just said "I want to join the army", went to the careers' office, signed up and he joined 3RHA (3rd Royal Horse Artillery) *with his brother, but the oldest one did Op TELIC* (Iraq) *with us, Op TELIC 7 I think it was, I was out there on Op TELIC 7*

Mark: You were on Op TELIC 7? So was I!"

None of that exchange was strictly necessary from the point of view of military family life, however as part of the preamble and rapport-building, it made a small contribution to the interviewee's comfort and also his confidence in the interviewer. Later on in the interview however there was a family related exchange:

"Mark: So when you went out to Germany, how old were the kids?

SP5: There was just two of them. Both started in the junior schools, so they were only young, and my youngest lad started off in the, literally, I think my youngest one's done all his education in Germany, my daughter done her education there, then obviously come back here and finished off here.

Mark: When we went out, my eldest was ten, I think, then my next eldest was eight, then my boys, my twin boys, who started, we went out in 2002 and they started primary school in Germany, and then my next boy was a baby.

SP5: That's it, Sophie was born over there, she was born in Hanover, Hanover hospital.

Mark: BMH (British Military Hospital), *I know, as was. By the time we got out there it was all in the German system for secondary care.*

SP5: That's it, she had the baby and then she come straight home, the Germans like to keep them in the hospital for a week, don't they, where they cuddle among the babies and feed them all and do all that for them and then they've got the rest, but because, one of the British things she had was the midwife…weren't too bad. So Sophie was born over there. Still had problems when we were renewing her passport. Always had problems. "Where was she born?" "Hanover." "Why has she got a British passport?" "Because she's English!" It's a problem we have, but you get around it."

Why he wanted to make those observations at that point in his story is open to interpretation, but it seems reasonable to speculate that having already told of the good times the family had in Germany, he perhaps wanted to balance that against some of the minor, bureaucratic

inconveniences that overseas service can generate. Further interviewing of SP5 might have allowed for exploration of meaning (Clandinin & Huber 2010) but this had not been catered for in the research planning. Nonetheless, drawing on personal experience, for some reason mainstream society and even fellow Crown servants in other government departments seem to struggle with the idea that being posted to a British military base is not the same as having 'lived or worked overseas'. It can adversely affect loan and mortgage applications, along with one's credit rating and even employability.

7.2: Meaning

Returning to the matter of meaning in the narratives, as Clandinin & Huber (2010) observe, *"Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful."* However, as with SP5's story extract above, in narrative inquiry there may be meaning to the researcher which is not 'meant' by the story-teller. In this respect narrative inquiry can seem much like art or literature, wherein meaning may be derived from the original that had not been intended by the artist, writer or poet. The Liverpudlian poet Brian Patten gave an example of this at a poetry recital attended by the author. He cited the fact that he had made a spelling mistake in one of his poems, that neither he nor his editors had spotted prior to publication. Some years later, there was an A Level English question, asking students to explore what the poet had meant by 'deliberately' misspelling the word. "Nothing…" he said in response, "I just can't spell!"

Relating that to the narratives, one can consider not perhaps the 'mistakes' of conversational English recorded in the transcripts, but the choice of language and expression used in terms of the nuanced meanings they were intended to convey. 'Bad' language might seem like an obvious example, but bad language is such a routine component of military speech that it passes all but unnoticed in exchanges between military folk. That, in and of itself, is a subtle reinforcement of the 'difference' of military culture. Of more use is the phraseology, conceptual congruence and liberal use of the military lexicon of acronyms and abbreviations that punctuated the stories. Grossen (2010) observes that meaning is not necessarily a product of the content, but of the interaction between parties, i.e. that mutual understanding of a term or concept is the genesis of the meaning. Therefore, as noted in the aforementioned observation about 'rapport building', this mutuality allowed interviewer and interviewee to converse freely in their 'own' language; neither party having to interrupt or impede the flow of the story by having

to 'translate' the content. Translation became necessary once the interviews had been transcribed, because the various people who kindly undertook the transcription were not party to the military lexicon and it was therefore necessary to make many corrections to the transcripts. One brief example from SP5's story would be the German town of Fallingbostel, which was transcribed as 'Falmostow' and which is routinely abbreviated to 'Fally' by military folk but which was recorded as 'Fothey'. Another from the same interview, which was kindly transcribed by the author's sister, was almost comic.

SP5: I got offered last week to go to Sennen at Parabold, do it over there,

Mark: Worst library in the world!

What was *actually* said was:

SP5: I got offered last week to go to Sennelager at Paderborn, do it over there,

Mark: Worst lager in the world! (a standard, in-group military joke about Sennelager, parodying the tag line of Danish beer Heineken of 'possibly the best lager in the world').

Thus the use of in-group language as a conceptual artefact by both parties held a meaning of its own in the context of the stories (Grossen, 2010). Veterans consistently choose to describe themselves as such, or as 'ex-Armed Forces' rather than as civilians (Burdett *et al,* 2012; Kukla *et al,* 2015; Markowitz *et al,* 2020), which intimates that validation of that may in part underly the meaning of communicating still in military terms, even long after leaving the military. Thus an element of the meaning of all respondents seems to be to establish and validate their veteranhood and distinguish themselves still from mainstream society.

Meanings that derive from an uninterrupted story may also differ from meanings derived from stories exchanged, that arise in an intersubjective and relational way (Gillespie & Cornish, 2014). The earlier transcript extracts were taken from interviews where experiences and stories were exchanged, but for SP3 and SP4, for example, there was little to no interruption of the story flow. Nonetheless the choice of language was 'inclusive' to the parties to the story-telling. In both cases the respondents were known to the researcher and so there were some things that didn't need to be said or explained, outwith the scope of the military lexicon.

It would also be folly to assume that there was no meaning in their very participation in the research and that elements of the manner of their story-telling did not relate to that meaning. All of the respondents, on first contact and outwith the transcribed narratives, expressed a wish to help. Not only to help me as the researcher, but also to contribute to the body of knowledge of the lives of military and veterans families. This motivational element conveyed meanings of its own; a maintenance of the sense of belonging, a willingness to give something back, a desire to make things better for present and future military personnel through their reflections on their own experience. Superficially, this could seem dichotomous given earlier observations of the disparaging and disdainful views expressed by some respondents of newer generations of military personnel, but at a deeper level this is consistent with a pervasive aspect of military culture. Beneath the surface veneer of negative reinforcement, the drive for ever higher standards and the intolerance of imperfection, there lies a genuine concern for the best interests of the troops. This could be summed up by the US Marine Corps axiom of, "train hard – fight easy". Ultimately the essence of the military in relation to its personnel is that they should survive in battle. Everything else in terms of the socio-occupational milieu derives from that. Ergo what appears harsh and rigid in the peacetime environment is intended to harden individuals to adversity in a safe environment, before they must venture out into the adversities presented by a highly dangerous one (Jelusic, 2006).

Another meaning that seems to have derived from the manner of the story-telling was for the respondents to assert their having survived the transition from military service into veteranhood and not only that, but to have thrived and grown as a result. Plummer (1995) capitalises on the narrative value of survivor stories, albeit with a very different target group, but the similarities of storied accounts of survival and recovery and the subsequent sociality of support available for survivors in some ways mirrors the veterans' experience. For all respondents, to varying degrees, their military family life together had been an important or often defining feature of their lives, much like the SP's military service and their veteran lives together seem richer for it.

Thus far, we have only considered collective meanings that have derived from the data. Specific individuals within the cohort, however, may have been communicating discrete and personal meanings.

SP3, for example, had had to leave Army service and return to Trinidad for family reasons, as documented earlier. However, at the time of the interview he was seeking to return to Army service and saw me as a potential ally in that endeavour. It seems reasonable to speculate that his overt positivity about the Army and how his family had benefited from military family life was a subliminal, unconscious effort to reinforce his sense of support in his aspirations.

SP7's tone throughout the interview suggested a meaning for him in terms of his story being a search for both self-justification and a certain element of absolution. Insofar as was possible to discern, he was honest and regretful about the impact his service had had on his first marriage and yet also thankful for the lack thereof in relation to his second marriage. Both of these examples point to there being an anticipated gain from recounting their stories, albeit that it was probably subliminal. Humans, though, are natural story-tellers and swap tales as a method of mutual enrichment and pleasure (Butina, 2015) and stories will likely contain drama, intrigue and emotional valence. Ergo the telling of any story could be said to be seeking an anticipated gain in some form, even where that gain may be difficult to conceptualise in the moment by either party to the story-telling.

SP9's story was similarly told in regretful terms in places. He had enlisted in the ranks in 1999 and sought commissioning four years later:

SP9: "2003, I started RAF Cranwell (Officer) *training. So, I think that's when you start to notice a bit of the... The challenge to the family, now. So, wife, your kid. So, the packing and moving...*

Int: And your wife is called [Name], is it?

SP9: Yeah, yeah. So, they moved back... Moved back to Cranwell. Got a quarter there. Went through training. April... February to April. And then had to pack again and move. First posting in ___. So, I think tension, then, was getting, kind of, really bad. So, we actually separated for about a month, then.

Int: Oh, gosh.

SP9: Yeah, it just started to take its toll. And I think so early on in your career as well. Because I was only... I was about three or four years into the military. You're still driven, and you're still, sort of, ambitious. You still want to see how far you can go. You're still deciding which pathway to take. What to concentrate on. Really, you know, reaching your potential. So, I was so career-focused. And I think young, commissioned officers as well, you... You so much want to prove yourself, isn't it? So, I was doing so much volunteering, pretty much for everything. And I was loving it. But it took its toll."

In this instance, both parties were mental health nurses and there was a palpable sense of this interview blurring the lines between an exercise in data capture and a clinical consultation. That SP9 was not merely telling his story, but was reaching out for affirmation and support. There were elements of that phenomenon evident in other stories, wherein the interviews took on if not a clinical, then a 'confessional' quality. The candour of respondents was both recognised and appreciated at the time and welcomed in terms of the analysis thereafter.

7.3: Better left unsaid

What didn't respondents say that they could have done and why? Blurring the lines again, between narrative research and the author's professional background in mental health, wherein what is not said may be as, if not more significant than what is said in clinical consultation, it seems reasonable to at least consider this question.

Reflection

Aside from my own attendance as a student on Intermediate Command and Staff Course (Air) at the Joint Services Command and Staff College of the UK Defence Academy, I was also the designated Community Mental Health Nurse for that location whilst serving as OC DCMH Brize Norton. I spent several months delivering therapy to a serving officer with depression and was getting nowhere so, by mutual assent, we discontinued our therapeutic work. However several months later, the patient got back in touch to re-establish therapy and, in our first session, revealed that his depressive symptoms emerged shortly after he began having an affair. Therapy progressed more effectively thereafter!

Broadly, in human interaction there are a host of reasons why one party may not wish to disclose information to the other (Butina, 2015). Elements of what Markham Shaw (1997) calls 'impression management' unconsciously come into play. We may not wish to expose our failings or folly, we may wish to aggrandise or exaggerate our character role in the story to elevate self-esteem or impress, conversely we may not wish to 'blow our own trumpet' or we may seek to emotionally insulate ourselves from difficult or painful memories. Individual motivation toward any one of those reasons is a feature of the individual, but collectively the Armed Forces exhibit a strange medley of these motivations, subject to circumstance. Within the Military Bubble, self-aggrandisement is commonplace, but in relation to the outside, there is more humility and self-deprecation.

With the exception of Family 1 and Family 8 no others, excluding the author, complained to any noteworthy degree about their married quarter accommodation, despite such concerns featuring significantly and perennially in the FAMCAS (MOD 2021). This may be down to the vintage of this particular cohort, but also to other factors. Cost may well be one, since in general the rent payable on a Service married quarter is a fraction of what one would pay for a similar property in the private rental market and a lot less than a mortgage. Given that this is considering what was not said, the only example on offer is that of the author, who has lived in both Service married quarters and private, rented accommodation during his service (see Chapter One, section 1.7). We have lived in nine married quarters and since we kept an eye on the private rental market due to our family size, no quarter rental has ever exceeded half of what we would have had to pay for an equivalent house on the private market. Allied to cost is also the provision of removals expenses and a 'disturbance allowance' each time a move must be undertaken for Service reasons. Convenience and proximity to work may be another factor and, although the service provided by the housing contractor often attracts criticism, there is the security of knowing that if anything goes wrong it will be fixed, with no cost to the occupant (unless it were deliberate damage!). Thus, from a story-telling perspective seven out of nine respondents appear to have felt there was nothing noteworthy to add to their stories with regard to their housing. Did this mean they were content? Or did this mean that there were other aspects of their stories that they were keener to tell?

