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‘Defining Soldiers: Britain’s Military, c. 1740-1815’ (resubmission)

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Abstract:

This article offers a critique of the methodology of military history. The question of what constitutes a ‘soldier’ is usually taken for granted, but history of Britain’s military between the wars of the 1740s and the end of the Napoleonic Wars suggests that current definitions are inadequate. By focusing on the themes of language, law and citizenship, lifecycles, masculinity and collective identity, this article proposes new ways of thinking about ‘the soldier’. In so doing, it suggests that military historians should rethink the relationship between the military and society, and engage further with the methodologies of social and cultural history.

Defining soldiers: Britain's military, c.1740-1815

The question of what constitutes a soldier is often taken for granted in the historical and sociological literature on armed forces. Like many socio-cultural categories, the terminology of soldiers is utilized without much thought being given to how and when definitions of the term have changed. Soldiers are usually classified by their membership of state organized forces for the express purpose of furthering the political objectives of the polity and ensuring its security, usually from external threats but not exclusively so, through the exercise of organized lethal force. This definition is rooted in the concept of 'trinitarian warfare' identified by Martin van Creveld's study of Clausewitz, which can be summarized as wars fought between states, with state-organized armed forces, drawing upon and supported by the population managed by the state.¹ As such, soldiers are primarily identified through combat and the legitimate use of violence in national military forces, a tendency reflected in historical studies, which overwhelmingly focus on national armed forces.

This observation does not diminish the significant advances made in historical interpretation of the military, but such a concentration does not encompass the experience of all those involved in military service, nor address the multiple identities a soldier could have. This is particularly relevant in the case of Britain's military experience in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. From around 1740 to 1815, Britain's armed forces underwent a massive and sustained expansion in response to a series of ever more demanding wars. In this '70-years' war', as it has been termed,² Britain was more often than not at war with France. Particularly in the second half of this period, successive governments sought new ways of mobilizing Britain's manpower. By far the largest proportion of this growth was outside of the British Army, such that of the 630,000 rank and file soldiers that Britain could claim to

have in 1805, only some 160,000 (or 23 per cent) were in the regulars.³ Britain's experience of the mass mobilization that all of Europe underwent during this period was not tied to the expansion within the established British Army. Therefore, there is a need to recognize a much broader range of armed forces, not just those wholly organized and paid for by the state or those who existed to further its political and military ambitions.⁴ The diverse terms of military service suggests that a simple categorization of soldiers is not sufficiently refined or suitable as a framework for historical analysis.

Nor was armed violence the primary experience of the men in Britain's multiple military forces. Even those troops actively campaigning against an enemy would not face combat every day. Taking the campaigns of the Peninsular War as an example, and counting all the battles, skirmishes and sieges (except the long siege of Cadiz), at most a British soldier could have undergone 355 days in combat out of a total of 2,085, equivalent to 17 per cent.⁵ Needless to say, it is highly unlikely that any soldier, even an officer or general, was at every battle of the Peninsular War.

Besides combat and training for it, those in uniform were expected to undertake a variety of other duties. It is well known that, in the century before the New Police, the military were routinely called upon to support the civil power in times of riot.⁶ This constabulary role also involved policing Britain's overseas territories, supporting the excise, putting down mutinies, and guarding key buildings and prisoners of war. A ranker could additionally expect to perform manual labour on engineering projects such as the construction of camps and fortifications, or even public works such as highway maintenance. They would furthermore spend a significant proportion of their time off duty or on furlough. Military historians have had little to say about these non-combat activities – J. A. Houlding regards them as the 'friction of peace' that distracted the British army from the real business of

training for war⁷ – but given their prominence in the soldier’s everyday experience, they demand to be taken seriously.

Indeed, these activities are even more important when we consider the growth of new forms of military service. Auxiliary forces were partly formed to free up regular forces from home defence and its associated non-combat duties, and often had restricted terms and conditions that ensured they did not serve overseas. Briefly, these included: specific regiments raised for home defence during war time and limited to service in the **United Kingdom**, often termed fencibles; a reformed militia, raised by counties by ballot that could only serve in the British Isles, which should have undertaken annual training during peacetime and once mobilized was a full-time armed force; and part-time auxiliary formations, variously titled armed associations, volunteers, and yeomanry, that usually only agreed to serve locally.⁸ Invariably, these military forces had divergent and complicated lines of authority, from matters such as the power to call these troops out into service, the responsibility for providing and maintaining arms and equipment, and who paid them (if indeed they were paid at all). In many cases, these new soldiers would only have ever seen combat if an invasion of the **kingdom** occurred. This is not to say that these men were not preparing for it, but the actual experience of being a soldier was significantly different from the combat-violence categorization that has typified scholarly attention so far. As such, many of these men in uniform would not qualify as soldiers in the classic definition.

