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Communicating War through the Contemporary British Military Memoir: the Censorships of Genre, State, and Self

K. NEIL JENKINGS AND RACHEL WOODWARD

School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, UK

This paper is about military memoirs—the published autobiographical reflections of those who have participated in armed conflict—as a mechanism for communication about war. In this paper, we consider the controls exerted by functions of genre, military organizational censorship and self-censorship as influences on the possibilities for the military memoir for communicating war. Drawing on memoirs published about experiences with the British Armed Forces from 1980 to the present and interviews with a sample of authors of memoirs, the paper considers the factors which shape and constrain the accounts these memoirs contain. We look first at the conventions of the genre, considering how authors may or may not accept or reject its established modes and forms, and consider censorship as a capacity of the conventions of the genre. Second, we consider the role of formal institutional censorship undertaken by the Ministry of Defence and by other military institutions in shaping what can and cannot be said within the memoir. Third, we consider the role of authorial self-censorship, and highlight this as a powerful force in shaping the final published narrative. We conclude with observations about the limits of the genre for speaking with veracity about war, and the potential offered by the turn to fiction by memoirists as a means of enabling a less constrained form of communication about their military experiences.

As a source of power, the book has also been very much subject to power. The history of writing can hardly be dissociated from the history of censorship, either of the blatant kind exercised directly by the organs of power, or the more insidious kind, self-censorship, when authors or publishers (whose interests may be opposed) themselves anticipate the wishes of outside forces,

whether of their own patrons (if that kind of support or protection is needed) or of more general political pressures.

Jack Goody (2000) *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, p. 157.

Introduction

Censorship of information about military activities is nothing new. The idea that in the narratives produced about war there may be either deliberate interventions to conceal factual information, or to articulate a narrative in a specific way for specific ends, or to omit details about events or ideas to varying degrees from the record, is unsurprising. Consideration of censorship is most commonly articulated with reference to news media, and in the commentaries surrounding the nature and effects of the censorship of war, it is the coverage of journalists and news media that most usually provides the focus (see for example Hallin (1986) on Vietnam, Curtis (1984) on Northern Ireland, Harris (1983) and Adams (1986) on the Falklands War and Taylor (1992) on the first Gulf War). Censorship of news media narratives continues to concern those engaged with understanding the ways and means by which the facts and representations of war are communicated, and this concern is present across historical time and into the contemporary period. Less usual, and the focus of this paper, is consideration of censorship in narratives of war beyond those of news media. Here, we focus on the censorships surrounding the military memoir—the published autobiographical accounts of experiences in armed conflict. Those producing military memoirs write as military personnel rather than journalists, and their accounts published in book form have a scope and focus very different to those of journalists. In this paper, we discuss three ways in which censorship and the military memoir can be considered. We consider first the ways in which the genre's form and conventions act to shape particular elements of accounts and influence the 'truths' that all military memoirs claim to articulate. Second, we explore how the organizations and institutions of the armed forces work to exert censorship of the finished book during the process of its production, considering censorship in broader terms than just the act of a nameless bureaucrat excising from the written record that which is unpalatable to the military establishment. Third, we discuss the ways in which authors themselves censor their accounts of military experience, and examine how self-censorship is practised and justified in the construction of the memoir. We conclude by considering the limitations on the publication of experience-based accounts of military activities with a claim to veracity, because of the forms of censorship which we identify, and suggest that fictional accounts provide the only way out for some of those determined to present their military experience for public consumption.