What was also prominent was not just what went unsaid, but who was omitted from the saying. Of the nine 'families' interviewed, only three of the spouses (SP1, SP4 and SP8) were willing to participate in the research. Yet meaning can be suggested even from that. It may have been

that those families who had survived military family life and endured into veteranhood were sufficiently secure in themselves that the spouse was content for the SP to speak on their behalf. However it might also be that the spouse had 'drawn a line' under the experience and did not want to revisit it. There was also only one opportunity to speak to a different family member, in this case the younger son of SP4, who was by the time of interview well into adulthood and whilst he hadn't followed his father into the military, he had done so in respect of profession, being also a mental health nurse. Whether the absence of any other offspring contributors gave meaning or simply reasoning is unclear. In the cases of SPs 9 and 10 it may have been a simple calculation that the children were too young to contribute, whereas in the case of other families it may have been the logistics of including family 'diaspora' in the process.

All of which leads to question 'ownership' of the stories. Can an individual assert ownership of any story other than their own (Chałupnik, 2022)? Gillespie and Cornish (2014) describe how culture can furnish individuals with a templated narrative that is consistent with the cultural norms in which the story is based. Ergo, there are two cultural norms at work here that can influence the perception if not the reality of story ownership. All respondents were influenced by the cultural norms of the military, wherein the saying, "there's no 'I' in TEAM" is commonplace, but also by the cultural norms of marriage as it has been historically understood. Certainly, of the three couples interviewed there was equanimity and agreement to the point where one could say they 'spoke with one voice' on the majority of the stories.

7.4: Summary

This chapter exposes narrative's strengths and challenges, as it is not possible to assert meaning unequivocally without further co-authoring of the narrative through ongoing dialogue between researcher and participants (Clandinin, 2013). This realisation will inform future research design, not least because of the noted symbiosis between narrative inquiry and mental health practice. In the latter, therapy comprises of multiple meetings wherein the notes from the last meeting will have been reviewed and then used as prompts and guides to question and reflect on the story to that point.

Chapter Eight: So what?

8.1   Overview – the perils of planning assumptions

In Chapter One, whilst trying to offer a working definition of what a Service family actually is, the author had recourse to look at what policy definition is used by the MoD to determine entitlement to such things as accommodation, allowances and welfare support. Of course, that entitlement has changed over the years and even despite working in MoD myself at the time there was no ready access to any archive of previous policies. In discussions about such matters, the 1995 Bett Review, or more properly *"Managing people in tomorrow's armed forces: independent review of the armed forces' manpower, career and renumeration structures"*, is often cited. This was a government-commissioned report that fed into the Defence Select Committee review, Defence Costs Study 15: Front Line First, which itself owed its genesis to Options for Change, which examined defence structures in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the resultant change in required defence posture. These studies were also informed by the conduct of the first Gulf War. Unfortunately, despite email exchanges directly with the House of Commons archive, the British Library and the National Archive, it has not been possible to track down an actual copy, in hard or electronic form, of the Review itself. Even online booksellers who list the publication do not actually have any in stock. This is disappointing not only in the context of this work, but in relation to future research plans, given the pivotal nature of the changes wrought off the back of that review. However, it was possible to find a House of Commons Research Paper (Dodd, 1994) that reviewed the review, if you will, prior to its formal publication. The Bett Review was wide ranging and indeed, many of the structures within Defence Medical Services owe their genesis to this review. However, without direct access to the report, it is not possible to wholly verify what is commonly believed in the military community, which is that the Bett Review did a lot to reshape earlier planning assumptions about the needs of Service families.

Nevertheless, Dodd's research paper allows us to see something of the inherent dangers in planning assumptions. Pan-governmentally, policy-makers have to plan on the basis of predictions and expectations, because no-one's crystal ball is infallible, but inevitably there will be times when government planning for years hence will not match what turns out to be the reality. They say that a week is a long time in politics, so one wonders why politicians think they can plan two decades in advance? Of course, to an extent they have to, although in reality it is actually civil servants who are having to base policy proposals on planning assumptions. From a constitutional perspective that is appropriate. The Civil Service are supposed to be, like the military, professionally apolitical and whilst politicians may only tend to think as far ahead as the next general election, it is for civil servants to maintain the progress of *governance* within government, which must take a longer-range view.

Looking at Dodd's research paper now it can be seen that there are a host of assumptions therein that, with the benefit of hindsight, turned out to be wrong. With that track record in mind there is at least an inference, if not a strong suspicion, that planning assumptions in respect of Service families were no more accurate. The norms of both general society and families therein were very different in the 1990s to what they are now and therefore policy based on such norms but not intended to have impact until some time in the future was likely to misjudge need, expectation and demand.

8.2   Fitting people into boxes

One of the fringe benefits of having tracked down Dodd's research paper is that it serves as a snapshot of governmental thinking from a quarter of a century ago. Indeed, there is a whole section of the paper that corroborates the author's own anecdotal experience, given that his service spans the twenty-five years in question. Throughout that period there seems to have been a progressive adoption of commercial and business practices by the public sector (NHS and Higher Education as well as MoD) that was the work of, if not Margaret Thatcher herself, then of her administration. At the time of the report there were plans being seriously considered to privatise the housing stock to raise £500 million for other 'front line first' initiatives (Dodd, 1994) but thankfully the government of the time rowed back from this proposition. In fairness to the then Defence Secretary, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, he was reported as observing that, "*It is important to emphasise at the outset that the principles underlying the management of defence are different in key respects from those which generally apply in the private sector…*" (Dodd,

1994). Twenty-five years on it appears that all subsequent administrations of whichever political stripe have kept up the pressure to force the public sector to try and mirror the operation of private companies and businesses. Even the MOD's own Civil Service Human Resources function is now managed by 'Defence *Business* Services' and the author's own students face a final dissertation to their nursing degrees which is effectively writing a *business* case. And so it is with much of the support to Service families. At the time of writing, Service housing was contracted out to Amey Defence Services and seemed no more efficient than when Service housing was managed in-house, but of course shareholders in Amey were benefiting from the contract, consistent with the ideological aims of the incumbent administration.

Following on from observations about planning assumptions, the challenge when trying to formulate and implement systems that govern human behaviour is simply that to be workable, the system has to have some standardisation or uniformity, whereas human beings are diverse and non-uniform (Cotton, 1988). For a military or other disciplined organisation it is an accepted prerequisite of joining that one will conform to the system, in recognition of the fact that the system cannot work without such conformity. Enlisted ranks will swear an oath of allegiance and officers will have the terms of their conformity spelled out clearly, albeit in somewhat formal and archaic language, on their commissioning scroll. For families however, conformity has been assumed without assurance and an organisation that is collectively indoctrinated into conformity such as the military can struggle with those who object to the box into which the organisation seeks to fit them. SP1's wife was a good example of that in her reaction, earlier discussed, to the allocated families accommodation in Cyprus. "*This is not happening!"* Yet in her case, by the time the family returned to civilian life, she was almost more indoctrinated into the Army way of thinking than her husband.

This is a key theme that has echoes throughout the narratives, to one degree or another, that families were expected to fit in with the military irrespective of their own needs, expectations or wishes. The very fact that, as Jones (1990) illustrates, spouses were referred to as 'wife of..' until quite recently and are still referred to as 'dependants' intimates that spouses and children were seen as the 'chattels' and belongings of the SP and that they could therefore be subordinated to the system as readily as the SP themselves. In discussing his wife, SP9 highlighted one of the classic features that reappear in the FAMCAS (MOD, 2021) of the impact of military family life on spousal employment:

"She's always managed to work. I suppose as nurses, you will always get a job, won't you? You'll always be able to find work somewhere. But she couldn't go into what she wanted. She wanted to be, sort of, practice nursing. So, with the moving around and everything, she was doing secondary healthcare."

A utilitarian would perhaps observe that she didn't have a problem because she was widely employable, but that discounts her own career aspirations to work in primary healthcare rather than hospital settings (secondary healthcare), and such impediments to aspiration can foment unhappiness and discord.

Ultimately however, in the drafting of policy whilst here will always be exceptions to any rule, those charged with that policy drafting will doubtless counter that there still have to be rules and lines have to be drawn somewhere.

8.3   Changing with the times?

Nevertheless, one has to conclude that MoD are at least trying to move things in the right direction when it comes to their provision for Service families. As noted earlier, the MOD are pressing ahead with their Future Accommodation Model which aims to give Service personnel, whether single or in partnerships, more choice and flexibility in their accommodation options (MOD, 2016). In theory, it will mean that should a Service Family decide not to opt for the traditional Service Families Accommodation, i.e. a house on or near camp, they can opt to find somewhere in the private rental sector or even be assisted in buying or maintaining (the financial servicing of) their own home. Single SPs would also be able to rent a house with other SPs or even family members, at a roughly comparable cost to living in military accommodation. That would be a beguiling prospect for many, but harking back to previous observations about the positive contributory effect of a cohesive military community one does have to question whether the erosion of that community will ultimately be shown to have had a damaging effect on military effectiveness. It is over thirty years since Moskos and Wood (1988) published their work that asked the question, "The Military: More Than Just a Job?" but the question has not lost its relevance in the intervening years. According to Turner (2018), writing in the Daily Telegraph, a career in the Armed Forces ranked only tenth in the list of career aspirations of schoolchildren. Reflecting back on earlier observations about military service as a vocation

however, it seems doubtful that contemporary hopefuls have a genuine grasp of the implications of military service, beyond what gaming and social media have with which to enlighten them.

It is encouraging, nevertheless, to see that more thought is being put into the actual experience of military life. Though it was never articulated on record, it seems that assumptions from the Bett Review era were that military families would take whatever they were given, as if they were a mere extension of the SP and could be held subject to the same expectation of compliance. It is fair to say that this assumption appears to have been abandoned in favour of more pragmatism and a realistic assessment of the needs of the whole Service community, not just those members thereof who are wearing the uniform. As noted earlier the US have long appreciated the 'force multiplier' effect of well-supported families, as Clever and Segal (2013) observe, "The military has long recognized that service members' families influence the strength and effectiveness of the fighting force."

8.4   FAMCAS and Defence People

Much of the moves toward improvements to the military family experience is probably owed to two things: the introduction of the Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS) and the extension of the role of what used to be the Chief of Defence Personnel, which is reflected in the change of title to Chief of Defence People and expands the role to consider not only the uniformed personnel who were the remit of the previous incarnation but also the wider defence community, that includes civilian MoD employees and families of uniformed personnel. It is likely that the push to enshrine an Armed Forces Covenant in law by the Cameron Conservative government contributed to this extension of remit and subsequent change of nomenclature. The original incumbent, Lt Gen Richard Nugee (cited earlier in this work) appeared to have a genuine enthusiasm for all aspects of his brief and let us hope that continues with subsequent appointees.

The first FAMCAS was circulated for completion in 2010 and although the format has remained largely static, the presentation of the results has changed over time. Initially, the final report was presented in the manner of an academic paper, complete with sections on methodology, method, sampling and so forth. Yet in nine years it has metamorphosed into a pictographic, easy to read document. Given its intended readership, that is perhaps no bad thing but for academic purposes the earlier reports offered more granularity and detail and had a formality

and gravitas that lent them overt credibility. Nevertheless, comparing the actual data from the first and the most recent report is useful as a snapshot of the last decade's Service family experience which, let us remember, has contained active warfighting in both Iraq and Afghanistan as well as two further Defence reviews and many changes and instability for the military community.

The 2010 report noted a 21% response rate which, given that it was a brand new initiative, seems credible. Key observations were:

62% of respondents who did not own their own home said it was because they could not afford to (since when, the Forces Help to Buy scheme was introduced in 2014). Of the nine families surveyed for this work, six remained in military accommodation throughout their service, largely due to the low rent for married quarters and the lack of wherewithal to buy a house. For military personnel who serve a pension-earning engagement, the associated gratuity payment is often the first opportunity they will have to place a deposit for a house purchase.   .

