

THE UNDERSTANDING OLDER VETERANS TOOLKIT: WORKING WITH POST-MILITARY LIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Where and how this toolkit was developed

Military Lives and Transformative Experiences: Exploring narratives and aged veterans' well-being was an interdisciplinary research project conducted between 2017 and 2019, with academics from medical sociology, philosophy, psychology and health research. We examined how older veterans' well-being could be improved by autobiographical storytelling in various forms, aiming to understand the impact of personal narrative in connection with wider philosophical questions about flourishing and well-being. This toolkit is one of the research outputs.

The toolkit is based on data collected used qualitative research techniques, analysed in combination with philosophical concepts:

- (1) Interviews with 50 older veterans, focused on the role of personal narrative autobiography and autobiographical accounts and their impact on well-being.
- (2) Five workshops working with over 70 veterans examining the use of storying prompts, concepts such as transformative experience, and particular themes in military life such as enlistment, comradeship or leaving the forces.

At the time of writing, we are in the process of publishing the research in academic journals. As this toolkit evolves, we will update the reference list to reflect this.

Who this toolkit is for and how to use it

Organisations who work with older veterans can use this toolkit it to inform their practice, including national and local charities, organisations aiming to work with the veteran community more broadly, health service providers, residential or care organisations and educational organisations aiming to support older adult learning. The toolkit contains practical recommendations for working with older veterans, including considerations of accessibility, and a detailed guide to delivering activities that enable civilians to support older veterans, with the aim of improving their well-being.

The activities in this toolkit are designed to be adapted to meet the needs of your organisation. It may be that you want to run one or more events with communities, or that you want to use the extracts to elicit conversations on specific themes.

EVIDENCE BASE: SHARING STORIES AND WELL-BEING

Research shows that sharing narratives about life events can benefit people with mental health problems.¹⁻³ Being able to tell a coherent story about the self helps people to make sense of their lives and improves well-being. Similarly, reading about shared experiences has also been identified as having well-being benefits.⁴⁻⁷ Autobiographical narrative—telling one’s own story—is central to well-being, self-understanding, and/or selfhood.⁸⁻¹⁰ Our starting point was to explore these ideas with the older veteran population, who often have poor well-being and experience loneliness and isolation.^{11,12}

This toolkit will help service providers to harness the potential of narratives and storytelling to improve well-being. It facilitates working with autobiographical texts on military lives, as well as with extracts from interviews with older military veterans. It shares the learning from the research we have conducted with older veterans, mediating encounters between veterans and autobiographical texts.





OLDER VETERANS AND STORIES OF MILITARY CULTURE

Older (aged) veterans are defined by the Ministry of Defence as those born before 1 January 1950. There is interest in ensuring their health and well-being needs are fully met. In the UK, an inclusive definition of a veteran has been adopted which includes all former service personnel: anyone who has been part of the armed forces for at least one day of service is considered to be a veteran.¹³ Many of those who fit this definition may not identify as a veteran, believing the term refers to those who served in the World Wars. However, we are now seeing more ex-service personnel begin to take up the veteran identity, especially through wearing the Veterans Badge.¹⁴

The use of stories as a form of bonding and establishing a sense of belonging in military culture has been widely established.¹⁵ Examining our interviews with this generation of veterans confirms this, with references to 'pulling up a sandbag', 'swinging the lamp' and an open acknowledgement that veterans love to tell stories to willing listeners.



“

I think the thing about stories is that the veterans who are listening to the stories by other veterans understand the context. [...] The problem mainly is to get your story in, because everybody else wants to tell theirs! So you've got to be quick. [...] Veterans love to hear stories: they love to tell their own stories.

18: Male, RAF, National Service, served 25 years

“

We always have lunch after a game of golf, and we go out for dinners and various things, and so we do, we swing the light and drag up a sandbag every now and again, you know, and have a chat, and it's quite interesting.