Yet contemporaries would almost invariably recognize a soldier when they saw one. This was a reflection of the aspects in common to the experience and identity of soldiers in eighteenth-century Britain. There were similar characteristics that outwardly defined soldiers in this period, despite the multiplicity of armed forces in units, titles and terms of service. At a basic level, they functioned in a similar way and their training, arms and equipment, and even look, reflected a basic division into three types: cavalry, infantry and artillery. In nearly

all cases these were the same regardless of how the men found their way into armed service and under what terms and conditions. The militia, for example, was drilled and trained as infantry: dressed in red coats and armed with muskets, they were expected to fight in close order, just as the regulars did. The part-time Yeomanry Cavalry were expected to operate like the regular cavalry and looked like them too, albeit that they adopted some of the most flamboyant aspects of military dress from the regulars (a characteristic of the many part-time forces of the period in Britain). Furthermore, they were all organized in a similar fashion: officers were commissioned from the King (or his representative), and units were structured into companies or squadrons, each with a military hierarchy of non-commissioned officers and officers, and almost certainly with a contingent of military musicians, such as drummers or buglers.

The pervasiveness of an accepted, and largely standardized, military culture echoes a complex relationship between soldiers and wider society, and it is within this framework that a more suitable methodology for defining and studying soldiers can emerge. It further emphasizes the need for a more holistic study of soldiers. Gerhard Kummel's 'A Soldier Is a Soldier Is a Soldier!?', in the *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, has explored the adaptations of the military in response to social, cultural and political change, and how soldiers and soldiering have changed and have interacted with society and culture (indeed they need to change to remain current and legitimate).⁹ In the case of Georgian Britain's armed forces, the interrelation between soldiers and society is all the more interesting. David Bell has argued that the upper echelons of the military and society shared a common culture in Europe's *ancien régime*, typified by the accomplishments and aristocratic background of the gentleman officer.¹⁰ He argues that military and society drew apart in the 'total war' of the 1790s – but it is hard to argue that the social world of the British officer followed this model, dominated as it continued to be by polite manners, gentlemanly honour codes and

lavish dances. Furthermore, the widespread acceptance of communal values and hierarchical order in British society suggest that military and civilian attitudes in this era may have been closer than has been previously thought, despite the well-recounted popular hostility to standing armies. Indeed many, if not most, of Britain's soldiers were not permanently in the full time regulars, but experienced soldiering either part-time or as a phase in their life, or both.

Working from the premise that a 'soldier' was a particular category within society, that was defined by contemporaries and by soldiers themselves, and that was therefore relational and contextual rather than being fixed, what is required for a study of Britain's soldiers in the Georgian period, and possibly other periods and places too, is a set of interpretational axes that reflects both the different forms of the interrelation between soldiers, individuals, and society and the body of sources that have been left behind by the military. Together, these strands can be brought together to give a fuller understanding of the experience and identity of soldiers in the period, and offer new avenues for historical inquiry. Let us therefore attempt to define 'the soldier' in terms of language; law and citizenship; lifecycles; masculinity; and collective identity.

Language

Let us begin by exploring the myriad terms that contemporaries used to describe the profession of arms. The study of etymology is interesting and worth doing in its own right; but, in the light of the linguistic turn, it is also highly necessary, since historical actors could only make sense of themselves and their world with the terms that were available to them.¹¹ It also guards against anachronism, since historians' terms of art do not always reflect the way that these same terms are used in our sources.

An obvious place to start is the term 'soldier' itself. Here is the entry from Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*:

SOLDIER. *n. s.* [*soldat*, Fr. from *solidarius*, low Latin; of *solidus*, a piece of money, the pay of a soldier: *souldée*, French.] 1. A fighting man; a warrior. Originally one who served for pay. 2. It is generally used of the common men, as distinct from the commanders.

The second definition, that 'soldier' referred only to the rank and file, might be unfamiliar to modern readers. Johnson illustrates this with a quotation from Spencer: 'It were meet that any one, before he came to be a captain, should have been a *soldier*'. The first definition is even more significant: Johnson dwells on the linguistic root of 'soldier' as deriving from the Latin for money, and defines the soldier as 'one who serves for pay'.¹²

This focus on Latin roots was not just an academic exercise on Johnson's part, since this definition recurs in contemporary texts, particularly those that are critical of the profession.¹³ For example, Granville Sharp was a radical in City politics and an enthusiast for militia reform. He regarded standing armies as unconstitutional and an affront to liberty, and he did not think that the post-1757 militia was much better. He argued that its recruits,

gradually lose their *civil capacity*, and, from free citizens, are apt to become *mere Sold-iers*, dependent on their military *Sold*, or stipend, and the favour of superiors; whereby their acquire such a slavish submission to COMMAND, be it *just* or *unjust*, that they readily undertake to execute those very measures and designs, which they themselves, perhaps, have previously condemned...

A soldier is therefore defined in terms of his pay, and thence that he has been bought: he has no personality of his own. Sharp argued that it is this ‘obedience to the will of others, which makes the profession *dishonourable!*’ It is further, ‘derogatory to their *natural dignity, as men*; for they give up an indispensable quality of *human nature*, the right of discerning between *good* and *evil*’.¹⁴ Not only does the soldier fail to qualify for the manly ideal of independence, but he is not fully human.