40% of respondents had had trouble accessing NHS dentistry. This is, however, a relatively new phenomenon and mirrored in mainstream society (BMJ, 2022). None of the respondents to this research spoke of access to dental care at all, however for context it should be recognised that most interviews for this work were carried out in 2015/16, both prior to COVID and before NHS dentistry problems came to the fore.

59% of those respondents who had a family member on an NHS waiting list for treatment reported an extension to that waiting time as a result of relocation.

It was interesting to note the phraseology of the section referring to children's education, wherein the report stated that 'half of the respondents that had children reported that they did *not* have any difficulties obtaining a place at the school…of their choice', which of course indicates that half *did*. The report does not quantify that against numbers who take up boarding school allowances to counter the effect of mobility on education. For a family who did, SP4's two sons were equally divided, insofar as one loved going to boarding school, whilst the other at first disliked and then was subsequently merely able to tolerate the experience.

In relation to difficulties with spousal employment, the presentation of the data did not clearly show the level of difficulty experienced, which worked out to be 63.6% of partners who experienced difficulties obtaining paid employment as a result of relocation. SP1's partner was happy to take whatever employment was available locally as they moved around, as did the partner of SP4. However SP8's partner, a qualified nurse with an interest in primary care, had to take locally available jobs outside her preferred speciality, thus impeding her career progression.

In contrast, some of the key findings from the latest, 2021 FAMCAS were as follows:

The response rate had risen, but only slightly, to 25%, which itself was a rise from only 22% in the preceding year. The biggest response was from the Army (28%) and the smallest was from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines (21%).

For reasons that were not clearly stated, whilst the categorisation of issues remained constant the actual question varied. In 2019, for example, 59% of spouses indicated they were 'satisfied' with their quality of life married to a member of the Armed Forces. Meanwhile in 2021 it was reported that 41% felt, 'disadvantaged about family life'. This is, fortunately, not a mathematics thesis but it appears that this is essentially the same data, represented differently (59 + 41 = 100). Perhaps unsurprisingly, from the stories told by this research cohort, those who appeared most satisfied, however retrospectively, we in relationships that had endured. For SP7, SP9 and SP10, their respective spousal dissatisfaction with military life were key elements of their decisions to separate.

45% of spouses, meanwhile, stated that they felt, "negative about the effect of Service life on my children." This cannot however infer that 55% felt positive. The data were captured on a five point scale, inviting responses to questions that ranged from very positive through to very negative. It is interesting therefore that the data were not reported in the same format, but also that the middle response of 'neither positive nor negative' is not published. To one degree or another, every respondent spoke of some issue regarding negative impact on their children. Most prominently, SP1 spoke of the difficulty for a soldier with a second family, trying to build bonds with step-children whilst constantly deploying in long or short absences from the family group. SP5 and SP8 highlighted the difficulties faced by children born in overseas locations, SP7 and SP9 regretted the frequent absences that were over and above those imposed upon

them by their service and SP10 rued the fact that even upon leaving the military, he still had to take work away from home and extend the 'married-unaccompanied' lifestyle, for the impact it had on his children.

78% were 'employed', although the report did not quantify in what capacity or whether the spouse was happy with their employment. It also failed to reflect whether any proportion of those not in employment enjoyed that status out of choice rather than circumstance. Furthermore overall, only 23% agreed that they 'felt part of the wider Service community'. This latter aspect is challenging to relate to the research cohort, because in the majority of cases their stories were rather historical and spoke back to a time when the military community was more cohesive and inclusive. The 2021 FAMCAS is thus potentially a reflection of changes in wider societal expectations and demands.

There were a lot more demographics in the later report, which were interesting but did not necessarily add much to the overall impression. There were, however, some interesting and pertinent statistics that did not feature in the 2010 report.

51% said that Service life had a negative effect on their career, which was an improvement on the 57% reported in the 2019 FAMCAS and following the trend, 'only' 46% were unhappy with the amount of separation from their spouse, down from 55%.. Again these findings were unquantified and could represent a host of impediments, some of which might be readily remedied and others which might be more complex.

35% felt that Service life had a negative effect on their marital relationship.

If those figures are accurate, it suggests that despite the best efforts of the MoD there is still a long way to go. In light of the findings of this research there is scope to speculate on what other efforts might go some way to ameliorating the current levels of dissatisfaction. There is also, however, scope also to speculate on whether some thought should be given to 'expectation management' of future service personnel. Having witnessed the recruiting and selection process fist hand as a participant, a trained selection officer and as the father of two serving soldiers it is possible to assert that such service is still 'sold' to candidates without reference to the non-combat related privations they can expect to encounter as well as the benefits they can hope to accrue.

Finally, what is fascinating is how the representation of the data has changed in a decade. The 2010 report was problem-centric and highlighted difficulties and challenges to the military family community, despite some apparent attempts to obfuscate the scale of those difficulties. The 2019 report, in contrast, is 'spun' to focus on the positives. Furthermore, the depth and range of questioning in the later survey was far greater, which is unsurprising as it has been an evolving project.

From an analytical perspective it is important to step away from the expedient governmental spin of the data as presented by MOD and ask whether there is more here than meets the eye. As highlighted earlier and included in the theoretical framework, a strengths-based approach to organisational behaviour is becoming more commonplace (van Woerkom & Meyers, 2014), predominantly in the wider public and commercial sectors, but one can divine a sense of its influence on Defence as well. Going back to the first decade of this century, Gosling (2008) questioned whether government policy to liberalise many aspects of Defence was 'pandering to social norms'. However, she finally concluded that, as with most political realities, there had to be a balance between maintaining military ethos and fighting power and meeting the needs of the individuals who volunteer in a professional Armed Forces and the families they bring with them or build from within. In the intervening fifteen years, striking that balance has continued apace and whilst it is rarely stated, one can infer from aforementioned developments that the underlying aim is to build on strengths, wherever they may be found, rather than focusing on shoring up perceived weaknesses.

8.5   Summary

It certainly appears that the policy direction of recent years is the right one, with more attention being paid to the Service family and concessions being made for those in stable, long-term relationships or same-sex marriages. Movement on the accommodation of Service families is very welcome, but the remaining 'usual suspects' of spousal employment, children's education and access to health (especially dental) care are perhaps more difficult to tackle, particularly in an era when solutions are expected to be 'cost neutral'. Access to dental care, for example, could be readily solved if either families who could not access NHS dentistry were given vouchers for private dental care, or such families were offered dental care from Defence Dental Services. Both options have cost implications however and so would not progress. The core

principle behind the Armed Forces Covenant is that members of the Armed Forces – and their families – should not be disadvantaged as a result of their service. Unfortunately, that principle is wide open to interpretation. For example, providers of services could argue that a civilian moving home for work reasons would attract no extra level of support, so why should a military person? As outlined in the introduction, there is far less cultural empathy for the Armed Forces in the UK than there is in places like the USA. One could argue that despite initiatives like the Armed Forces Covenant and the annual Armed Forces Day, support for the military has been steadily if slowly diminishing since the end of the Cold War. Options for Change and subsequent Defence reviews sought to deliver the electorate a 'Peace Dividend', despite the fact that the demand placed on our Armed Forces has been higher since the Cold War. During the Soviet era, the threat was palpable even to the civilian population, most of whom had personal memories of the Second World War. As time marched on, however, the role of our Armed Forces was no longer to repel the Russian hordes and changed to one of World Policeman, involving us in conflicts which increasing numbers of civilians felt were none of our business. Only those with a grasp of European history could perceive any threat to the UK or her interests by the war in the Balkans, yet we were the second largest contributor to UNPROFOR and SFOR. Even today, many people across social media refer to the Iraq war as an 'illegal' one and hold former Prime Minister Tony Blair responsible for 'war crimes' for having involved us in that conflict. This despite a credible terrorist threat, many civilians do not hold our Armed Forces in high regard and would rather their tax monies were spent on healthcare, education and welfare, leaving the authors and influencers of that positive policy direction to try and make a silk purse for service personnel and their families out of the sow's ear provided by the Treasury.

Chapter Nine: The story of the stories

Given the methodological nature of this work, this section will be written in the first person.

9.1: Context and background

This thesis has itself been a story and that has been a product of both design and circumstance. An essay, a dissertation or even a book can often be composed in a relatively short time but there is prose in this work that was first laid down over six years ago. Then, I was a retired RAF officer and until not long before I began this story I had been a Military and Veterans academic, studying for a taught doctorate in education before being *poached* to do a PhD instead. By 2019 I was again a regular Army officer after an interval of 15 years and fully employed, running a busy military mental health team. During the course of my studies I have moved house four times, suffered with depression and latterly been diagnosed with ADHD, seen my mother and father-in-law both die, changed jobs twice, joined the Army Reserve, had four of my (six) children leave home, re-joined the Army, lived through COVID, spent 18 months off sick and finally secured an academic post at Teesside University, teaching student nurses – the thing I had wanted to do since 1989. Somehow, through all of that I have also managed to compile and curate this collection of stories and inescapably woven my own story into the fabric of the overall tale.

The methodology was chosen for me, although I was well within my rights to change it had I not been content, but in fact it was a good fit with my skill set as a mental health nurse and made me reflect on the stories I had been told, over the twenty years I had practiced in mental health, by my clientele. Principally, and consistent with Markham Shaw's (1997) notion of 'impression management', I had learned that people will tell you what they want you to hear. As a clinician, I needed to consider that in my interpretation of what I was told and it was no different when I

was interviewing my research cohort. However, my studies of the last few years have re-focused my professional approach. In particular, narrative researcher and former mental health service user Russo (2016) complained of being *interpreted* rather than *heard* and on encountering that observation I stopped in my tracks, figuratively speaking. As a nurse teacher I exhort my students to practice 'active listening' and whilst that is an established concept in mental health practice, I felt forced to reflect on whether I had practiced it myself…or whether I was *interpreting* rather than actively listening to what I was being told. I also reflected on the interviews I had conducted and wondered the same thing; had I been *searching for data* at the expense of actually listening to the story I was being told? Reflecting on it now, I don't think I was. For good or ill, my strategy for the interviews had been, as far as was possible, for them to be akin to mutually stimulating and beneficial 'chats' with a 'mate'. As noted earlier in this work, there is an aphorism popular in the military that states that one has, 'lots of mates, but very few friends'. This is double-edged, of course, but simply being part of the Military Bubble, either as a serving member or a veteran, almost immediately accords 'mate' status to any fellow one meets and I exploited that in my interviews.

What was heart-warming was that my 'mates' wanted to tell me a good story, full of anecdotal adversity, trial and tribulation, high points and low points, yet reflect on it with fondness and a knowing nostalgia that could only have been offered to a fellow veteran, as I was then and am again now. Someone who had *been there, done that and got the tee-shirt*, as the military aphorism goes. In that respect, it is almost ethnographic, albeit that the experiences have been discontinuous and so the reflexive component has been the glue that has held together a patchwork of tales that span decades.

Composing the introduction was difficult, though engaging. It seems to me that many of the challenges faced by the Armed Forces stem from a fundamental misunderstanding of what the military is all about, in terms of philosophy, morality, ethos and culture. Therefore to try and communicate something of that to a non-military readership was both a challenge and an opportunity. It sits within the epistemological quandary between knowing something by description and knowing something by experience. You cannot *tell* someone how to ride a bicycle; they have to sit in the saddle, grip the handlebars and find their balance themselves. Similarly, in relation to my work as an educator and my studies as a researcher, for a kinaesthetic learner like myself, no amount of textbooks or journal articles will help me to do something without *doing* it. In that, I embody the 'theory practice gap' that concerns nurse

educators. However rather than choose a nursing analogy, consider this: should you ever find yourself in the fictional situation of being on an aircraft when the cabin crew ask if there's anyone on board who can fly a plane, would you rather someone stand up who was an expert in theoretical aeronautics – or would you rather have a *bona fide* trained pilot? So it is with many experiences in life and no less so with military life. It has no parallel. There is no analogue. Unless you have lived it you cannot fully know - hence the difficulty in composition. Congruent experience cannot and should not be a prerequisite however, as Berkovic (2020) observes that being an 'insider researcher' can have its problems, not least in that it may challenge the subject's sense that they are the 'expert' on their own story. Meanwhile in the clinical domain Davies (2011) considered recognition of 'sameness' and 'otherness' as important, intersubjective components in building an effective therapeutic alliance and given the noted symbiosis between mental health and narrative, the same could be applied to a research partnership between researcher and subject(s). Thus readers of my reflections herein who have lived it will recognise it and those who have not may find aspects of it strange, bewildering, confusing and possibly disturbing. With my mental health background I attribute that to perceptions of locus of control. Those of us who serve or have served will to a lesser or greater degree have an inherent, though not necessarily conscious, sense of an external locus of control. As I suggested in more formal language in the introduction, they *own* you and that can be a disturbing notion to contemplate for those who have no experience of it. Until quite recently, they *owned* your family, too – or at least they thought they did and more critically believed they had the right to think that. Times are changing.