41: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 22 years

“

There might be a few comical stories come up about things that have happened to various people at various times; some repeatable, some not. And, you know, it'll be that sort of camaraderie, amusing stories or where are they now type of things and, when you get to my age, asking if they're actually still around, you know!

28: Male, Army, National Service, served 2 years

“

[Civilians'] eyes go blank! Because you're trying to explain the inexplicable, if you like. And conversations, this is an in-depth conversation for a purpose. So, you are interested. But the average person that you talk to, you don't understand.

26: Male, TA, Voluntary Enlisted, served 25 years

The recognition that not all former comrades 'were still around' was important to note. While veterans may previously have had good social networks and significant contact with their former regiment or colleagues, as they aged, this was less easy to access. Many regimental organisations had closed, and former service comrades had become ill or died. This meant that older veterans had lost a source of support that they may have previously relied upon; opportunities to pull up a sandbag are disappearing.



This toolkit focuses on providing a framework for civilians to become willing listeners, and enabling veterans to connect with each other despite their different experiences. By facilitating opportunities to share stories in a structured and aware manner, use of this toolkit will continue the work we have started in workshops and interviews to affect a positive change in levels of well-being in the older veteran community by telling stories and encouraging listening and awareness of this communities' needs.

“

If you got a few of us together in a room, and to talk about our experiences, and you just sat and listened, if we could get off talking together about what we did, where we went, what we'd done, how we became, stuff like that, I think you would find how it gels together, because even though we might come from different – as I say – as we come from different regiments or corps, that the basics were the same. And along the line somewhere, your experiences dovetail, you know?

02: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 27 years

“

Thoroughly enjoyable and educative – I am leaving with good vibes resulting from the group work.

Workshop feedback

“

It will have already become apparent how 'old soldiers' of whatever flavour recognise shared experiences and have a natural affinity for one another.

Workshop feedback

“

I found the form the programme took to be fitting and it was interesting to hear other views from other services. [...] Some of the topics gave food for thought, which were quite interesting. I, hopefully, was able to contribute to the discussions.

Workshop feedback

“

The quotations from the autobiographies proved provocative and related to our own experiences. We were quite surprised to learn that the first ones were written by T.E. Lawrence and Siegfried Sassoon so many years ago. They were still remarkably relevant.

Workshop feedback

“

*[Interviewer: When you talk or share stories about your military experience, how does it make you feel?]
Veteran: Pretty happy, I suppose. I think sometimes at the end of a night in the pub when you've been talking stories, you think, "It's a bit sad, I wish I was still there".*

18: Male, RAF, National Service, served 25 years

THE UNDERPINNING PRINCIPLES OF THIS TOOLKIT

Our ethos has been to work with veterans using some key principles from the language of cultural competencies, which is a framework for working with people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds in healthcare. Cultural competencies literature encourages the idea that knowing about, and understanding, different needs will improve healthcare and ultimately improve outcomes for a community.^{16,17} As part of our work, we have identified three values that we feel encourage best practice in being culturally competent with the older veteran community:



DIGNITY

Older veterans are a diverse community with different values, experiences, views and choices. By seeing each veteran as an individual, we are able to reach a position of understanding but not making assumptions.

RESPECT

Many veterans are proud of their military service. Even if they have later questioned the justification for the actions that they took as part of that service, they feel a need to be treated with respect for their willingness to make a personal sacrifice for the country.

LISTENING

The veterans that we worked with often had concerns about being understood. They sometimes felt that there was a divide between those who had served and those who had not. Often there was a perception that civilians were not interested in veterans. We found that listening to these concerns and ensuring that stories and experiences were heard enabled us to become culturally competent. By using different tools to elicit stories, we developed techniques that enabled a dialogue and overcame some perceived gaps.

WORKING WITH OLDER VETERANS: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines practical recommendations for working with older veterans, including general considerations of accessibility. These recommendations are drawn from the workshops that we conducted with veterans. As well as drawing on our three principles of dignity, respect and listening, when facilitating discussions it is important to remember:

1. The veteran identity is experienced as a universal bond.

Many veterans were clear that differences in service, combat history or nationality were not important, and the overall identity of the veteran allowed for connection despite difference.