The contemporary military memoir has its origins in the spiritual revelatory memoirs of the pre-Romantic period, in which accounts of the spiritual

transformations brought by war to the soldier-author constituted the most common form within war-writing (Harari, 2008; Ramsey, 2011). Following the Peninsular Wars and Napoleonic Wars (1808–1814), contemporary scholars note a shift in the focus of the military memoir, from those concerned with spiritual transformation, to those more concerned with descriptions of the deprivations endured by the ordinary soldier (Ramsey, 2011). These newer forms of war-writing were criticized as ‘unpatriotic accounts’ containing ‘unjustifiable’ criticisms of senior officers; the Duke of Wellington himself was not immune from this critical gaze. The ‘critical memoirs’ appearing from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the middle of the 1820s were then replaced by the more patriotic and adventurous accounts of the officer class (Ramsey, 2011). While official censorship of the ‘critical’ accounts of the ordinary soldier by the military or state was not a feature of this period, these accounts were ‘censured’ in the reviews of them in popular journals of the time.

It is difficult to establish with certainty the point in time when state and/or military institutional interests started to exert deliberate control over the contents of memoirs, and over freedoms of the author to publish the information that he or she considered necessary for the narrative. What is more transparent is the emergence of systems of control over the military memoir, and the development of practices ranging from legislation and state sanction over publication, through to less formalized mechanisms (such as the facilitation and denial of access to information and people). These methods of state control, however, are just part of a range of practices which constitute censorship in the genre, and our purpose in this paper is to take a wider view of censorship, beyond the interventions of the state and its institutions, and consider a more nuanced and essentially human set of activities which, whilst in effect censoring what is published, in practice reflect the complexities of the genre and its production.

In constructing our argument, we draw primarily on the results of a study of the production of the contemporary British military memoir which focused on autobiographical accounts of participation with British Armed Forces published from 1980 onwards.¹ The principal aim of the research was to explore the processes through which the military experiences of an individual come to be published in book form, and underpinning the research was a focus on the published book (and for this reason, we excluded blogs and unpublished manuscripts). Over 150 memoirs within our category were collected, and interviews were conducted with twenty-one authors, using a schedule to guide a semi-structured interview designed to explore the specificities of writing and memoir production with a diverse sample of authors. In addition, an interview was conducted with a senior member of the British Ministry of Defence public relations management team and supplementary information on specific books and authors was generated from news media and publishers’ information. The author interviews, the primary source of data on which we

¹‘The social production of the contemporary British military memoir’, Rachel Woodward and K. Neil Jenkins, 2009-11, ESRC reference RES-062-23-1493

draw here, were then transcribed and sorted according to the questions in the interview schedule. Author responses were then analysed using established coding strategies to reveal patterns, commonalities, and diversities of experience amongst the group of twenty-one authors. The questions and responses which we draw on here concern authors' reflections on their readership of other military memoirs and experience with the genre as a whole; author experiences of the role of censorship in the production of their memoir; and author decision-making about what to include and exclude in the written manuscript and published memoir.

The censorships of genre

Fundamental to our study of the memoir is an argument that the military memoir constitutes a specific genre, in that the collection of books we consider share a unity of intent comprising a narrative based on the lived experience of participation in military activities told in the first person and making a claim to veracity on the basis of the activities of the individual identified as the author. There is, of course, diversity within the genre, which includes the more standard accounts of action and adventure and of personal transformation and revelation about the nature of war, but also includes accounts which cross over into other genres within non-fiction life-writing, such as the trauma and recovery narrative, and outliers within the genre (one, Eddy Nugent's (2008) *Picking Up the Brass*, was written as an 'anti-memoir' constructed deliberately to counter the conventions of the standard action-adventure story; another, Pen Farthing's (2009) *One Dog at a Time* was written as an account of dog rescue).

One of the great surprises of our research was the extent to which the majority of author interviewees denied any great influence from the genre of the military memoir in their own writing. Many did not consider themselves to have been influenced by 'genre' at all, and argued that they were merely recounting their experiences. Indeed, the limitations of length were reported as a more restricting factor than any requirements dictated by the genre. Whilst some memoirists had read a number of memoirs by other authors, the majority had not. The majority of memoirists, it seems, do not feel censored either by the genre in general, or by memoirs of a similar time or conflict already published. Moreover, some authors avoided reading or re-reading the published memoirs of others whilst writing their own, specifically so as not to be influenced by the style and content of other writers. Yet a small number of interviewees had pertinent points to make about the ways in which the conventions of the genre demanded attentiveness to the idea of censorship. As Patrick Hennessey, author of *The Junior Officers' Reading Club* (2009) noted, his book would only work if it was honest, but also because as a memoir it constituted 'the oldest story of them all', 'the growing-up journey'.