Reviewing other theses to inform my composition of this one, I have noted quite a lot of repetition, which is something upon which I generally frown when I am marking my own (undergraduate) students' work. However, to summarise the literature review warrants repetition of the fact that almost nothing I could find, either initially or on subsequent revision, seemed to specifically apply a narrative inquiry approach to the military family. Only one work, from a Turkish academic, actually used narrative inquiry to talk about and to mothers of Turkish soldiers (Kaptan, 2017), although sadly it was more of a narrative-inspired opinion piece than an example of definitive research. In some respects, the lack of specific narrative inquiries into military family life is a good thing. It forced me to cast my net wide and thereafter piece together fragments of other works that illuminated my own inquiry. Throughout the process of project approval and study design, the intent of this work was to produce something distinctly different from the problem-centric, deficits-based material represented in the majority of military family

literature. There was no intention to actively solicit positive accounts, but there was the hope that by using narrative inquiry and setting no parameters to the stories I was told, some evidence of positive growth and experience might be encountered. That hope has been rewarded. In the end I did not actually count up how many of my references were quantitative versus qualitative, not least because as I noted in the literature review, many studies were or appeared to be mixed methods works, exploiting qualitative methodologies then having to render their results into something tangible, usually for whomsoever has funded their research or the policy makers they hope to influence. Reading such articles reminded me of my time at staff college, where it was explained to us that when we wrote a formal Service paper, in all likelihood the intended recipient (a much more senior officer) would read the introduction and conclusion and skip all the turgid prose in the middle. In fact, in preparation for conducting the literature review I had had yet another go at trying to read up on inferential statistics and so forth in the expectation that I was 'supposed to know' all of that in order to critique any quantitative work I was reviewing, but I was quickly disabused of that notion in supervision. Nevertheless, that left me with pages and pages of reference material that were of very limited use to me. In essence, the literature merely confirmed what were the known problems and were therefore of some use in informing what areas I should focus on in interrogating my own data. Much of the literature was sourced from health journals, which explains the health bias of many articles. Sometimes, when deeply immersed in the literature review phase, I had to remind myself that I was not looking at the literature as a mental health nurse.

Having been given a methodology to work with, my anticipation at the beginning of this study is that I would come to deeply understand narrative inquiry but, looking back over this work, I would certainly not consider myself as any kind of expert but rather a new enthusiast, eager to learn more whilst acknowledging my kinaesthetic bias to have to learn by *doing*. Reflecting more broadly, all of my academic endeavour up until that point had benefited from some form of structure. Even the two years I spent on a taught doctoral programme had direction and fixed outcomes to be achieved. Arming myself with a textbook and a handful of articles on narrative inquiry did not enlighten me, because I was looking for a structured guide, a methodological protocol, a coherent plan. None of that seemed apparent in narrative inquiry. No narrative theorist I encountered offered a clear recipe for their signature dish. Retreating back within my comfort zone of nursing theory, I think Benner (1984) would be generous to consider me an Advanced Beginner. That said, it has been put to me several times that a PhD is a bit like a driving test. You don't really learn to drive until you have passed your test and are let loose on

your own, so perhaps I should accept Advanced Beginner status with better grace and park it alongside 'new enthusiast'?. After all, there are so many support groups in universities, including my own, for new or 'early career' researchers that it must be an accepted notion that one is an 'advanced beginner'.

9.2:   The thread of the thesis

Conducting the interviews felt like a privilege and a responsibility, in many respects, that people would let me into their lives for a short time to hear something of their own experience, and one can consider that in the context of narrative ethics (Kim, 2016). Her view of narrative ethics is fundamentally no different to my understanding of nursing ethics; it is person-centred and built on working respectfully *with* the other party, maintaining their dignity and being faithful to their expectations. Ergo, just as I sought storied data, they sought and deserved a faithful representation of their stories herein and that was the basis of the sense of responsibility. I was also aware that whilst there was a ubiquitous commonplace to the stories I gathered, each would be individual. Not that I ever anticipated referring to Dostoevsky in this work, it was interesting to note in Hermans' (2001) exploration of the narrative self that, in his paraphrasing and assessment of Dostoevsky's works, he observed:

"There is a plurality of consciousnesses and worlds instead of a multitude of characters and fates within a unified objective world".

So, whilst a 'multitude of characters' were introduced in Chapter Four, I had to acknowledge that each of them would occupy one of a 'plurality of consciousnesses and worlds'. That is to say, I had to be prepared to find both commonality and individuality.

 My early, pre-interview concerns about positionality proved unfounded and were consistent with the experience of Williams *et al* (2020) of a young, female non-military researcher interviewing older veterans. In her account she:

"…noted how the men's previous military ranks were not noticeable upon initial encounters, and that the RBL seemed to promote an all-inclusive, supportive environment:

Unless they told me, or I looked at their screening questionnaires, I wouldn't have been able to tell that so and so was a higher rank. Everyone seems to get involved and they encourage each other to take on various different roles and responsibilities. Victor (a retired officer) *was even making cups of tea today. (Researcher field note/February, 2015)"*

Thus the beginning of the story, even before the beginning of the subjects' stories, was one of establishing contact, seeking consent, and finding mutual time, before introductions and 'rapport building' and subliminally establishing our 'positions'.

As a mental health nurse I find face-to-face interviewing infinitely preferable to other means, but the practicalities and geographical spread of my cohort meant that Skype and telephone interviews had to be included too. This latter option denied me a host of opportunities to contemporaneously make note of non-verbal cues and communication. Kim (2016) describes one view of narrative inquiry as 'performance', in which non-verbal cues and situation are as much part of the narrative as the spoken content and so for Skype and telephone interviews I was arguably not getting the full picture. In the case of those who invited me into their homes to conduct the interview (SP1 and SP5), not only could I read their non-verbal communications but I could also see for myself evidence of their links to the military. There were pictures and ornaments and other memorabilia in both houses that subliminally – but clearly to the discerning observer – communicated that this was a 'military family' home.

Remote interviewing was further impeded by technology. Unfortunately, as alluded to in my earlier comments about Nvivo, although I am no technophobe I am not as competent with technology as I used to be and on one occasion a ninety minute interview failed to record. I am grateful to the respondent who, on hearing the news, was quite happy to be re-interviewed…and didn't laugh too hard. Unfortunately for me, Professor Kiernan is very much a techno*phile* and was constantly exasperated by my reluctance to embrace technological solutions. I composed my reference list manually, for example, simply because I did not (and still do not) understand EndNote and could not afford to purchase it either.

The early minutes of each interview were inevitably given over to scene-setting, alongside the rapport building and settling in. Despite having sent them all the Patient Information Leaflet, I had to explain as best I could to each respondent what I was doing and why. In retrospect I am

quite happy to admit that I did not know exactly what I was doing as, that early in the project, I had only the most superficial grasp of what narrative inquiry was, based on its inclusion in a session on qualitative methodologies in my EdD and some hasty and slightly bewildered literature searching. As a result I wasn't sure whether asking me to use a methodology of which I had no practical experience and little theoretical knowledge was intentionally heuristic. Ergo, just as I was introducing my research subjects to the idea of narrative inquiry I was also introducing myself to it as a *thing* I was actively *doing*, rather than as an opaque and abstract concept in a text-book. See earlier comments about kinaesthetic learning. A measure of my discomfiture in introducing the concept can be seen in this extract from the transcript taken from SP9:

"I'm using the methodology called narrative inquiry. Have you heard of narrative inquiry? And the basic idea is that it's about... It's a very, sort of... I was going to say ethnographic, which isn't technically true because ethnography is a separate methodology. But, it's basically about going and asking people to tell their story. And, you know, you retain ownership of your story. So, it starts where you want and ends where you want. It contains what you want. But, what I'm looking for is the story of family life in the services. You know, so as a starter for ten, I can ask a, sort of, opening question - which is were you married before you joined up?"

This was hardly an example of supreme confidence in what I was doing. The difference between the story of the thesis and the stories that informed it is that the latter were reflective whereas the former was prospective. Their stories of the past were building a story of the future One could take the view that my subjects' stories were over and done with in an hour or two, but the very purpose of their contributions was to furnish this story and so they endure, even if the teller has long since forgotten about it. The data capture phase was very early in the story of this thesis and I have only been lucky enough to bump into two of my cohort since, one of whom had indeed forgotten all about it!

The middle of this story then took place once most of the stories had been captured. I was able to add a couple more, critically from non-serving family members, but in general the middle related to trying to make something coherent from a lot of data (A continuous document containing all transcripts runs to 252 pages). Whilst it might seem like having put the cart before the horse, it was at this point that I started to acquire a tenuous grasp of what I was supposed to

be doing. In practicing what I preach to my own students I tend to avoid direct quotes wherever possible, but Kim (2016) summed up what I was feeling more eloquently than could I:

"…you might feel as if you were in an endless maze of issues of narrative enquiry … some issues seem as elusive as a mirage, escaping our full grasp, as they branch out in so many directions depending on the angle from which you look at them. But this is not to discourage our exploration; rather, it is to acknowledge the kind of joyful, awe-filled moments we might experience by looking through a kaleidoscope."

At that stage in proceedings, I'm not sure a kaleidoscope was what I needed. When I finished my mental health nurse training in 2002, my personal tutor asked me how it had been and I told him it had been as if I were an apprentice carpenter and joiner – as I had been many years before – and going to college to learn what it feels like to be a tree and have your roots burrowing into the earth, the sun shining on your leaves and the rain quenching your thirst…when all I really wanted to know was how to make a coffee table! In short, I had a head full of theory but no real idea what to do out in clinical practice. I had no 'toolbox' of skills with which to go and ply my trade. Now that I am the one doing the teaching, I try my hardest to make sure I do not put my own students in the same position and yet I still reiterate to them that, at the end of the day, the only tool you really have is *you*. Narrative inquiry seems much the same to me. It appears not to be a prescriptive methodology that you *do to* people; like mental health practice it is an iterative exercise in personal engagement, collaboration and discovery that is undertaken *with* people.

Given my never having actually *done* any research before in the practical sense (the honours in my undergraduate degree related to literature review) I initially found the analysis phase that formed the middle of my story to be more familiar than the data capture, because I was working with text. Initially however, I defaulted to thematic analysis as that had been a feature of my undergraduate dissertation. It was quite some time before I came to appreciate that I had the opportunity for more than that.