2. Veterans are a diverse group of people.

Although the veteran identity is universal, veterans are still diverse, and these differences matter to them. For example, differences between services and generations or health and mobility. Inter-service banter was a regular feature of our workshops, and many participants

valued being part of group discussions that represented a diversity of experience.

Some veterans are more isolated, have greater health problems and experience many difficulties in activities of daily living, which makes attending and participating more challenging. Other veterans are much more active, have a social community of veterans (sometimes this was online) to draw on and are not limited in activities of daily living. This enables them to participate more in discussions.

3. Veterans observe hierarchy across generations, conflicts and rank.

This was particularly observable if there were WWII veterans present in the room with other, younger veterans. There was a sense of deference and respect for WWII veterans that meant that others in the room commented that they were 'imposters' who did not have anything valid to say in comparison with this type of veteran. It was important to ensure that all those in the room felt that their contribution was valid and welcome to try and overcome this internalised hierarchy.

“

A soldier is a soldier is a soldier. [...] I found this with the United Nations, when there was a lot of different countries – when you sit down together, it doesn't take long before you're talking, even if it's in sign language, you know? or pidgin English.

02: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 27 years

4. Veterans have different experiences of telling their story

Experience of telling stories about service life were varied, some had never spoken about their service before whilst others had developed well-rehearsed stories. There are different reasons for this.

Veterans may not have spoken about service life before because they felt that no-one was interested or could understand their experiences. Or the experiences could have been difficult or hard to articulate. For example, sometimes veterans experienced dissonance in relation to their enjoyment of service even though it was a difficult and potentially violent time.

Alternatively, those who do tell their stories can be bearing witness to particular events, using them for educational purposes, or remembrance. It can be hard to steer the conversation away from these polished stories towards other explorations, to ensure that all experiences were listened to - see the practicalities section below for more detail.

5. Veterans' connection to the military is emotional.

The connection to the military is often a deeply emotional sense of belonging, often characterised as familial. The majority of the

older veterans we spoke to said their military service was the best time of their life and made them the person they are today.

At the same time, older veterans served before the discovery of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and in a time when societal norms favoured 'the stiff upper lip'. They noted that the older generation of WWI and WWII veterans often never spoke about their experiences because of this. Whilst this is changing, there continues to be social restrictions on the expression of emotion within the veteran community, as well as those who are currently serving, especially as the majority are men.

Nevertheless, many of the veterans we worked with expressed a range of emotions in relation to military service from joy to sadness, regret, remorse and anger. Speaking about military service will raise such emotions and it is important to recognise this when facilitating discussion. Do not frame such emotional responses as negative or positive, but as a natural part of reminiscing about something so personally important.

Interview data very strongly highlighted a little acknowledged, but very present loneliness which was exemplified by leaving the military 'family'. This highlights the relevance of the relational and collective nature of well-being, demonstrating that bringing veterans together to communicate has value.