Returning to Johnson, the noun ‘soldier’ could have a range of suffixes in the eighteenth century, such as the adjectives ‘soldierlike’ and ‘soldierly’. ‘Soldierlike’ is not in common parlance today, but was commonly used in military training literature from the time to describe the condition to which recruits should aspire. Johnson also lists the unfamiliar noun ‘soldiership’, which meant, ‘Military character; martial qualities; behaviour becoming a soldier; martial skill.’¹⁵ Verbs to describe activities specific to soldiers are more elusive. A full text search of the corpus of Eighteenth-Century Collections Online reveals no entries for ‘soldiered’, suggesting that today’s verb ‘to soldier’ was not current. We have adopted the verbal noun ‘soldiering’ for our current research project,¹⁶ in order to get a purchase on soldiering as a phenomenon, but it is an awkward compound that is not listed in Johnson and was rarely used in the eighteenth century.¹⁷ This lack of a verb to describe the activities of soldiers perhaps reflects a contemporary unease about the profession of arms.

Turning to other terms used to describe soldiers, it is striking how **many** were similarly negative in connotation. Historians blithely refer to ‘redcoats’, but Johnson’s *Dictionary* reminds us that the word was actually ‘A name of contempt for a soldier’.¹⁸ We all know that it had this connotation in the American colonies, but its usage on this side of the Atlantic may not have been that different. For other colloquial terms for soldier, we have to turn to slang dictionaries, of which the most famous was Francis Grose’s *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, first published in 1785 and much reprinted and enlarged

thereafter. Grose was himself a military man, having served in the regular army and the Surrey Militia, where he rose to the rank of captain.¹⁹ His *Dictionary* lists eight synonyms for soldier, besides numerous appellations for members of certain regiments, types of troops, malingerers and pretended soldiers. Given his background, it is striking how many of these are derisive. Naval terms for soldier ('lobster' and 'live lumber') are predictably so, but so were 'caterpillar' (soldiers were not 'the pillars of the nation' but its 'CATERpillars'), 'swad' or 'swadkin' (meaning lout or bumpkin) and 'bloody back'. Like 'redcoat', the latter played on their attire but also emphasized the brutality of the soldier's existence, specifically the corporal punishments to which men under martial law were subject. Only 'brother of the blade' was remotely laudatory. Did these negative terms reflect soldiers' standing in Georgian society?

Law and citizenship

In the century up to Waterloo, the status of the soldier was indeed rather anomalous. It is well known that common soldiers were often derided for their low origins, propensity to violence and generally low morals. Their marginal status went deeper than that though, to legal and constitutional concerns about their very existence. The longstanding critique of 'standing armies' was reiterated succinctly by the lawyer Sir William Blackstone:

In a land of liberty, it is extremely dangerous to make a distinct order of the profession of arms. In absolute monarchies this is necessary for the safety of the prince, and arises from the main principle of their constitution, which is governing by fear: but in free states the profession of a soldier, taken singly and merely as a profession, is justly an object of jealousy... The laws and constitution of these

kingdoms know no such state as that of a perpetual standing soldier, bred up to no other profession than that of war.²⁰

As Blackstone notes, it was the legal and political position of the soldier that was at issue. Every year, parliament would go through the ritual of granting the Munity Act for one year only, underlining the army's provisional status; troops were pointedly marched out of town at election time and during assizes so as not to interfere in the civil process; and their role in riot control depended on direction from civil magistrates and remained highly controversial. Moreover, in a political culture that placed so much emphasis on the legal liberty of the individual, and on equality under the English law, the fact that soldiers lived under a different set of laws put them beyond the pale. It did not help matters that soldiers acquired a reputation for lawlessness, and that the mass demobilization that followed every major conflict was invariably accompanied by a crime wave. The contemporary view was that soldiers' habits of forage and violence acquired on campaign accompanied them back into civilian life. More romantically, the fact that cavalymen were allowed to keep their horses supposedly led them naturally into new careers as highwaymen.²¹

Blackstone continues that, in such a free state, 'no man should take up arms, but with a view to defend his country, and its laws; he puts not off the citizen when he enters the camp; but it is because he is a citizen, and would wish to continue so, that he makes himself awhile a soldier.'²² The flipside of the critique of standing armies was the lauding of the citizen soldier, and it is worth underlining its political and legal implications. Recent scholarship has tended to emphasize that this is a pan-European phenomenon, characteristic of state-building in the 'age of democratic revolutions',²³ but arguably there are important differences between Britain's essentially civil tradition of citizen soldiering and the more statist models on the continent. Britain's indigenous 'amateur military tradition' had its

origins both in ancient practice and some fairly radical neo-republican political theory, both of which emphasized the liberty of the individual. A citizen soldier could resist oppressors foreign and domestic, his arms underwrote his political power, and his service to his community earned his status. Even the reformed militia – which was, to all intents and purposes, an adjunct to the regular army and a conscripted one to boot – could be admired as the ‘constitutional force’ of Whig political theory.