I didn't want to self-censor for the authenticity of the memoir, but also actually stylistically as a [...] piece of writing, it wouldn't have made sense to self-censor,

'cause [...] you needed to understand that I was immature and cocky at the beginning to [...] understand how much I'd grown up... (Author interview, 2010)

Hennessey, with a background in English literature, may be more able than many to articulate clearly the fit between his book and the wider genre, and spoke also of playing with the concept of what was and was not a memoir. But he was not unique in having an awareness of genre and readership whilst writing. Patrick Bury, author of *Callsign Hades* (2010), spoke of deliberately writing for people who had never read a military book or would never read one again, consciously avoiding the conventions of the action–adventure story and its popularity in the market which he viewed as being of minimal interest compared with people ‘who were more interested in what war does to people and what war does to men’ (Author interview, 2010). Richard Dannatt (*Leading from the Front*, 2010), writing as a senior officer and former Chief of the General Staff, also pointed to his position as a public figure and thus the status of his memoir as a version on record for future historians and students; the conventions of the genre were thus of less concern than its future as a source document for those writing about the British Army and its campaigns and activities in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Genre may censor too, in terms of defining the narrative structure of a memoir. Memoirs which focus on a specific operation, a popular form within the genre, have proven successful with publishers and readers (see, for example, Andy McNab's (1993) *Bravo Two Zero* and the way in which the structuring of that story has subsequently shaped the memoirs of others). So Ed Macy (2008), who as an Apache pilot serving in Afghanistan had a very wide range of potential stories to tell from active operations, was told very firmly by his agent to focus on the Jugroom Fort mission for which he had been awarded the Military Cross and which would constitute the focus of his story.

...you need to focus on one thing [...] you only use missions which get you to Jugroom Fort. If it didn't get you to Jugroom Fort, you don't have the space in which to include it, it's as simple as that. (Author interview, 2010)

It is in this sense, then, that genre can be seen as a form of censorship in practice. Other authors also spoke of the consequences of writing for a specific genre, or writing a book that had a limited length and thus the need to prioritize only events and ideas essential to the story and which would keep the manuscript to an acceptable length.

Censorship by military institutions

Censorship in relation to the military memoir is more commonly understood as a practice undertaken by military institutions acting either in the interests of the institution itself (i.e. the armed forces) or in the interests of the state (i.e. present and

previous governments and the Ministry of Defence, MoD). All members of the Armed Forces sign the Official Secrets Act but this is seen as having limited impact on memoirs due to issues around its broad scope and enforcement. In the UK the main oversight is carried out by the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee (DPBAC) inaugurated in 1912. This is usually chaired by a senior civil servant and the Secretary and Deputy Secretary are usually serving members of the Armed Forces. The committee draws its membership from the media and broadcasting organizations, although book publishers are/were not represented. However, as minutes from a 1992 meeting of the DPBAC note: ‘In answer to a question about the attitude of book publishers, the Secretary confirmed that, although not represented on the DPBAC, publishers had copies of the Defence Advisory (DA)-Notices and followed the advice in them, and generally encouraged their not invariably so willing authors to do so’.² The minutes of the DPBAC of May 2003 state: ‘The Secretary reported that he had been asked for comments on six books in the past six months. One concerned potential official use of satellite receiving stations, three were Special Forces books, one was a crime novel by an ex-SF author, and one was the DPBAC Vice Chairman’s book about Weapons of Mass Destruction. There were no changes advised to any of these books’.³ This hands-off approach contrasts with authors’ accounts, and this would seem to be because the DPBAC is not the site of daily censorship activities, but where problems or settled issues get recorded, and revolve around the use of DA Notices: (<http://www.dnotice.org.uk/>); otherwise a memoir goes to a single service PR team. If written by a specialist or containing technical information that could be sensitive, the book is reviewed by one or more further people able to judge the potential sensitivities of the content. The PR personnel’s job is to know to whom it should go. Relevant segments with contextualizing information are sent rather than the whole document, which means that different segments are read by different people, with the comments later collated.