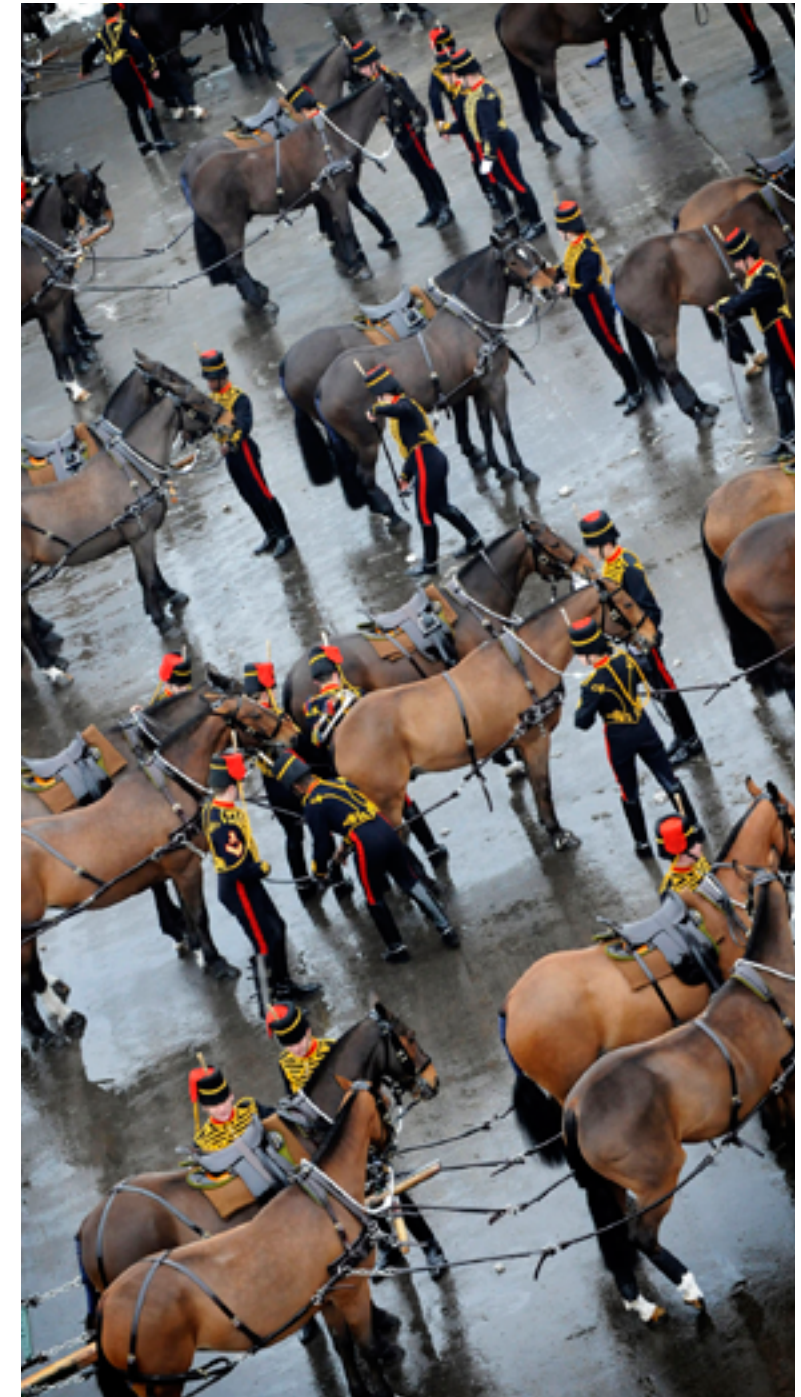


PLANNING AN EVENT

Timing, location, and careful planning are all important when working with older adult veterans. Some practical things to consider include:

1. Choosing when and where to hold the event

- Venues should be accessible, including ramps, lifts, hearing loops; a room on the ground floor of a building is often the best option.
- Venues should be close to local transport links and have cheap or free parking.
- Ask for the room to be set up cabaret style, with seating around round tables for groups of 4-6 people. It is important that these tables are spread out as much as possible, as once discussions start the background noise may make it hard for some people to hear the conversation on their table.
- Consider the timing of your event: many older people have caring responsibilities either for spouses or grandchildren. Check local transport planners for arrival and departure times.
- Be aware that participants will often arrive up to 30 minutes early for an event and someone needs to be at the venue to welcome them. Military culture places great emphasis on punctuality and veterans value this in their current lives.
- Be aware of significant military anniversaries and if possible avoid scheduling events on these dates. If you do plan an event for an anniversary date, holding a minute's silent reflection at the start of the event is appropriate.
- Indicating the dress code (casual) is also helpful, as veterans may have an expectation of needing to attend in uniform/with medals etc. otherwise.





2. Recruiting veterans

You may already have a group of older veterans you wish to work with or you may want to recruit them specifically for this activity.