9.3: Inconclusive conclusions…and some recommendations

Everybody got mixed feelings
About the function and the form
Everybody got to deviate from the norm

(Vital Signs – Rush)

In contrast with most other methodologies, it seems that narrative inquiry affords no concrete conclusions, but rather provides a space for, *'multiple voices or multiple interpretations to emerge, and yielding no final and complete truth'* (Kim, 2016). However in this case there is something to conclude in terms of the journey that each one of the stories described in their own unique ways. Although we omitted the original sub-title of 'narratives from enlistment to discharge' in terms of its overly prescriptive boundaries, there remained an inescapable journeyed quality both in temporality and growth that was ubiquitous. Perhaps more prominently than most civilian employment, there is a clear development and progression pathway that overlays each SP's career and the SP's family life experience changes as their SP progresses. Meanwhile, children grow and spouses develop as they journey along. Whilst one cannot find it formally recorded anywhere, service in the military does have a central plot that can be seen across these stories. Central plots are a *commonplace* in society as well, in the shape of expectations, assumptions, and stereotypes and the 'rules' established on the basis of 'the norm'. This is social constructivism at work, formed from a myriad of influences, both formal and informal. Yet I would wager that every person on the planet has experienced being an 'exception to the rules' or a 'square peg in a round hole'. For comparison, in higher education 'the norm' is a fresh-faced, single 18 year old (or perhaps a 19 year old after a gap year), who's going to live in halls for their first year, move out into student digs in their second year and have the time of their lives. Meanwhile, most of my nursing students are older (some as old as me), often married with children and have little to no interest in the social milieu of university life; they are here to train as nurses and the three-year undergraduate programme that has been overlayed onto the Nursing and Midwifery Council's mandated three-years of nurse training is a secondary matter. They are square pegs in HE's round hole. Similarly in the Armed Forces and excluding junior entry and officers, 'the norm' is a 18-24 year old single person, statistically likely to be male, who will live in Single Living Accommodation and advance through the ranks at a predicted pace to conclude their service as a Warrant Officer and who is likely to marry young

(Hogan & Siefert, 2010) and require Service Families Accommodation. That 'norm' is used as a career and HR planning assumption by the three Services' respective manning authorities.

What can we conclude from that? Well, to an extent therefore the basic building blocks of the plot for the stories of each of the families was predetermined; set out for them at the start of their SP's career. What made them interesting was where there were deviations from the central plot. In this section then I will summarise the stories of each family in my cohort and consider it against the themes that were distilled out from the initial thematic analysis (Appendix 2). It should be remembered that with the exception of theme 7 (positive growth or experience) the remaining themes were intended to be neither positive nor negative. 'Impact on spouse', for example, could be both a negative impact, such as the emotional turmoil of separation or it could be positive, such as career development opportunity.

Family 1's story began before they became a military family, albeit that SP1 was already at that point a veteran (Royal Tank Regiment) and that they were already an established family unit. Their story reflected separation, impact on spouse and children's experience almost immediately, because the family remained in the family home when SP1 initially went off to re-join the Army:

"T went away to Germany, didn't you, you were posted to Germany, which I found, initially very difficult cos it was a bit like whoa how does this work then. You know you're over there I'm over here, doesn't kinda work in my head…

…: So you kinda introduce 2 children to a potential new partner and then he leaves again and goes off to Germany."

That they had a story that pre-dated enlistment vindicated the decision to change the title and aims of the research from that initially specified ('Understanding the experiences of military families: *a narrative from enlistment to discharge'*). They were not the only family whose story began before enlistment and theirs, as with others, extended beyond discharge so my initial instincts were well placed.

Their story deviated from the central plot in two primary of ways; firstly by being already a family at the beginning and secondly by SP1 being a re-entrant. That SP1 eventually retired as a

sergeant is not necessarily a reflection of under-achievement on his part, but almost certainly a product of his having deviated from 'the norm', by having served, left and re-joined…with a family in tow. As their story progressed what was also intriguing was the degree to which SP1's wife adapted to and then seemed to fully embrace the 'Army wife' lifestyle and ethos. Furthermore their children all subsequently joined up, making them a truly embedded military family in perpetuity, much like my own.

SP2's experience followed the plot to a greater extent, although the RAF plot is slightly different to the Army plot, insofar as until recently the Army plot was based on joining at 18, serving a 22 year engagement and 'retiring' at the age of forty whereas the RAF plot allowed for service to age fifty-five. This is part of the reason why promotion is noticeably slower in the RAF compared to the Army, because the manning authority are not 'pushing' their personnel to hit milestones on a 22 year career pathway. SP2 deviated slightly in that he joined as an airman in a ground trade and only later switched to aircrew, during which time he had got married and thus brought family into the equation. One could postulate, particularly given my substantial lived experience of both the Army and the RAF, that had he stayed in his ground trade and worked his way steadily up through the ranks to retire at fifty-five, his first marriage might have endured. Switching to aircrew however resulted in an order of magnitude increase in his career focus and the amount of separation, which had an inevitable impact on his wife and his child's experience. In ground trades he would not have had as many detachments, deployments and courses to attend and furthermore his family life would have been more static and predictable. His second marriage was more fortuitous in that his wife could continue her career more or less uninterrupted, even after he left the RAF and transferred his skills to civilian employment.

Just as with Family 1, Family 3 were already established at the point at which SP3 joined up and so their story also pre-dated enlistment and, as with Family 1 the first challenge was separation, as SP3 had to undertake phase one (basic) training alone. In his case, transferring to the QARANC as a student nurse, his phase two training was the three-year long BSc in Nursing at the Defence School of Health Care Studies and he was able to have his family join him in Birmingham for those years. This is unlike most other trades in the Army, where both phase one and phase two would be conducted as if all recruits/trainees were single soldiers, however phase two for most trades is much shorter than for nursing. This factor also allowed Family 3 to settle into military family life in a predictable and stable setting, since SP3 would not be absent on courses or sent on deployments during his three year course. Whilst there is no

geographically distinct military community in Birmingham, as families (and single personnel) are dispersed across the city, discrete groups still formed that afforded the family a sense of military social cohesion that set the tone for the future. Subsequently as his career developed, his wife and children were equal enthusiasts in their family adventures and opportunities for positive growth. It should be noted for transparency that I knew SP3's wife personally and although for various reasons she was unable to provide a formal interview for this work, my having known her gives me a certain degree of confidence in my assessment. As noted earlier, Family 3's military life was truncated by unfortunate family circumstances back home in Trinidad, by which time the children were independent adults, but both SP3 and his wife were and remain keen to return to the UK military when circumstances allow.

SP4 also joined up with an established family in tow, but SP4 was already a qualified Registered Nurse and so the brief separation they experienced during SP4's basic training, as with SP3, was manageable. SP4's career followed the 'script' of the RAF plot fairly closely thereafter, with him serving to fifty-five and retiring as a Warrant Officer. His family remained supportive throughout his career and rather than reporting any negative impact, in interview his wife focused on examples of positive growth and life experience as a result of their varied and interesting life together in Germany, Cyprus and the UK. Both of their sons took advantage of the military subsidy to attend boarding schools and though the younger son had a more difficult time than the older one, his reflections in interview were of having grown from the experience and having life skills in adulthood that he uses every day, drawn from his schooling. Family 4 also extended the story to include transition, going beyond retirement (from the RAF) through SP4's continued employment as an MOD Civil Servant. Whilst the family were now settled back in East Lancashire and held a sense of a 'return to normality', the military connection was maintained.

Family 5's story was closest of all to the Army plot, albeit that SP5 did not make it to Warrant Officer before the end of his service. In interview he did not mention that and I did not ask but, on reflection, notwithstanding the prescribed career pathway, the Army does value career soldiers who 'find their level' and are happy to stay there. Reflexively, it reminds me of something my father – a retired senior police officer – told me about his own occupation, which itself owes much of its organisational structure, culture and ethos to the military. He asserted that a police officer who chose to remain a constable, in the manner of the apocryphal 'village bobby', was greatly respected in police forces as the bedrock of their trade. Following the script,

SP5 joined up single, married young and produced offspring who followed him into the Army. Their story was one of his wife being content to follow him around as his career progressed and capitalise on opportunities as they presented themselves, such as working for her husband's commanding officer as a housekeeper, which brought with it social advantages and a degree of respect within the military community. Much of their family life together was spent in Germany, which was reflected upon very much as a positive experience and the story included a similarly positive account of transition. Like SP1, the story also included reflections on service life from the perspective of a parent of serving soldiers, most of which was positive but some of which was expressed in terms of being dubious, though not unduly concerned, about more recent developments in relation to military family life. Between Families 1 and 5 we see the best representations of the *Regimental* family, a facet of the overall story that is critical to understanding the benefits of military community cohesion and something which was less overt in other stories. As noted earlier, this is largely down to the fact that with few exceptions only the Teeth Arms appear to be rigorously maintaining the Regimental family principle and support arms and Corps have become more diffuse and amorphic.

At this point, to offer an early segue into the next section, I will briefly cover Family 6…my family. We also 'deviated from the norm' from the outset, in being an established family unit at the point of my enlistment. Also, my route in was atypical, insofar as I had been a Reservist officer, then taken advantage of a full time arrangement (that pre-dated Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS), as it is know today) and deployed to Bosnia for six months during the two years of that engagement. As a result, when I went to Sandhurst in 1999 my family were already acclimatised to my periodic absence. Furthermore, at that stage we were still living in our own home, close to other family and friends and so the impact on Caroline was minimal in comparison to other families. Ergo, when we finally decided to embrace military family life it was as an adventure we were sharing together. Over the course of the ensuing sixteen years however, there was a mixture of experiences, some negative and some positive. My wife, who had had to abandon her nurse training whilst in third year, was never able to re-engage with nurse training, or consider any other long course leading to qualification in anything else, due to our mobility. For the children, it could be argued that their education suffered, however having now seen five of our six reach adulthood and find their niche in life, one could argue that they gained more than they lost from their itinerant educational journey and their experiences in a military family. My wife has been impacted by circumstances outwith the military bubble however, insofar as nurse training has now become all-graduate and without level 3

qualifications she cannot currently re-engage. She is, however, working as an NHS Health Care Assistant and a route now exists to enrol on a Degree Apprenticeship and continue to earn a salary, whilst concurrently training to become a Registered Nurse.

Family 7's story bore striking similarities with Family 2. SP7 had also joined as a single serviceman and married young. Initially their story followed the Army plot and just as with SP2, had he not made the career move to the RAPTC (Royal Army Physical Training Corps) that marriage too might have endured. Although it developed more gradually in his case, his career move brought with it the same magnitudinal impact on his family, as the nature of his employment, his personal appetite for his work and his blurring of the lines between the two brought more and more instances of separation. Also mirroring SP2, he commissioned in mid-career, which stepped up the demands on him – and the attendant impact on his first wife – yet another notch. Both families suffered therefore at the hands of Segal's (1988) seminal model of 'Greedy Institutions'. Again, he married again later in his career, at a point where circumstances afforded greater stability and predictability and this aspect of his story extended into transition and life beyond, as he continued to serve on an FTRS basis. For clarity, FTRS is basically divided into two main contracts, 'Full Commitment' and 'Home Commitment'. Full Commitment, as I was, is contractually identical to full Regular employment, the only distinction being that it is a relatively short, fixed-term contract. Home Commitment however is an arrangement whereby the contract holder is non-deployable (save in a few discrete circumstances) and only eligible for duty on (and paid for) working weekdays (again, save in a few discrete circumstances). This is how SP's can continue their employment with the military after retirement from the Regular force and still offer their families stability and the chance to settle down.

Family 8 presented a complex picture owing to their composition and history. This was in essence an opportunity to get two distinct, albeit related, stories at once. The female contributor had never served, however she was the daughter of an RAF couple who both served and had useful recollections of military family life from over forty years ago that provided an intriguing counterpoint to the experiences of more recently served military families. Her husband was her second husband and he too had been married before, therefore his story related similarly to other SPs in its account of his previous military family life with his first wife. Inspired by his grandfather who had been an infantry soldier and having 'skipped school' in his own words, he had joined very young – at 16 – and had been channelled into aircraft engineering from the outset by the Army Careers Office staff. In common with other stories he also married young,

having met his wife while he was still in his phase two training and marrying on completion, at which point his wife was already carrying their first child. Consistent with Hogan & Siefert's (2010) observations, his wife was motivated in many ways by the same drive that he had had to join up; to get out of sleepy Dorset and find some excitement. However a posting to Germany caused disharmony. Given the vintage of their story in the early nineteen-seventies, his wife's father had served in the RAF during the war and she still harboured very negative views of the Germans. That said, she was reported to have loved Germany once she got out there, but had less love for the Army. There were no married quarters at that time and the family were isolated from the rest of the unit in a rented German house. It was also whilst in Germany that their son was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. This led eventually to earnestly seeking a return to the UK, but the associated stressors of the time ended their marriage. As with other stories, SP8's extended through transition into life after the services, wherein his specialist skills led him straight into almost identical employment as an aircraft engineer for Westland.