Arguably, however, this contrast in legal theory between contemptible regulars and constitutional irregulars did not hold up in practice. As Hannah Smith has recently argued, there existed an ‘alternative rhetoric’ to the anti-army camp, which portrayed the soldiery as ‘defenders of political liberties, and as soldier citizens’.²⁴ It was the regular army, after all, that protected Britain’s freedom, prosperity, religion and laws against its despotic foreign enemies.²⁵ It also upheld the Protestant succession: the Hanoverians closely identified themselves with the army, which responded in turn with a pro-monarchical ritual culture and a fervently loyal politics. This image of the army as the patriotic defender of liberty seems to have been imbibed by soldiers themselves. Recruiting posters appealed to ‘All Real Volunteers Whose Hearts are filled with Loyalty for the best of Kings, and love the noblest of constitutions, and who are willing to maintain the Honour of old England’.²⁶

Finally, even the allegation that martial law made soldiers oppressed and unfree would not necessarily have been accepted by soldiers themselves. Critics of the army alleged that its practice was arbitrary and that its punishments were excessively harsh. The voluminous records of general courts martial, however, reveal a highly legalistic regard for procedure, evidence, expert witnesses and recording; Glenn Stepler has reached similar conclusions for the inferior military courts.²⁷ If scores of lashes could be handed out for apparently trifling offences, it was arguably no harsher than a civil code whose number of capital offences increased from 160 to 222 in the period under consideration. Soldiers

preferred to be judged by their peers and considered it a greater indignity to be handed over to the civil authorities. If borne with fortitude, corporal punishment would cleanse the offender, who would return to the fold with his honour intact. The anti-army rhetoric about the legal and constitutional position of the soldier, therefore, should not be taken at face value.

Lifecycles

As mentioned above, military service would only have been part of a man's life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This suggests that longitudinal studies of the experience of soldiering, drawing upon an anthropological approach to those involved in the military, offers a new analytical paradigm for the study of soldiers in this period. A wider concept of soldiering as a passage in someone's life allows a consideration of motivation beyond just looking at combat to explore the whole range of emotional, psychological and social prompts to behaviour. Not just why fight, but why enlist, why desert, why remain with a unit, or why break military rules and face severe punishment. As such, becoming a soldier can be viewed as a cultural transformation, echoing the work undertaken about popular political transformations and the importance of changing everyday life.²⁸ Such an approach would complement the existing 'snapshot' horizontal studies of Britain's soldiers in this period, which have examined the social composition of regiments or the reasons for men enlisting.²⁹

Service for the rank and file in the British Army was officially for life, besides periods in wartime when short service for a number of years was offered to attract recruits, but in fact there was a prodigious turnover in manpower. Between 1803 and 1815, 326,302 men were casualties (death, discharges and desertions), whilst on the positive side of the balance sheet

159,752 men joined up through ordinary recruiting, an additional 94,179 men transferred from the militia to the regulars, and the Army of Reserve and Additional Forces Act produced 58,417 recruits.³⁰ These changes compare to an establishment of just over 100,000 during the Amiens peace, so in rough terms, the entire army was replaced three times in twelve years.³¹ We should not expect Britain's other military forces to be any different in this respect. Of course, there were not likely to be any large scale deaths in these units, but often their terms of service were shorter or, in the case of the part-time auxiliary forces, men could leave when they liked, either by official discharge or by simply not turning up to training.

Within life as a soldier, there are also key stages that can be identified and studied. Broadly speaking they were: joining a unit, in some cases offering to serve and create a new unit; the transformation from recruit to soldier; acting as a soldier; transfer, disbandment or discharge (and death); and life after soldiering. Of course, the precise details of these phases would vary considerably due to personal circumstances and the military situation. For example, often during wartime the process of becoming fully combat ready was cut short and men were sent out on campaign when they were not completely competent in the tasks that were required of them.

This lifecycle framework needs to match the records available to be a viable methodology. The military records do facilitate such an analysis, although it is as much about new approaches to this material. For example, understanding when a soldier was considered ready is something that can be picked out through a close reading of the military's inspection returns, WO 27 in the National Archives, through the expression of the attitudes of inspecting generals about the state of the units they were looking at. Furthermore, the key moments in the history of military units do tend to be well documented: offers of service are spread through the War Office in-letters (including those not accepted, which can be equally informative about attitudes of what constituted a useful military force); the disbandment of

units, and sometimes their wholesale transfer to other units, invariably resulted in complicated correspondence (if only because it involved finances); and the whole records set of the Chelsea out-pensioners have been digitized. Additionally, we should not ignore the physical memorialization of soldiers in the communities to which they returned. Even cursory examinations of parish churches reveal not just gravestones but also plaques to old soldiers from this period. The key moments in the soldier lifecycle are well documented.

Perhaps the hardest phase to address is life as a soldier. Tackling this is all the more important because, for some, soldiering could become a career. The military's well established hierarchy meant there was the opportunity for promotion and recruiting posters cited this as an incentive to join up.³² Yet the NCO remains a historical hiatus and was a curiously liminal figure: being from but not of the men, he could at once be respected for his experience but also be derided for 'carrying the halbert in his face' if he was promoted any higher.³³ There are clearly some very technical roles in the military of this time that we still do not fully understand, or have made large assumptions about, even down to the differences between a corporal and a serjeant (besides pay). Although individual records of service do not exist in this period, we can get at the experience of soldiering in different ways. Firstly, an analysis of pay lists and muster rolls can turn these horizontal transects of the people in units at a particular time into vertical analysis of the pattern of military life. Through this we can observe movement between sub-units, promotion and reduction, and time spent in the unit. Admittedly, such a study will have flaws as it will be entirely dependent on identifying unique names and contemporaries did not always record personal information in a consistent fashion, but that does not completely demolish its potential.