Places to advertise:

- Local RBL branches and other veterans organisations such as RAFA, Blind Veterans
- Local organisations that work with older people, such as Age UK
- Local public libraries, cafes, museums (especially military related), shops and supermarkets
- Social media. Administrators of veterans and military Facebook groups are often happy to share your event details
- Local newspapers

3. Gathering information

However you make contact with veterans, make sure you collect the following information (where possible):

- Name
- Age
- Service: Army, Navy, Airforce, Merchant Navy, TA
- Enlistment type: national service, conscription, volunteer
- Length of service
- Accessibility requirements
- Dietary requirements

This information will help you arrange the groups to ensure diversity, which helps facilitate greater engagement and participation.

Before the event, use this information to split the veterans into groups of 4-6 people that represent different services, types of enlistment and length of service.

Create place names and arrive before participants and set up the tables, so they know where to sit.

4. Before the event:

- Provide participants with clear information about the venue and timetable for the event, and a brief description of activities (see example timetable at the end of this toolkit).
- Collate resources, and ensure they are adapted for the needs of the groups, e.g. large print.

5. Refreshments:

- The veteran community appreciate events that include refreshments, and we found that starting with a lunch really added value to the experience
- Whatever your budget, starting with refreshments on arrival provides some time for people to introduce themselves and swap their more rehearsed stories. This could be a cup of tea and biscuit or a three course meal!
- Provide food appropriate for older people who may wear dentures or have diabetes.

6. Starting the event

At the beginning of the activities, introduce yourselves and invite the participants to introduce themselves to the whole room briefly - name, service and length of service will suffice.

7. Establish ground rules

Ask for participants' agreement to these ground rules. Example ground rules:

- Have respect for each others' views even when they are different to yours.
- Encourage each other to talk – don't speak over each other.
- Respect confidentiality - don't repeat what you have heard outside the discussion.
- If you don't want to talk, you don't have to.
- If you want to take a break from the discussion, you can, and if you want to leave the event then you can at any time and you don't have to give a reason.

8. Facilitating the activities

- Bringing a group of people together to talk about life experiences requires strong facilitation to ensure that everyone can contribute and that the discussion does not go off topic. Our participants placed great value on facilitation that was firm and enabled equal participation.
- Having served in the military, participants told us that they were comfortable with a disciplined approach and invited us give them orders that they would happily follow. They encouraged us to be less polite!
- Ideally you will have two facilitators per group, or one very experienced facilitator.
- There will always be dominant personalities and people who are quieter and

more reflective. Directly invite quieter members to start or join conversations, by name. You might say, 'that's very interesting Geoff, I wonder if that is the same for you Derrick?'

- Some topics may trigger memories of difficult experiences. Remember this is not a group therapy session and firm boundaries need to be set around this. If someone begins to get upset allow some space for it – other members of the group may be supportive – however, the best course of action is to acknowledge it as a difficult experience and offer them time in the break to discuss further with a facilitator.
- Veterans often bring objects of military culture to events; these may also help to structure discussion, but sometimes may lead the discussion off topic. Making time during refreshment breaks to look at these objects one-to-one with veterans often provided opportunity to share specific stories or memories, and this could be a more productive conversation than trying to integrate them into the activities.

Our aim was to present veterans with stories that would relate to, but not necessarily directly mirror, their experience. By facilitating small group discussions, we, as civilians, were able to offer veterans a structured space for discussion that was thought-provoking, appealing and enabled the sharing of stories and experiences.



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

These activities are based on three cross-cutting themes relevant to all those who served regardless of service history and background:

- joining the services
- comradeship
- leaving the services

These themes allow veterans to reflect on their experiences. By using extracts from military autobiographies and interview transcripts, the conversation can be focused and facilitators can ensure that those who participate feel that their contributions are valid. Using this format will enable inter-service camaraderie, banter and we found that our workshops were demonstrably good for veterans' well-being. The excerpts helped to keep conversation on track as a point of reference.