So, if a memoir is to be published by an author who is a serving member of the British Armed Forces, or who is employed by the MoD, there is a requirement that the manuscript be reviewed and cleared by the MoD, or specific service, prior to publication. This is censorship in its most readily understood form. These issues were discussed during our interviews with authors—although there was a slightly strange aspect of such lines of questioning, asking about things which had been excised or changed at institutional request, without being able to ask or know about the nature of the deletions and alterations because of the needs for confidentiality or secrecy.

Censorship of this kind starts before the writing of the book. There is an understanding that memoirs of some campaigns or operations simply will not be published. As one of our interviewees reported, a colleague from the Royal Marines

²D/DPBAC/3/2/1 2002 <http://www.dnotice.org.uk/linkedfiles/dnotice/15may2002.pdf>

³<http://www.dnotice.org.uk/linkedfiles/dnotice/15may2003.pdf>

was explicitly directed not to write about his experiences with Kurdish forces in Iraq in 1991. Such control is less easily accomplished if authors have left the Armed Forces and are not subject to the same restrictions, although ex-regular UK military personnel will still be accountable to the Official Secrets Act. Following the massive commercial successes of Andy McNab's (1993) *Bravo Two Zero* and Chris Ryan's (1995) *The One That Got Away*, the MoD tried to prevent the publication of accounts by other members of the team involved in the failed operation in Iraq, but was unsuccessful, and Mike Coburn's (2004) *Soldier Five* was published—despite a two million pound legal action by the MoD.⁴ Following this, members of Special Forces units have been required to sign the UKSF Confidentiality Contract introduced by the MOD in 1996; through signing, agreement is reached not to write about their Special Forces experiences, a restriction justified on grounds of 'operational security' (this appears to be not just for service personnel but media people too if they are recipients of information from breaches by Special Forces personnel). This resulted in a major reduction in the number of Special Forces memoirs published from the late 1990s onwards (and explains the absence of any Special Forces memoirs from the Afghanistan war, despite the deployment of Special Forces personnel and the healthy market for Afghanistan memoirs). Although those who joined the Special Forces prior to the requirement to sign the 'pre-nuptial agreement' were not affected, those individuals who have published have been denied access to, for example, the Special Air Service base in Hereford. This move was controversial, as it was seen as applying to the non-commissioned ranks and enforced by the officer class—who then proceeded with their own memoirs. Profits from books published while still serving in the Armed Forces can technically be claimed by the MOD as personnel are not allowed two sources of income, confirmed in the legal judgement of the *Soldier Five* case in 2003 (DPBAC 15 May 2003), and this too acts as a discouragement. This tactic was used to try and 'recoup' money from a Royal Marine Reservist, Matt Croucher, who had earned £90,000 from his book *Bullet Proof* following his award of the George Cross. The MoD swiftly had to back down when the story hit the press of its attempt to financially ruin the Reservist Afghan volunteer and popular hero (Lewis, 2010).

The authors we interviewed had varying views on censorship. A commonly held view was that

... the Ministry of Defence was going to look at it to see that I hadn't crossed the Official Secrets Act [and] the publishers' libel lawyers would read it to ensure that I hadn't said anything that could be actionable or by other parties, that I couldn't then justify or stand by.