Family 9's story featured similarities between Families 3 and 4 (and 6), largely because SP9 was a fellow nurse. He had joined up as a qualified nurse, albeit that he would have had to go through processes with the Nursing and Midwifery Council to recognise his Zimbabwean qualification. There was no established family unit at the outset, but he was in a relationship that developed into marriage and subsequently bore children. The early stages of the story followed the (RAF) plot, but unlike SPs 2 and 7, SP9 sought the commissioned route far earlier in his career, bringing the associated pressures to bear far sooner in the family's life together. This was illustrated in his story by the fact that he and his wife separated for a short period before being reconciled, but the manner of his story-telling and the content of the story intimated that his wife never really settled to military family life. His children however seemed to thrive on the opportunities presented and there was no report of adverse impacts on their education in his tale. Furthermore, notwithstanding her apparent discomfiture with military family life, his wife did at least have a readily transferrable skill set as a nurse (RN Adult), albeit that she was impeded in developing her career in line with her aspirations by the itineracy of their shared life. SP9's story deviated dramatically from the plot when he had to return to Zimbabwe and end his career earlier than planned. That his marriage also ended, partly as a result of separation – some of which was voluntary and for which SP9 appeared regretful in retrospect – and partly through circumstance.

Finally, Family 10's story also started long before enlistment, yet one could argue that in so doing it was very much in line with the Army plot, or at least a very common sub-plot, wherein a discrete cohort of those who join are those who have 'always' known they were going to be soldiers. As such, they are distinct from another discrete cohort, usually from the other ranks, who joined the Army to escape from something. The early part of his story followed the script as it applies to a young officer; career-focused, not interested in getting tied down, multiple, short-term sexual relationships. Even once he met his wife, they continued to exploit the benefits they perceived from their lifestyle as a young, child-free couple. Perhaps the most compelling aspect was that this 'dashing young infantry officer', who had wanted to be a soldier since childhood, was then profoundly disturbed and affected by the 'reality of war'. So much so that the after-effects of his personal encounter with combat adversely affected his mental health and ultimately led to both a truncated career and arguably the demise of his marriage. This latter point is ironic and not a little sad, because his eloquent story encapsulated the disdain he felt for those 'proto-brigadiers', as he put it, who put their careers before everything else in their lives.

9.3.1: Where do we go from here?

Implicit in the observations made early in this thesis was the notion that the data found in the existing literature pointed to difficulties and challenges faced by military families affecting only a minority and that through balanced, value-neutral story-gathering it might be possible to learn something of value from the majority, who either tolerated the difficulties and challenges uncomplainingly or who adapted to survive. Whilst I submit that I have demonstrated elements of that in the course of this thesis, the process itself has also taught me, or at least reaffirmed to me, that everyone is an individual. Whether they are subordinated to the subliminal uniformity of social constructs or to the overt uniformity of military service, all individuals will find ways to exercise their individuality. The same can be said of individual families. In Chapter eight, I attempted to explore some of the policy influences and implications on military families. What I have taken from that does not constitute a conclusion, but it does reaffirm my belief that the logistic and bureaucratic convenience of 'one size fits all' policy-making does those to whom resultant policies apply a disservice.

Each story was different, but each family found its own ways to adapt to military family life, some with more success than others. It cannot be ignored that the three families (four, if you

count my own) who were already established when the SP joined up survived the military family phase of their lives and endured. In contrast, aside from Family 5, the families that became established once the SP's career had begun fared less well. Whilst that would not be grounds for recommending that the Armed Forces only recruit married people, it does offer up the notion that there might be more that could be done to support servicemen and women embarking on the formation of a family. Reprising the aforementioned individuality however, there could be no 'one size fits all' approach to that and many couples may find that they have ample support and sources of advice from family, friends and peers. What could be done, however, is to research adaptive coping amongst military families, to add to the evidence base for support that currently exists and to justify further support.

Much of the literature included in the early reviews for this work featured stories of combat-related PTSD survivors, in relation to the impact of their service and survivorhood on their families. Drawing particularly on SP10's story, what might derive from this work is research into servicemen who had fulfilled a lifelong ambition in joining up, only to find that having experienced exactly what they joined up for, it changed them in fundamental ways. There are potential stories of deep self-doubt, questioning and potential reconciliation and self-discovery to be found there.

Whilst it was in no way part of the research design for this work, the fact that three of the nine families were fellow nurses, largely as a result of the practicalities of convenience sampling, is no bad thing in the wider picture. Albeit that this is being submitted for a Doctorate of Philosophy, the university brigades this study within the School of Health and Life Sciences and particularly under Nursing. This has some potentially useful implications. Firstly, I believe I have demonstrated herein the symbiosis between a narrative inquiry approach and the norms of clinical mental health practice, which warrants further investigation and also offers scope to inform both parties to this symbiosis. The constructs, considerations and philosophies that underpin narrative inquiry could enhance clinical practice and a greater awareness of and interest in narrative inquiry could result in an increase in nursing research that adopts and advances the methodology.

In personal terms, where I go from here will be to venture deeper into narrative inquiry through further research projects. Reflecting on this journey, there was a clear missed opportunity in not coming to appreciate the methodology until long after I had conducted the active phase of my

research. I have covered this and will not reiterate, but I will draw out that I wish I had known of the expectation of follow-up interviews and co-authorship much earlier in the journey. Armed with that knowledge I have even greater enthusiasm for embarking on further narrative inquiry and whilst I may not be in a position to pursue that with military and/or veteran research subjects, I can see ready application to nurse education. Given that Clandinin and others grew their mastery of narrative within an educational context, that gives me a sense of *bringing it home.*

9.3.2: (Tentative) Recommendations

As noted at the top of this chapter in relation to conclusions, narrative inquiry may not necessarily point to any recommendations. However, it does seem that it might afford scope for tentative recommendations for further research, which have been outlined above.

There were a number of speculative recommendations for further research within the body of the text and more overtly in the section above, but to summarise I would also recommend:

A study into spousal employment and whether, under the auspices of the Armed Forces Covenant, companies with national reach could be incentivised to 'post' military spouses to the same area as the SP. In this I am thinking particularly of other public services such as the NHS or indeed the Civil Service, but also companies we see on every high street who could transfer their employees. Ergo, if a military spouse is developing a career in one location and their employer has an operation close to the family's intended destination on posting of their SP, they could continue that career development unimpeded by simply transferring their location. This might be more difficult in the private sector, for companies whose business model is franchised rather than centrally managed, but where there's a will there may be a way.

In the same vein and as mentioned in Chapter 6, there should be more done to operationalise the transferability of healthcare, and in particular dental care, from location to location. Whether any research is needed on that point is up for discussion, because it seems to be an accepted fact.

Additionally, further UK based research into the military culture itself as it is represented within HM Armed Forces would be very useful, to identify what value it adds and why it should be

preserved. I say 'why' rather than 'whether' because for so long as we need military forces for national defence and to honour international obligations, we will need to preserve its efficiency, which is underpinned by the culture of its agents. In considering that against the Institutional/Occupational model it is worth remembering that such a distinction need not be binary – that elements of Institution can and arguably should be retained, whilst concurrently acceding to society's demand for more occupational liberty.

Perhaps most pertinently, given the initial aims of this study, it would be revealing to conduct more active research into examples of military families' positive growth and experience to see what might be capitalised upon and enhanced. The notion of the family and the support it gives to their SP as a *force multiplier,* that I have intentionally highlighted throughout this work, does seem to be gaining currency here as well as in the USA where it is already well established. Clearly identifying what needs to be changed should be balanced against what is valuable and what should be retained in order to maximise the military family experience.

9.4: Closing reflections

A reflection on re-engaging with the 'Service Family Experience'

When I began this study, I was a recently retired military officer (RAF Squadron Leader), working as a locum civilian nurse in a military mental health team. Today, I am a lecturer in Mental Health Nursing at Teesside University but in the intervening years I re-joined the Army and was back serving as a regular military officer (Army Major). Being back in the fold meant re-subordinating myself – and my family – to the military life and involved relocating from North Yorkshire to Hampshire, on being posted in as the team leader of the Department of Community Mental Health in Aldershot. This turn of events afforded me the opportunity to reflect on my family's experience of returning to service life and compare it with what I had found in the stories offered by my research cohort, of which only Family 1 had had the experience of having left and re-joined – and that was only in the case of the SP. Ergo, we were unique as a family in having been *reinserted into the Matrix.*

In the anticipation phase, there was a collective mood of optimism and excitement at the prospect of another *family adventure.* I had a long association going back to 1992 with the Aldershot area, not least because until about a decade ago Keogh Barracks at Aldershot was the 'home' of the Defence Medical Services and I had been on countless courses there. However, to that point, I hadn't been able to share any of that with my family. Meanwhile, my wife had family in West Sussex and, as a family, we had visited the area – less than an hour's drive from Aldershot – many times in the past. So there was a real sense of opportunity and hope. This same sense seemed to feature in the stories told by Families 1, 3 and 4, who albeit in different ways looked to benefit from the new experiences that would be on offer.

However, our optimism was tempered by the growing reality of the move and the net impact on us as a family was significant stress. Our particular stress as a family was also compounded by the fact that Service Families Accommodation was still, a quarter of a Century on from the Bett Review (Bett, 1995), allocated on the basis of my rank and not my requirement, meaning that we had to significantly downsize. As a family of eight, we were living in a 6-bedroomed house in Yorkshire which had an additional room on the ground floor we were able to use as a seventh bedroom. This allowed all six of our children to have their own room, which given that four of the six were adults at the time was rather essential. None of the families interviewed had faced this

particular challenge, although prior to the Bett Review there were many instances of junior personnel with large families being expected to live in houses too small for their needs. In our case, facing the prospect of moving to a 4-bedroomed Army house in Aldershot, three of our adult children who were in full-time employment in Yorkshire elected to move out at the same time as the rest of us relocated. Whilst to a dispassionate observer that seems logical and sensible, it had an inescapable emotional impact particularly on my wife and two youngest children. We joked at the time about 'divorcing' the three of them and as we packed up the house it did have a surreal quality to the experience, as we had to divide up our belongings between the Hampshire cohort and the Yorkshire cohort, but at a deeper level it adversely affected my wife, who harboured a strong sense that we had 'abandoned' three of our children.

My wife and I were roughly the same age as our now-independent adult children when we got married and bought a house. However back in 1990 we didn't have the 'benefit' of mobile phone technology – indeed we didn't even have a landline phone for quite some time – whereas when we moved down to Aldershot every minor difficulty, disagreement or crisis was almost instantly communicated to us from the Northern branch of our family. This resonates with the experiences of Families 1 and 5 in particular, who described similarly austere beginnings and who also now experience the benefits and sometimes pitfalls of 'instant' modern communications with their own remote offspring. I tried to remain pragmatic and practical and assist them with problem-solving, but my wife remained deeply affected and distressed at her inability, due to our significant geographical separation, to render assistance. This phenomenon featured in several stories, most prominently for Families 3 and 9, who both had to curtail their military family lives to return to their homelands for family reasons.

Speaking of the benefits and pitfalls of modern communication technology, another challenge we had not anticipated has been a reduction in our internet broadband service. When we contemplated a move to the affluent South-East from the wilds of North Yorkshire, we did not expect to find that fibre broadband would be unavailable. Indeed, I had run an online postcode checker for broadband and it indicated we would get a 'superfast' service. However, it seems that because we resided on an estate composed solely of military housing, BT Openreach have not felt it necessary to extend fibre cabling into our area. One might argue that this is a First World problem but be that as it may, in general society the internet is now as essential as any other utility and websites and software are built on an assumption that the end user is connected to superfast, fibre broadband. Previously simple aspects of personal administration,

such as online banking for example, became tortuous, time-consuming affairs punctuated by frequent glitches, as the webpage tried to download far faster than our copper cable broadband speed could accommodate.