Alongside this quantitative analysis, there is more material than has been assumed about the life of individuals in the armed forces which, when coupled with the detailed examination of language used in them, can unlock the soldier's world. Soldiers, not just

officers, wrote home more often and more of this material has survived than has been thought. This correspondence, alongside the burgeoning memoir literature of the period, provides insights into the experience of soldiers. This can be buttressed by the sometimes voluminous correspondence revolving around certain practices in the military: for example, courts martial generated significant documentation which can provide a window onto the world of soldiering.

The sheer numbers involved in some kind of military service, mostly as a temporary rather than a life-defining experience, highlights the need more fully to understand the relationship between the military and civil society. The more that civil and military society crossed, the more this connection has left us to work with and ponder. The auxiliary forces are a case in point. Sources relating to the volunteers are mainly housed in local archives and provide patchy but abundant material to explore this connection around a number of themes. For example, examining the alignment of social and military positions for officers in both the militia and the part-time forces, whereby local preconceptions of rank and precedent could find new opportunities for expression and, moreover, avenues for changing the social order. Questions about rank, and the heavy managerial burden of dealing with this, fell squarely on the Lords Lieutenant of the counties, and their local papers are supplemented by their correspondence with London. Additionally, the proportions of different types of units – artillery, cavalry and infantry – within an area were not wholly military decisions, and reflected the transfer of existing social orders into new military arrangements, whereby some socio-economic and cultural groups were deemed more suitable for certain military roles than others.

Masculinity

The life-cycle of the soldier also relates to his life-cycle as a man. In this period, soldiers were expected to remain bachelors throughout their careers. Soldiers did of course have wives and sweethearts, and whole families continued to follow men on campaign, but the practice was discouraged. Women had few opportunities for paid work 'on the strength' and wives who stayed behind had no formal means of financial support. As well as having implications for women, this had implications for soldiers. This was a period when full masculinity was founded upon being a father, husband and householder; and furthermore, when political citizenship came to be associated with the attainment of this domestic masculinity.³⁴ Soldiers were therefore stuck in an unfulfilled stage of the male life-cycle. (The contrast with the militia is pointed, since they were symbolically citizens and family men, who did not go on overseas postings and whose families were eligible for parish aid.³⁵) Could it be that, since the regular soldier was pointedly excluded from the domestic and the constitutional realms, he could not fully be a man?

This might seem an odd question to pose, given that the profession today is usually associated with the hypermasculinity of violence, camaraderie and physical fitness. Indeed, sociologists have made much of the cluster of gendered qualities that soldiers epitomize, and the processes by which these are inculcated.³⁶ Masculinity, however, is contextually specific and the gender of the soldier has changed hugely with time.³⁷ In the eighteenth century, soldiers could be very defensive about their status as 'men'.³⁸ Georgian army officers were frequently associated with effeminacy, and were condemned for their addiction to fancy uniforms, gallantry and the niceties of politeness. Some writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, did so from a classical republican political tradition – long an ingredient of anti-army rhetoric, as we have seen – which associated professional soldiering with dependency and moral corruption.³⁹ But this comes from a wide range of other sources too: caricatures, for example, send up soldiers' vanity and foppery, particularly from the American War onwards.

These questions about the soldier's relationship with wider social and gender codes have yet to be answered satisfactorily for this period.

The history of gender also has the potential to shed light upon the corporeal aspects of the soldier's experience. Military training seeks to cultivate the soldier's body in terms of its strength, its capabilities and its appearance. The armies of the long eighteenth century placed huge importance on drill, as an inculcator both of discipline and also of the musketry and manoeuvres that were required to fight in close order. Historical commentators disagree whether this turned the soldier into a kind of automaton, or whether it sought to co-opt his essential humanity.⁴⁰ What is clear, however, is that the military body of the eighteenth century was very different **from** that of today, privileging dexterity and grace over strength and muscular bulk. This was dictated by the battlefield tactics and weapon technologies of the time, so is yet another example of how issues of cultural preference can shade into those of instrumental military effectiveness.

Collective identity

The well established practice of organizing the military into discrete formations meant that being a soldier was a collective experience, and part of **his** cultural transformation revolved around subsuming **himself** into a wider identity. Men joined units rather than the British Army, an observation reflected very conspicuously in the recruiting ephemera of the period. As we have seen, the creation of new military forces, in whatever form, always copied the form of existing military units: the militia was organized into one or more county-based regiment, and the volunteers also chose to form themselves into companies, corps, battalions and regiments, even though they were often created with little prompt from government. (It is also noteworthy that this hierarchical structure went no further than regiments.) Once a man

was in a military unit, this was the basis of his primary military identity and where all of the phases of his soldier lifecycle would be played out. In effect, the membership of this military community was one of the means by which soldiers could be identified. The unit with which a soldier served was a focal point for his loyalty and an emotional attachment more generally, and ought to be addressed as such.