One author proposed that the MoD relied on authors not knowing their rights, and thus being compliant to requests for changes. A couple of authors were critical of the amount of censorship they thought existed around memoirs, particularly

⁴<http://www.socnet.com/archive/index.php/t-4473.html>

when more senior personnel were perceived to have a greater freedom to publish. However, they and others also recognized that there was a need, sometimes, to limit or omit specific information, not least because, as one author put it, ‘I’m not prepared to put anything down and put anything into writing with the chance of getting someone killed out there’ (Author interview, 2010), and this was a common story. There was also a wider awareness that some operations or events should be avoided as issues to be written about, and ultimately there was little that an author could do about this, given that if employed by the MoD or Armed Forces they were obliged to seek permission to publish. Equally, for one author of a Bosnia memoir, ‘... the then Army PR people [...] felt that actually it was a good idea that this should be out in the public domain’ because the story would have a positive effect on the reputation of the Army (Author interview, 2010). There was no unanimous position on the role or experience of censorship among our authors. As a matter of course, major publishers would send a draft copy of a manuscript to the MoD for clearance, and their own legal departments also read through the document and any required changes and suggested amendments. Authors would be the principal editors of such changes, and they varied in their attitudes to such guidance. Authors were not necessarily passive actors in this process, being keen to get clearance in order to get their book published. Here, experiences differed. One non-commissioned officer was told that failure to follow MoD advice could result in a criminal charge. Previous MoD actions have included the demand that a publisher withdraw and pulp a whole print run; the publishers of Jackie George’s (1999) *She Who Dared* were, however, unable to recall all copies of the book, and it remains available.

Whilst accepting the necessity for some MoD oversight of materials entering the public domain, greater criticism was reserved for how this practice was executed. The author of a best-selling book about Afghanistan remarked, for example, on the qualifications or lack thereof of those in charge of overseeing publications, although ‘thankfully they have civil servants who work alongside them who do know the job’ (Author interview 2010). Another, a Falklands memoirist, talked of rebuffing MoD requests for the exclusion of information because it was already in the public domain:

This [MoD] expert said, ‘You can’t say that, a lot of the public don’t know that the ship was hit beforehand’. And [...] I said, ‘the Honours list is now out and if you look at the citation for Lieutenant Commander Bernie Bruen it describes his award for diffusing a bomb on that day and it’s in the public record’ (Author interview, 2010).

Another talked about censorship which seemed, essentially, to be daft:

I think I mentioned something about an officer – how he spoke was quite gay – and they actually took that out, saying a member of the commissioned officers should never be known as being, or possibly being gay... but just saying that

some officer had a gay voice is hardly you know cause, you know, [for] Afghanistan to fall... (Author interview, 2010).

Another spoke of being unable to include photographs of his 'flying buddies' because of RAF insistence that written consent would be required of individuals included in photographs. This author argued that it was this over-interpretation of regulations which had the most significant effect in terms of what was included and excluded in that particular book.

The process can also be complicated by the complexities of what is being described. In the case of *Apache*, a memoir centering on the role of a complex aircraft,

The Ministry of Defence then get it and they've got to decide, can this book be released?... Easy to do when you're talking about a foot soldier in Iraq, or a sniper, cos it's really easy. But what do you do when you're talking about equipment no-one knows about, and it's so new nothing's been, no measure's been put in force to say what you can and can't say? They then need to go to subject matter experts. So that book was then sent to the Army Air Corps and the Director of Army Aviation, the Brigadier got it and then ... he then dragged people in who are weapons experts... And then it all gets compiled and they come back with this huge list of things that they don't want in the book (Author interview, 2010).

Ultimately, however, control seemed to rest with the MoD for those who are serving personnel or who are on the reserve list. In the words of one author, the response to requests for changes was 'Yeah, just change it, let's keep them happy, keep them sweet'. That said, there was awareness of power on both sides. In the case of Ed Macy, who knew he could refuse requests for removals and alterations, had he proceeded and published anyway this could have led to a High Court injunction where each point would have been argued before a judge. It was better, therefore, to come to an amicable compromise. Another author resigned from his MoD post rather than make a change requested by the MoD to his memoir of bomb disposal in Iraq.