As for the house itself, despite our efforts to downsize before we left Yorkshire, I still had a carboard-box false wall along the length of our garage, full of belongings we wished to retain, but for which we had no storage space in the house. Indeed it is commonplace on military estates to see that most families are forced to use their garage as extra storage, leaving their cars on the driveway or street. Family 5 had a good experience in Germany, where they were given a floor of what had previously been a soldiers' barrack-block as a 'flat' and had more space than they knew what to do with. Inevitably perhaps, when they came back to the UK as he was transitioning out of the Army and bought a house, after sixteen years in Germany they had a significant surplus of both furniture and belongings. Inside our new house, where previously I had space for a study in Yorkshire in which to lock myself away and work on my thesis, in Aldershot there was no such provision. What became my 'study' was actually the entrance hall cupboard, which was fortunately wide enough to accommodate a small desk, but which could only be accessed once I had moved the vacuum cleaner and other household paraphernalia that would normally reside exclusively in such a facility. To say it was less than ideal would be an understatement, but as an example of 'adaptive coping' it will suffice.

On hearing that I was to be posted to Aldershot, I took advantage of developments in housing management that post-date the experiences of most of my cohort. The housing process has been sub-contracted to Amey Defence Services and in some respects it is an improvement. When you login to their website you are presented with a list of 20 houses that match your entitlement, complete with pictures, floorplans and details, which is a far cry from our experience earlier in our career and certainly that of most of my research cohort. However, the software is set up to select houses that match your entitlement within a 10 mile radius and does not exclude houses that belong to other units in the same area. Thus, I selected three houses away from Aldershot in semi-rural settings for the benefit of family, but when I submitted my selection I was told that I could not have any of them, because they were associated with other units. I enquired as to why the houses had been listed in the first place and was given the apparently standard, side-stepping answer that Amey Defence Services do not control the software that populates the lists. In the end, despite initial appearances I effectively had no choice

whatsoever. I was offered three houses that were all identical and all on the same military housing estate in what I and my family would call an urban part of Aldershot.

Another First World problem from which we had hitherto been spared was the issue of school places. There was a school adjacent to our married quarter patch to which my daughter could easily walk, however when we arrived in Aldershot it was full for her year group. Everywhere else we have been as a family, given our preference for rural living, there has only ever been one school available. Down in the urban South-East, we found ourselves in a different situation. Instead of my daughter being able to walk to school in around three minutes, she instead had to traverse the whole of Aldershot to another school by public transport. One appreciates that millions of families are in the same position, but for us it was the first time we had had to face this and given that, as a family, we didn't like Aldershot very much or feel that is was 'safe' in comparison with Catterick Garrison (where we now reside again, albeit in our own home), it was yet another blow to add to the many.

Those of my research subjects who came from a mainstream Army background and particular those from the Teeth Arms talked of the 'Regimental family' and of a sense of community. For us, whilst our new neighbours were not overtly rude, neither were they overtly friendly. Furthermore with the exception of Frimley Park's Commanding Officer at the time, none of them were from my Corps or even from Army Medical Services. Additionally, we did not match the demographic that was reflected in most of the families in our neighbourhood, which predominantly comprised a young, mainstream Army officer, wife and small children. A pair of fifty-somethings with adult and teenage children were an anomaly. Another key feature of military communities is the various messing facilities, which form the social hub of the military community and of which several of my cohort spoke positively. Unfortunately, as I did not belong to a substantive, formed unit, I had to join (military regulations require mess membership) the Garrison Officers Mess, which was predominantly patronised by a host of people with whom I had nothing in common beyond the uniform we wore.

As noted early in this work, the Army in particular of the three Services structures itself around some core organisational assumptions. Most prominent of those is that every unit within the Army should be structured like every other and the template for that structure, given our core business, is that of an infantry battalion. Thus, a 'unit' should have a Commanding Officer (CO) and a headquarters element and his or her unit should be comprised of sub-units each led by an

Officer Commanding (OC). Those sub-units themselves should be further sub-divided and also have specific roles that contribute to the overall unit function. For example, each unit should have its own support company/squadron, with its own Quartermaster's Department. The headquarters company/squadron should have within it, its own Administration Office and so on. Unfortunately for those of us who serve in Medical Services or, more specifically in my case, Defence Primary Health Care, we have no such structure, which often results in difficulty getting anything done because those aforementioned unit functions are provided by non-Medical Services units who have little understanding of who we are, what we do and why we often need to do it differently to the rest of the Army. This has a knock-on effect to families.

In a generic, mainstream Army unit there would have been people and resources made available to us to facilitate our relocation. Indeed, as several of my research subjects elucidated, often it would be the whole unit that was relocating, whereas in our case we were moving as a single family. My administration was provided by Catterick Garrison's Admin Office who, by dint of their more usual role, do not normally deal very much with postings in and out except for their own Garrison staff. Similarly, Aldershot Garrison Admin Office are in the same position, whereas we are merely hosted by the Garrison. As a result, I had to do most of the administration myself and given that I am a nurse and not an administrator, the process became far more problematic than it needed to have been.

This brings into focus the way in which military personnel (HR) administration has changed over the last decade or so and for the most part after my research subjects' time. In the early 2000s, the MoD introduced over several years an online software package called Joint Personnel Administration (JPA), which placed the onus on the individual service person to manage their own personal administration. Cynics have observed, perhaps with some merit, that this was essentially a cost-cutting exercise allowing MoD to reduce the number of administration personnel. There are, however, some enduring problems with JPA. First and foremost, in keeping with the MoD's appetite for low-cost, Commercial Off The Shelf (COTS) procurement, they purchased a commercial HR platform based on Oracle software, that was in no way bespoke to the MoD requirement. It was and is a software package designed for professional HR staff and is in no way 'user-friendly' for the novice amateur administrators who are its end users. Even the onboard 'self-help' provision is unhelpful, based as it is upon erroneous assumptions about the prior knowledge of the hapless user seeking help.

Ultimately though, what it all boils down to in my view was this; I 'took the Queen's Shilling' and, as the popular Army aphorism goes, 'if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined!', or as SP1's wife might have counselled, 'suck it up, buttercup!'. However, the prospect of living in cramped, sub-standard accommodation for three years was a joke that had worn thin with my family and, though I didn't know it at the time, with me. Desperate for a solution, I hit upon the idea of applying for what was called Surplus Service Families Accommodation or, in layman's terms, an Army house where I wanted to live, which was back home in North Yorkshire. A year after we had moved to Aldershot, we moved back to Yorkshire, to a married quarter at Dishforth, home of 6 Regiment Royal Logistics Corps. However, my return to living the married unaccompanied lifestyle, with a room in the officers' mess in Aldershot rather than the flat I had enjoyed whilst at Birmingham did it for me. I had been under treatment for recurrent depression since the October of 2019 and in March 2020 I was rocked by a diagnosis of ADHD. Whilst that explained a lot about both my recurrent depression and many of the things that had troubled me all my life, the diagnosis did nothing to improve my mood. Thus by July and less than a month after we had relocated, both my motorbike and I had a 'breakdown' on the long journey home from Aldershot on a Friday evening. The motorbike packing up on the M25 left me on the hard shoulder, contemplating life, the universe and everything and by the time I had plucked up courage to phone my wife and tell her I had realised that the last straw had been broken and I was incoherent and tearful. In short, I never went back. I reported sick and stayed off sick until finally I was medically discharged in April of this year. It was not the ending to my story that I would have wished for or had expected when I re-joined the Army. Earlier, I had made numerous references to the similarity between narrative inquiry and mental health practice and several interviewees seemed to gain a cathartic experience from our interviews. Mindful of confidentiality in these matters, I will not identify individuals, but several described similar psychological challenges in the course of telling their stories.

The 'dissolution', in geographical terms, of our family undoubtedly had a big part to play in my deterioration in mental health, even if consciously I had been pragmatic about it. Whilst it is not overt in policy, there remains an expectation implicit in the regulations that adult children will have left home and they are not seen as 'entitled' dependants. This is at odds with trends in civilian life, where the last decade's legacy of employment changes, reduced opportunities and increased housing costs has meant that more and more adult children are forced to continue living with their parents for longer (Guardian, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the 1995 Bett Review which fed into Defence Costs Study 15 (Options for Change) recommended that families accommodation should be allocated on the basis of need, not rank, for Other Ranks (Pte – WO) but should continue to be allocated on the basis of rank for Commissioned Officers. Thus my 'entitlement' as an Army Major was to a Type 4 married quarter, which is 4-bedroomed. Thanks to this anomaly, when I was at RAF Brize Norton (2007-2010) I was allocated a 4-bedroomed house whilst one of my sergeants, who had five children, was allocated a 6-bedroomed house.

A summary of this reflection may also serve to sum up perhaps the principal dichotomy of the military family experience. I had been posted into a good job that, in relation to my Army career, was well located close to some key locations like the Army Medical Directorate in Camberley and potentially therefore offered me much by way of opportunity, but…

…the price my family had to pay for that was high and placed unwelcome stressors on marital and family relationships.

It had not been anticipated in any way, at the proposal and detailed design stages, that I and my family would have the opportunity to return to the military life. Having had that opportunity it has been useful to see first-hand what has changed and what has stayed the same since we first moved out of military accommodation in 2010.

Closing remarks

In final summary and given the reflexive elements contained herein, it seems appropriate to conclude with the following anecdote. When I was preparing myself to report to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for my formal officer training, I was asked by many people how I felt about it. My standard response was, "I'm looking forward to looking back on it with fondness." Given that my cohort were all veterans and that despite the tales of trials and tribulations their overall reflections were positive, I would conclude that certainly in relation to those who kindly allowed me to interview them, they have grown as a result of their family life together in the Military Bubble.

Appendix 1

NVIVO Node reduction

Whilst the latter stages of analysis were conducted with pen and paper, the initial Nvivo analysis yielded 26 themes that, for practical reasons, warranted reduction to a more manageable number. Thus the themes that emerged from the Nvivo analysis were collated and mapped into ten broader categories;

	Nvivo Themes		Collated Categories	
1	Married unaccompanied and detachments	2	Separation	
2	Safe for kids	4	Children's experience	
3	Impact on Marriage	3	Impact on spouse	
4	Resentment toward SP	3	Impact on spouse	
5	Spousal separation from family	3	Impact on spouse	
6	Regimental Family/Military Community incl. in-group intolerance	5	Military Communities	
7	Accommodation problems or benefits	6	Accommodation	
8	No career for spouse	3	Impact on spouse	
9	Army wife as an accessory	3	Impact on spouse	
10	Educational disruption/stability	7	Education	
11	Positive growth or experience	8	Positive growth or experience	
12	Enough is enough	10	Transition	
13	Communications with home	2	Separation	
14	For today's single soldiers it's just a job	9	Reflections on service life	
15	Military background for SP and/or spouse	1	Marriage	
16	Married or in a permanent relationship prior to service, or married in service	1	Marriage	
17	Service before self/family – career focus and selfishness	8+	Positive growth or experience	
18	Married in haste and/or too young	1	Marriage	
19	Coping with separation and maintenance of traditional roles	3	Impact on spouse	

20	Children an encumbrance	4	Children's experience	
21	Myth of belonging and one-way loyalty	9	Reflections on service life	
22	Settling the family down	10	Transition	
23	Continuing with married unaccompanied as veterans	10	Transition	
24	Transition	10	Transition	
25	Can't knock the Army/fond memories/good life	9	Reflections on service life	
26	Overseas postings	8	Positive growth or experience	

Thus the ten themed categories extrapolated were:

1.   **Separation**
2.   **Impact on spouse**
3.   **Military Communities**
4.   **Children's experience**
5.   **Accommodation**
6.   **Education**
7.   **Positive growth or experience**
8.   **Marriage**
9.   **Transition**
10. **Reflections on service life**

Appendix 2: Thematic Analysis

For the purposes of this work thematic analysis proved useful in allowing for mapping of known themes from existing research and the FAMCAS (MOD 2021). The graph below represents the number of incidences from the NVIVO analysis that fall into the ten refined categories or themes. Each category features three columns (**B**eginning, **M**iddle, **E**nd) to indicate where in the stories these incidences appeared.