The soldier was also a member of a military hierarchy that had complex issues of status and seniority and, for officers, this facet of their existence was publically portrayed through *Army Lists* and the *London Gazette*. Commanding officers could find themselves with plenty of work managing these issues, necessarily generating considerable correspondence with secretaries at war, which itself provides a source base for this approach. Investigating the leadership and managerial qualities expected of Britain's officer, and equally the shared expectations of the men they led, through a detailed appreciation of what 'worked' and what did not, opens up novel ways of defining soldiers too.

The material culture of this collective experience provides a means to explore identity. Historians are blessed with very detailed records of the minutiae of all manner of aspects of the dress and appearance of soldiers in this period, both in written form and as artefacts. Traditionally exploration of this aspect of soldiering has firmly remained the preserve of antiquarians or been presented 'as is' for the hobby press with little attempt to analyze it. Yet, as Katrina Navickas has shown in her work on political adornment in the long eighteenth century, colours, additional items of clothing such as sashes, and mottos could have rich and complex meanings.⁴¹ Why then, should the material culture of soldiers be neutral or simply for show? Even if it was purely decorative, it can still provide the opportunity for new levels of interpretation. Uniforms, by the very nature, define groups against other groups, and these delineations can range from the overt (soldier and civilian) to the subtle, which in the case of the Georgian soldier went down to lace patterns on otherwise

identical uniforms that distinguished one unit from another. Furthermore, military uniforms had to balance requirements for public display against their function as a utilitarian set of equipment that was there to facilitate their role as a soldier. As Scott Hughes Myerley has shown, even apparently non-utilitarian articles such as rigid neckstocks or tailored jackets are important in terms of bodily deportment, and thence for the effect that they have on both the wearer and the spectator.⁴² There was, therefore, a negotiation between these different aspects and their manifestation in the material culture of a soldier and of the unit to which he belonged.

The material culture of soldiers is but one aspect of their experience as a group. Most of the activities undertaken by soldiers were done together. The military tactics of the day, with close order drill and precise movements in time, suggest that an exploration of this ‘muscular bonding’⁴³ can be achieved through drill books of the day, soldiers’ accounts and letters home, and material created by observers. Furthermore, all the other duties that soldiers performed were usually group activities. Soldiers were moved around as communities and were set tasks, such a guard duty, by sub-units. A close study of the referential objects used in the language to describe these events, or to order them to take place, can illuminate how others, both in the military and outside it, viewed these military communities.

There are also other areas of the collective experience of soldiers that can be explored, for example music and singing. The history of music in the military is beginning to be written, but hopefully will go beyond the analyses of songs as texts and bands as organizations.⁴⁴ Music and singing are bodily, emotional experiences, both individually and collectively. They as much a part of ‘muscular bonding’ as marching or drilling, and indeed played an important role in both, keeping time and spurring ‘the Heart of the Soldier’.⁴⁵ Historians should attend to the formal military music that was expanding during this period, but also the plebeian material that soldiers created themselves, such as ‘A new song in praise

of Lord Granby & his brave veterans who boldly engaged the enemy and gain'd compleat victory, July 15th & 16th, 1761':

Sound praises of fame in the Name of Granby,
Great Wonders is done in high Germany
Upon the 15th of July the French gave attack,
Our Left wing repuls'd them & soon drove them back

Chorus ye Sons of Britannia and sing
Success to Great Granby & Long Live the King...

They are always Boasting of Courage I say,
But upon our Approach they hasten away,
For when Granby Appears they are always in fear,
Crying out Mon Dieu Quarter Anglateer

Chorus...

He ne'er [saw] the Army One day for to want,
If Gold could it purchase tho' ever so scant
Gave us Beer, gave us brandy and all we disired,
We thank you Lord Granby was all he required⁴⁶

These verses attest to the affection in which commanders like Granby were held by their men, both for their bravery and prowess in the field and also for their paternalist concern

for their men: in an age when officers had great latitude regarding how funds were spent, they could either line their pockets at the expense of the men or bankrupt themselves with largesse, as Granby famously did.⁴⁷ Many regiments were particularly associated with their commanding officers, and indeed were referred to as such well into the period: an aspect of the proprietary nature of command, it also gives us an insight into the soldier's collective identity as a member of a regiment. Militarily, commanding officers were the cornerstone of affection and discipline for units and, indeed, beyond into a wider military identity of an army. The introduction of territorial titles in the 1780s is an aspect of Britain's military culture that marks a watershed in the idea of a collective military identity and its relationship to a wider society.