There was also recognition of the limits to censorship. In the case of one Falklands memoirist, Vince Bramley, despite having had his book *Excursion to Hell* (1991) cleared by the MoD and even put through a D notice, he still had troubles and recriminations once the book was published.

Self-censorship

It is self-censorship which seems to be the most significant issue for authors when considering what to include and exclude. As noted already, authors have an awareness in general terms about what can and cannot be written about for reasons of operational security or because of MoD requirements that some activities and

events should not be put into the public domain. But when talking to authors, it was the censorship by the self, for personal reasons, over which most care was taken.

There were a lot of details I glossed over or missed out because of operational security and because I didn't want to upset [name] and [name]'s families and there were some identities I changed (Author interview, 2010).

Authors were also alert to changing conventions regarding some issues about which they could have written. Bullying, for example, was avoided as a topic in Eddy Nugent's (2008) *Picking Up the Brass*, which is about the story of a recruit to the British Army of the 1980s.

Everybody was bullied, you know, in that there was [...] physical chastisement if you messed up. So that was technically bullying by your yard stick now, but I didn't feel I was being bullied because it was 1985 and there was more of a knock-about world, [...] my secondary school was tougher than the Army, [...] it was a real sort of Lord of the Flies environment, the secondary school, the Army didn't seem half as bad you know because there were more rules (Author interview, 2010).

The distinction that authors made between formal and self-censorship was not a simple one. There was an element of what authors saw as common-sense, evident in comments such as 'what I didn't include was stuff I knew the MOD would be uncomfortable with ... and I self-excluded that stuff' and 'there was no way the RAF would have allowed me to publish it. So that was definitely self censorship'. Self-censorship was anticipatory and pre-emptive:

I don't think we have ever been reviewed by the MOD, you know, I don't know if the book has ever been submitted by anybody for scrutiny as to what things are mentioned, but you can bet your bottom dollar if we started talking about special duties units in Northern Ireland then you know they'd want a good look at it (Author interview, 2010).

More significant seemed to be self-censorship following authors' own concerns, and this worked in various ways. Most obviously, it works through protection of the self. As Simon Bywater noted, 'I wasn't there to sell my soul', although his *Forced Out* (2003) contains a lot of self-reflection. It works through the ethics of what should or should not be revealed about others, and through finding a balance between providing sufficient detail to give readers a good sense of what happened, and going into too much detail so that the sensibilities of readers would be offended. It works also through concerns for families of deceased colleagues: 'it's a terrible thing to see and [you] don't want to make it sound too sick for respect to the bereaved families and such like'. In terms of the latter, authors felt they did not need to be told by the MoD about the need to protect the families of the casualties of war. As Simon Weston, author of *Walking Tall* (1989) and *Going Back* (1992) observed, 'Well you'd always do that. You'd never tell somebody about a

family member that would die in such horrible, catastrophic way, torturous, terrible, painful, agonizing; that would be cruel'. And as Ed Macy emphatically stated, 'there are things that people need to know, and there are things that people don't need to know, and that's as simple as that'. The simplest way to do this was by not naming people, or if necessary by omitting information from the narrative.

Self-censorship also included care over identifying individuals who were thought to have made mistakes or errors, or who had character traits or modes of operation which were unpleasant. 'I am not saying, 'hey, crush the story, don't say what that person did', but there is absolutely no need for you to go putting the guy's name there, you know, in a format that he can't defend himself', a tactic described by another author as 'criticism by omission'. Furthermore, individual mistakes may not be representative of an individual. As Rick Jolly, author of *The Red and Green Life Machine* (1983), noted, 'I didn't put in failure, there were some people who didn't do very well initially, and then did well afterwards, so I didn't want to humiliate them'. Names could be changed to protect the author and publisher against potential accusations of libel, although the individual could still be identified to those with the requisite knowledge. Patrick Hennessey commented, with reference to a similar instance concerning an individual, that 'it's so easy to work out who he is if you know anything about the Army, and it is an unflattering portrait of an instructor, but I think he earned that in a way [...] if he had been a bad instructor but a nice guy you probably wouldn't have done it, but I thought he was a bit of a bully...'