Fam	Tot	Marriage			Separation			Imp. spouse			Childn's ex			Mil.Comm			Accom			Education			+ exp.			Reflections			Transition		
		B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E
1 TJR	61	1	0	0	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	2	0	5	3	4	**8**	3	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
2 DT	27	1	0	1	2	0	0	2	2	3	2	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	5
3 GB	26	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	1	3	2	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	2
4 DC	41	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	3	0	**8**	2	4	1	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	3	1	0	2	0	0	1
5 M	37	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	**6**	0	3	0	4	2	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	**10**	0	1	3
7 R W	39	2	1	1	0	3	1	3	3	1	2	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	3	3	0	0	3	0	0	1

8 SW	39	3	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	2	1	5	1	2	0	3	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	3	0	0	2
9 SM	38	3	0	0	1	4	0	3	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	**6**	4	0	0	1	0	1	5
10 AC	54	6	2	1	0	3	0	0	3	**6**	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	**9**	3	1	3	0	1	**6**
		17	3	3	9	13	9	17	16	27	10	26	6	19	11	18	16	9	7	1	0	0	11	21	21	7	5	28	0	7	25
		23			31			60			42			48			32			1			53			40			32		

Taxonomy of themes

The table above thus enabled the ten themes to be ordered in terms of frequency and at least suggest the degree to which the themes were important to the research subjects.

1. Impact on spouse
2. Positive growth/experience
3. Military communities
4. Children's experience
5. Reflections on service life
6. Transition
7. Accommodation
8. Separation
9. Marriage
10. Education

As can be seen from the graph, the largest number of observations from across the transcripts was 'impact on spouse' but the next largest was 'positive growth/experience'. Perhaps significantly, separation featured only in eighth position.

Richest source

1. Fam 1
2. Fam 10
3. Fam 4
4. Fam 7
5. Fam 8
6. Fam 9
7. Fam 5
8. Fam 2
9. Fam 3

Appendix 3:

Explanatory notes and Glossary

Given that the readership of this work may not be military initiates, it is incumbent upon me to explain something of the structure of Her Majesty's Armed Forces to aid in understanding.

Rank structure

Consistent with historical works cited in the main body of the text, the rank structure of the military owes its origins to social and class divisions prevalent at the time of the respective organisations founding.

Essentially, the military structure is sub-divided into two main categories; enlisted ranks and officers. The enlisted ranks are again sub-divided into junior ranks and senior ranks. Thus, for the Army, the lowest rank is Private, which enjoys a significant diversity of its own, depending on the role of the individual. Thus, a private in the Artillery is a Gunner. A private in the Royal Engineers is a Sapper. A private in the Royal Signals is a Signaller. A private in the cavalry is a Trooper and so on. Subsequent ranks also have their various eccentricities, but the basic format for the Army is as follows:

Private
Lance-Corporal
Corporal
Sergeant (at which point the individual becomes part of the Senior Ranks of Enlisted personnel)
Staff Sergeant (Colour Sergeant in the Infantry)
Warrant Officer Class Two
Warrant Officer Class One

Warrant Officer Class One is the highest of the enlisted ranks.
Company/Squadron/Regimental/Garrison Sergeant Major is not a *rank*, but rather an *appointment*, however it does confer seniority.

For the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force the rank structure has very different nomenclature:

RN

Able Seaman
Leading Hand
Petty Officer
Chief Petty Officer
Warrant Officer

For the Royal Air Force

Aircraftsman
Leading Aircraftsman
Senior Aircraftsman
Junior Technician
Corporal
Sergeant
Chief Technician
Flight Sergeant
Warrant Officer

It does not take a military analyst to observe that across the three services, the rank structure of enlisted personnel does not appear to correlate equally. This has been a cause of internecine strife for many years. For example, as the RAF do not have a Warrant Officer Class Two (WO2) rank, the RAF single Service view is that a Flight Sergeant is the equivalent thereof. However, in exclusively pay terms, an RAF Flight Sergeant is on the same pay grade as an Army Staff Sergeant, despite taking on responsibilities that are commensurate with an Army WO2. This speaks to an important aspect of the differences between the Services that is not adequately reflected when working together in what is referred to as the 'Joint' environment. Although pay grades and rank equivalences have been agreed, by their own single Service traditions, responsibilities, positions and appointments are established. So, for example, an Army 'company' – which is both a sub-division of a unit and based on a set number of personnel – is commanded by a major, whereas in the other two services a similar sub-division with similar

numbers is commanded by a Lieutenant or Flight Lieutenant, which is one rank lower in the agreed rank equivalence table. Also, in the Army the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel are regarded as 'field grades' and senior officer ranks do not begin until that of full colonel. Meanwhile, again in the RAF, there are no 'field grades' and so senior officer ranks begin at Squadron Leader, which is seen in the equivalency tables as equal to that of major. All of which segues neatly into the officer ranks.

For the Army

2nd Lieutenant

Lieutenant

Captain

Major

Lieutenant Colonel

Colonel

Brigadier

Major General

Lieutenant General

General

For the RN

Midshipman

Sub-Lieutenant

Lieutenant

Lieutenant Commander

Commander

Captain

Commodore

Rear Admiral

Vice Admiral

Admiral

For the RAF

Pilot Officer

Flying Officer

Flight Lieutenant

Squadron Leader

Wing Commander

Group Captain

Air Commodore

Air Vice Marshal

Air Marshal

Air Chief Marshal

Again, no special military skills are needed to note that there is scope for confusion between the chosen nomenclature of the three Services. A lieutenant in the RN, for example, is the same rank equivalent as a captain in the Army, whereas a captain in the RN is the same rank equivalent as a Colonel in the Army and so on. Also, each of the Services has its own rank insignia to add to the potential confusion.

Formations

The word 'unit' is used prolifically throughout this work. The word itself is problematic because in military parlance it can mean different things within the overall organisation. In the Army, it is generally taken to mean a regiment or battalion and unfortunately to non-military observers those two can sometimes be the same thing. Thus for example the Parachute Regiment is not a unit. It is composed of three regular battalions (1,2 and 3) and each of those is a 'unit'. Meanwhile, the Light Dragoons are a cavalry regiment and are roughly the same size as a Parachute Regiment Battalion and therefore they are both a regiment and a unit. In the RN, a ship is essentially a unit. In the RAF, a unit is generally a squadron on a flying station, although it may also be a wing for operational purposes where, for example Tactical Medical Wing is a unit based at RAF Brize Norton. Thus for the purposes of this work, a 'unit' is therefore in most cases the smallest sub-division of the overall force that is essentially self-sustaining (i.e. it has its own embedded logistics, engineering, communications and medical support) and does not routinely need to rely on a higher formation to operate.

Glossary of acronyms

In the Armed Forces we have a formal structure and process of written communication that, in theory, requires all terms to be spelled out in full on first use, followed by the accepted acronym in brackets. Thereafter, the acronym may be used routinely. As a side note, in reality I often find that information promulgated from higher authority is peppered with acronyms that the author(s) clearly presume are common knowledge. The MoD's own official glossary of terms runs to 383 pages and lists 13 different meanings for 'AA' for example and, for us as mental health nurses, Alcoholics Anonymous is not one of them. Nevertheless, it was my aim herein to ensure that all acronyms I used were spelled out in full first. For those I may have missed, or for easier reference, I include the following:

1st Sea Lord	The RN's most senior officer
2i/c	Second in Command
AFF	Army Families Federation
APC	Army Personnel Centre (not to be confused with Armoured Personnel Carrier)
AT	Adventurous Training (mandatory)
ATC	Air Traffic Control (not to be confused with Air Training Corps)
BFG	British Forces Germany
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff (the RAF's most senior officer)
CDS	Chief of the Defence Staff (UK's most senior military officer, drawn from each of the three Services, usually on rotation)
CGS	Chief of the General Staff (the Army's most senior officer)
CSM/SSM	Company or Squadron Sergeant Major (the senior enlisted soldier in a company or squadron (identical formations, but named differently depending on the unit)
DCMH	Department of Community Mental Health
DMHG	Defence Mental Health Group
DPHC	Defence Primary Health Care
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal (bomb disposal team)
IDF	Israeli Defence Force (not to be confused with Indirect Fire, the military term for mortars, rockets and artillery)
IED	Improvised Explosive Device (a home-made bomb)
JFC	Joint Forces Command
JMG	Joint Medical Group

JPA	Joint Personnel Administration (an online HR system that allows individuals to manage some aspects of their own administration)
MODREC	Ministry of Defence Research and Ethics Committee
MSO	Medical Support Officer
NFF	Naval Families Federation
NOIC	Nursing Officer in Charge
OC	Officer Commanding (not to be confused with Commanding Officer (CO). A unit will have one CO and the sub-units thereof are commanded by an OC)
PMRAFNS	Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service
QARANC	Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (often abbreviated to QA)
QARNNS	Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service
RADC	Royal Army Dental Corps
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFFF	Royal Air Force Families Federation
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAPTC	Royal Army Physical Training Corps
RAVC	Royal Army Veterinary Corps
RBL	Royal British Legion
RCD	Regional Clinical Director
RE	Royal Engineers
REME	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RMP	Royal Military Police
RN	Royal Navy
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major (the senior enlisted soldier in a regiment)
WO	Warrant Officer (RN and RAF only)
WO1	Warrant Officer Class One
WO2	Warrant Officer Class Two

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northumbria
UNIVERSITY NEWCASTLE

Study Title: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY FAMILIES: A NARRATIVE FROM ENLISTMENT TO DISCHARGE

Investigator: Mark Sewart

Participant Information Sheet

> You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to read this leaflet so you understand why the study is being carried out and what it will involve.
>
> Reading this leaflet, discussing it with others or asking any questions you might have will help you decide whether or not you would like to take part.

What is the Purpose of the Study

This study is simply looking at the actual experiences of Service families. Most research into Service families has focused on problems that were known to exist. We know there are challenges in Service life but if we start off by asking you to tell us about a specific problem, then what you tell us will relate solely to that problem. There are also positive advantages to Service life that often go undocumented and there may also be problems that have so far gone unnoticed. So this study just asks you to tell us the story of your Service life from a family perspective. You can involve as many or as few members of your family as you see

Why have I been invited?

Firstly you will be a Service veteran. You will have served for a minimum of 9 years and ideally you will have left the Forces within the last three. What 'Service family' means is what it means to you. Like me, you may have had a partner and children who followed you around throughout your career, or you may be single and have had family 'back home' who have a story to tell. Whatever your circumstances and however you define your family, there will be a story.

Do I have to take part?

This study is wholly voluntary and it's likely you wouldn't have even read this far if you were not a volunteer.

What will happen if I take part?

The Principal Investigator (PI) will contact you and arrange to meet with you and your family at a time and place of your convenience. This could be your own home or any other venue where you will feel comfortable and relaxed and ready to tell your story. The PI will then send you a questionnaire which will ask you for some background information before the interview, so that you can get on with telling your story without delay on the day. You should allow around 2 and a half hours for the interview. If there is still information you want to tell a further interview can
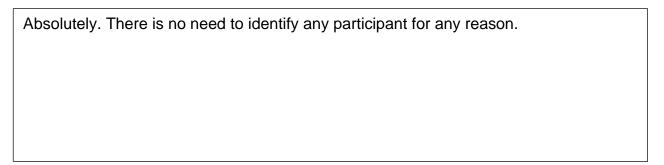
What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Obviously the interview will encroach on your time and hospitality but the information you provide will be entirely confidential and it is highly unlikely that there will be any adverse consequences to your participation. It is possible that in telling your story you may recall distressing or unhappy memories but please be assured that the PI is a qualified and experienced mental health specialist, who will be sensitive to this eventuality and offer appropriate support and advice

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Hopefully twofold: Firstly, you may help us to identify potential areas for improvement in terms of Armed Forces policy toward families and secondly you may be able to highlight things to celebrate about Service life for both service-people and their families.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential and anonymous?

Absolutely. There is no need to identify any participant for any reason.

How will my data be stored?

Voice recording will be carried out digitally and the resulting audio files stored on a password-protected external hard-drive that will be kept locked away when not in use. Hard copy notes will be scanned, stored in the same way and the hard copy originals destroyed.

What will happen to the results of the study?

This study is part of a PhD and will thus make up the resulting thesis, which will be published in line with normal practice and university regulations. Some parts of the thesis may then be reproduced for separate publication in other formats. As with most research of this type, it is gathered to provide a body of evidence with which one may hope to influence policy formulation and direction at organizational and governmental levels. It also provides other students throughout higher education with more evidence to support their own studies.

Who is Organizing and Funding the Study?

This PhD is funded directly by Northumbria University and organized through the Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by the Northumbria University, Faculty of Health & Life Sciences Ethics Committee and has formally been approved.

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