Conclusion

The military did not exist without the personnel that formed it. The literary scholar Leo Braudy has noted that, 'most military history, with several distinguished exceptions, was not so much about men or war in general as about strategy and statistics, armament and uniforms.'⁴⁸ While this does the subdiscipline something of a disservice, it is nevertheless true that when military historians have engaged with the human element of war, such as John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976), they have added immeasurably to our understanding of it. The 'new military history' made huge steps forward in this regard, and borrowed methodologies from other subdisciplines of history to great effect. On the other hand, the rise of social and cultural history has often involved divorcing war from soldiers and the activity of being a soldier, most notably in Linda Colley's and Stephen Conway's work on national identity in the period.⁴⁹ 'War and society' and 'war and culture' models tend to treat 'war' as

a separate domain **from** society and culture: ironically, the soldier himself can be less important in some histories of war than non-combatants or bureaucrats.⁵⁰

Firstly, therefore, we need to rethink the relationship between the military and society. This should involve deeper analysis of the transformation and transfer from military to civilian identities, and the assimilation of the soldier's experience into a broader context. This not only presents a new direction for the study of the armed forces, but one that is more in tune with the realities of service in this period, when men often served part time or for a phase (or phases) of their life. The soldier experience, broadly defined, is more representative of the working-class experience than that of the millhand, but is disregarded by labour history.⁵¹ Crucially, soldiers were better documented than many men of their class, so military archives present a huge opportunity for social and cultural historians, which has hitherto largely been missed. It is true that military sources (and in particular the way that they are catalogued) can present particular challenges, but their mysteries are not beyond the capabilities of scholars trained in other disciplines, as military historians are wont to allege.⁵² Indeed, literary scholars are arguably better placed to handle the nuances of genre and intention in the autobiographies and letters that military historians quote so liberally.

Secondly, we should therefore explore how military history can engage further with the methodologies of social and cultural history. Richard Holmes's *Redcoat* and Steven Brumwell's *Redcoats* are examples of military histories that have successfully adapted social history techniques to the men (and women) of the British Army⁵³ – but we have seen how social issues such as lifecycle and social class can also help in this respect. Equally, we have sought here to suggest the potential usefulness of techniques from cultural studies, such as the study of language, gender, the body and identity. If social history is concerned with life experience, cultural history is concerned with the *meanings* of those experiences: it can therefore shed light on soldiering as an activity, and even on combat itself. To return to our

opening remark, then, defining who and what a soldier is can in fact be a complex question. If the soldier on the ground is the fundamental unit of study for military history, then military history can only gain by learning more about him.

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¹ Gerhard Kümmel, 'A Soldier Is a Soldier Is a Soldier!?', in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, ed. Giuseppe Caforio (New York, Springer US, 2006), p.422.

² H. M. Scott, 'The Second "Hundred Years War", 1689-1815 [Review article]', *The Historical Journal* 35 (1992), pp.443-69.

³ 'An Account of the Number of Effective Volunteers in Great Britain and Ireland Respectively, on the 1st of January and 1st of July in the Years 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, 1807, and on the 1st of January 1808;--Distinguishing Cavalry, Infantry, and Artillery', in *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers* (1808), VII, p.223; 'Return of the Effective Strength of the British Army, in Rank and File, in Each Year from the Year 1804 to the Year 1813, Inclusive;--Distinguishing Cavalry, Artillery, Infantry, and Militia, and British from Foreign and Colonial Corps.', in *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers* (1813), XI, p.269.

⁴ For a notable example of a wider analysis of military service, see Ian F. W. Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991).

⁵ The dates of the Peninsular War are taken as 1 August 1808 (landing at Mondego Bay) to 17 April 1814 (armistice); data on battles and combat extracted from Digby George Smith, *The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book: Actions and Losses in Personnel, Colours, Standards and Artillery, 1792-1815* (Mechanicsburg PA, Stackpole Books, 1998).

⁶ Tony Hayter, *The Army and the Crowd in Mid-Georgian England* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1978); Clive Emsley, *Policing and its Context, 1750-1870* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1983); Clive Emsley, 'The Military and Popular Disorder in England 1790-1801', *Journal for the Society of Army Historical Research* vol. 61 no. 245 (1983), pp.10-21 and continued in vol. 61 no. 246 (1983), pp.96-112.

⁷ J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army 1715-1795* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981), pp.57-74.

⁸ A complete survey of all the types of Britain's military forces in the period remains to be undertaken, but good sources on particular aspects are: Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen Conway, 'The Mobilization of Manpower for Britain's Mid-Eighteenth-Century Wars', *Historical Research* vol. 77 no. 197 (2004), pp.377-404; J. E. Cookson, *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997); J. E. Cookson, 'Service without Politics? Army, Militia and Volunteers in Britain During the American and French Revolutionary Wars', *War In History* 10.4 (2003), pp.381-97; J. R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century: The Story of a Political Issue, 1660-1802* (London, Routledge & K. Paul, 1965).

⁹ Kümmel, 'A Soldier Is a Soldier'.

¹⁰ David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know it* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

¹¹ James Vernon, 'Who's Afraid of the Linguistic Turn? The Politics of Social History and its Discontents', *Social History* 19.1 (1991), pp.81-97.

¹² Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edn (2 vols, Dublin, 1775), II, col. SOL.

¹³ Francis Grose notes the linguistic links between ‘soldier’ and ‘stipendiary’ in his discussion of mercenary troops: *Military Antiquities Respecting A History of the English Army from the Conquest to the Present Time*, 2 vols (London, 1786), I, p.58.

¹⁴ [Granville Sharp,] *Tracts Concerning the Ancient and Only True Legal Means of National Defence, by a Free Militia* (London, 1781), pp.47-9.

¹⁵ Johnson, *Dictionary*, II, col. SOL.

¹⁶ ‘Soldiers and Soldiering in Britain, c. 1750-1815’, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK).