Self-censorship involved considerations about the protection of more than just individuals. As Barry Fieldgate, author of *The Captain's Steward* (2007), noted, 'I was very, very conscious never to bring in or to discredit another member of the ship's company'. Fieldgate illustrates both a sense of loyalty and honour, not just to individuals but also to the group which could also be tarred by the 'dishonour' of one of its members. Naming and blaming is thus a difficult decision. As Chris Bain, author of *Cold War, Hot Wings* (2007), expressed it, 'the issue of trust is [...] to me the trust amongst your peers, and I don't think I need to go much further than that!' Patrick Bury related how he had initially included a controversial account he had heard from someone else and as

a naive captain I [put it] in the first draft and I remember that alarms bells went off all over the place, [people] saying "if you put that in there will be an enquiry you know, do you want to see your soldiers dragged into court?" Absolutely no way. I have got a loyalty to them you know, I'm not having my soldiers in there talking about their bosses book... I took it out and changed it.

Self-censorship is as much about a style of writing. For Nigel Ely, author of *For Queen and Country* (2003), 'anything I write I try and write it within the flow and context of the story. I don't stop and then if there's a nice meaty bit about bashing someone's head in I don't prolong it—I hope I don't anyway'. Self-censorship is also shaped by the distance across time between the events described and the writing of the narrative. 'Do you need to make that comment

about that person twenty five years on? And in most cases the answer was “no”, remove it, and I did’. Authors noted the ways in which they used the text to make implicit criticism rather than explicit.

Conclusion

Censorship is a complex issue in memoirs. These books make a claim to truth, about the veracity of the lived experience of war, and their authority rests on this idea. But like any narrative, they are shaped and mediated by authors, agents, publishers, and unlike other narratives by the military institutions of the MoD and the three Armed Forces. Most evidently, they are mediated by the sensibilities of those close to the author, and the families of those whose deaths these texts describe. So whilst the idea of censorship around these books may accord with an accepted and widely understood view of control around the published text to protect the institutions of the military, it is also much more, and involves both the expectations demanded by the genre, and the sensitivities of those writing with regard to those about whom they write.

Two observations follow from this. The first concerns the utility or otherwise of the military memoir as a source of information and understanding about the lived experiences of war. Given what we have noted, about the mediation of the text by the conventions of genre, military institution and authorial practice, there is perhaps the possibility that the utility of these texts is undermined. Our research is predicated on an understanding of the military memoir as valuable in a range of contexts, social and academic, for widening public and scholarly comprehension about armed conflict (see Woodward and Jenkins 2012a, 2012b). It could be argued that exposure of the mediations surrounding the text during its writing and preparation for publication undermines the authority of these books. We disagree, arguing instead that a more nuanced account of the ways in which these texts are structured—their social life during production—opens up possibilities for a closer understanding of how these books actually work.

Our second observation concerns other outlets that may exist for writing about the experiences of war beyond the reach of private or state sensibilities. Although in our research we did not set out to explore fictionalized accounts of war and their relationship to lived experience, we came up against this issue from time to time when discussing the further writing careers of our authors. Fictional accounts offer the potential for less constrained forms of communication about the war experience, and perhaps a way, for those determined to reveal its truths, to write a less compromised account. There is an interesting issue here for future research. The authorial careers of memoirists such as Andy McNab and Chris Ryan have been successful, and that success is usually interpreted as a consequence of carefully co-written and successfully marketed action adventure stories playing on the brand or platform established by the author as a memoirist. Whilst the shadow of their success hangs over other memoirists, particularly the realization about how lucrative

subsequent writing careers can be, the possibilities of fiction for enabling what may be a more truthful account of the lived experience of war appeared attractive to some.

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