¹⁷ The word only appears a handful of times in ECCO, and usually in an archaic or dialect context. For example, in Isaac Bickerstaff’s play *The Recruiting Sergeant* (London, 1770), p.15, the sergeant’s wife sings:

But if a soldiering, you’re bent to roam,
We shall shortly to the parish come;
And the churchwardens, no-one to befriend us,
Will, for the next thing, to the workhouse send us.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Dictionary*, II, col. RED.

¹⁹ J. Farrant, ‘Grose, Francis (bap. 1731, d. 1791), antiquary’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004-11), accessed 12 January 2011: <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

²⁰ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 8th edn (4 vols, Oxford, 1778), I, p.408.

²¹ J. M. Beattie, *Policing and Punishment in London, 1660-1750* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2001), pp.46-8.

²² Blackstone, *Commentaries*, I, p.408.

²³ S. Dudink, K. Hagemann and J. Tosh (eds), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003); Alan Forrest, Karen

Hagemann and Jane Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820* (Houndmills, Palgrave, 2009).

²⁴ Hannah Smith, 'The army, provincial urban communities and loyalist cultures in England, c. 1714-50', *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011), pp.139-58.

²⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992), pp.52-3.

²⁶ 'Arouse Britons for the honour and Glory of Old England!' (n. d.): National Army Museum (hereafter NAM) 5010/9.

²⁷ G. Stepler, 'British military law, discipline, and the conduct of Regimental Courts Martial in the later eighteenth century', *English Historical Review* vol. 112 no. 449 (1987), pp.859-85.

²⁸ Leora Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions : Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009).

²⁹ For example: Stephen Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and War in the Americas, 1755-1763* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); Edward Coss, *All for the King's Shilling: the British Soldier under Wellington, 1808-1814* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

³⁰ Cookson, *British Armed Nation*, pp.115-116; Return of Men Volunteered from the Militia, The National Archives (hereafter TNA) WO25/3225; Return of Militia Volunteers, TNA WO1/946; 'Return of the Number of Volunteers from the Militia, English, Irish and Scotch, That Have Enlisted into the Regular Army, from the 25th December 1813, to the 25th December 1814; Distinguishing Men and Boys, and Those Enlisted for Life, or for a Term of Years', in *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers* (1814), IX, p.327; Volunteers from the Militia, TNA WO1/904.

³¹ 'Return of the Effective Strength of His Majesty's Land Forces, on the 1st January and on the 1st July, in the Years 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806, & 1807, and on 1st January 1808', in *House of Commons Papers; Accounts and Papers* (1808), VII, p.267.

³² A recruiting poster for the 6th Regiment of foot promised that, 'men of good character are sure of speedy promotion and... MERIT never remains unawarded': 'Old England and the Warwickshire Heroes forever!' (n. d.), NAM 7511-30.

³³ Grose, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, col. HAL.

³⁴ Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005).

³⁵ Matthew McCormack, 'The New Militia: War, Politics and Gender in 1750s Britain', *Gender & History* 19.3 (2007), pp.483-500.

³⁶ David Morgan, 'Theater of War: Combat, the Military and Masculinities' in *Theorizing Masculinities*, ed. H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1994), pp.165-82.

³⁷ Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (Knopf, New York, 2003), p.xiv.

³⁸ Clive Emsley, 'Military and Popular Disorder', p.101.

³⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.84, 92.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), trans. Alan Sheridan (London, Penguin, 1991), part 3; Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450-2000* (Houndmills, Palgrave, 2008).

⁴¹ Katrina Navickas, "'That Sash Will Hang You": Political Clothing and Adornment in England, 1780-1840', *Journal of British Studies*, 49.3 (2010), pp.540-65.

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- ⁴² Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle from the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1996).
- ⁴³ The phrase is William McNeill's: *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (New Haven, Harvard UP, 1996), p.vi.
- ⁴⁴ Mark Philp et al, 'Music and Politics, 1793-1815' in *Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion 1797-1815* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006), pp.173-204.
- ⁴⁵ [William Breton,] *Militia Discipline* (London, 1717), p.33. See McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*, p.2 and passim.
- ⁴⁶ William Todd, *The Journal of Corporal Todd, 1745-1762*, ed. Andrew Cormack and Alan Jones (London, Sutton Pub. for the Army Records Society, 2001), p.171.
- ⁴⁷ Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (Routledge, London, 1987), pp.39, 71-3.
- ⁴⁸ Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism*, xviii.
- ⁴⁹ Colley, *Britons*; Conway, *British Isles*.
- ⁵⁰ Jeremy Black laments this 'demilitarisation of military history': 'Britain as a Military Power', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 26.2 (2003), pp.189-202 (p.189).
- ⁵¹ As noted by Nick Mansfield in 'Military Radicals and the Making of Class, 1790-1860', in C. Kennedy and M. McCormack (eds), *Men of Arms: Soldiering in Britain and Ireland, 1750-1850* (forthcoming).
- ⁵² William P. Tatum, 'Challenging the New Military History: The Case of Eighteenth-Century British Army Studies', *History Compass*, 5.1 (2007), pp.72-84.
- ⁵³ Richard Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London, HarperCollins, 2001); Stephen Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and War in the Americas, 1755-1763* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).