This guide to activities has been developed building on older veterans' feedback from the five workshops we conducted, and we have refined the activities and format. Feedback on the workshops also demonstrated the value of our approach to working with older veterans (see introduction).

Events should be structured to provide time for refreshments at the start, followed by a 45 minute exercise, then a short 15 minute break, and another 45 minute exercise (see example timetable at the end of the toolkit). In some of our workshops, one theme was explored, first using extracts from autobiographies and then using interview extracts. In other workshops, we explored two themes using just interview extracts. Both approaches were productive, and this format could be adapted to become shorter, or to work with a group of veterans across the three themes on a weekly basis.

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

In structuring the event, be very clear about the planned timing and activities, and the purpose of activities.

“We are interested in exploring your experiences in military service. While it may have changed your life in many ways, we are interested in the experiences you have had, and how they relate to other people’s experiences as described in other people’s military life stories. We are interested in your perceptions, on the basis of your knowledge and experience. If you do not feel you are able to comment on any area please say so.”

INTRODUCING THE EXTRACTS

Facilitators need to have some knowledge of the extracts, which can be used flexibly to guide the conversation as the topic under discussion changes. Reading an extract aloud can be a good starting point, as well as providing large-print written copies to those participating so that they can review and follow along. Facilitators can then ask open questions about the extracts, and how they relate to experiences.

In early workshops, we asked participants to choose an extract that resonated with them and one that they felt did not represent their experiences at all. This could facilitate discussion in smaller groups, but sometimes led to one person dominating the conversation. It is important to conduct discussion in a responsive and flexible manner, that allowed conversation to flow without going too far off topic.



QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE DISCUSSION

Some possible questions to ask to facilitate discussion about the life story and/or interview transcript extracts:

- What appealed about this extract? What did not?
- How does this extract relate to your life/ experiences?
- What did you identify with in this extract?
- In what ways were you able to identify with what was being said?
- Was the setting familiar to you?
- What was it in this extract that helped you to understand your own experience?
- Did anything in this extract change your perspective?
- Did this extract remind you of other experiences in service? How did it remind you?
- What do you think the writer was trying to get across when he wrote this?
- How honest do you think the writer was being?
- How can this extract help us to understand more about military lives?

Throughout our close reading of the interview data, we identified some key experiences that often led to fruitful and enjoyable discussions. Often these discussions were based on the materiality of experiences. Some further questions that might help to open up sharing and comparison of experiences:

First times:

- Tell me about the first time you... (e.g.) put your uniform on, ate military food, you were away from home, travelled abroad, went on an aeroplane/ ship

Describe what it was like on your base/ camp/ ship:

- Who did you share a room with? How many people were there?
- Tell me about the amenities... (e.g. What was the bedding like? Did it have heating? Was there a shower or did you have to wash out side?
- What was the weather like?

What kind of people did you meet?

- Were they like you or from different backgrounds?
- Did you meet the local communities as you travelled abroad?
- What was the social life like?

Discipline:

- What was your experience of basic military training?
- Did you ever get in trouble?
- Did you ever bend the rules? Did you get away with it?

QUESTIONS ON SPECIFIC THEMES

JOINING THE SERVICES

Talk of joining the services often encouraged detailed and thoughtful reflection. All those who served underwent basic military training, which varied across contexts and years but had some similarities. While some people had joined voluntarily, others had been conscripted, and these different motivations sometimes went on to shape future experiences. Discussion of joining up often helped to start to address the question of what was different about military service and what changed when people joined the forces.

- What motivated you to join the forces?
- How did the experience of service life change you as a person?
- What do you know, as someone who served, that someone who hasn't does not know? How did you find it out?
- Are you the same person as you were before your service? What makes you say that?
- If not, how did you change, and what made you change?
- How did it change relationships with: Friends? Family? Home? Civilians?

COMRADESHIP

Comradeship was often spoken about as something different to friendship. One did not have to like one's comrades to value them. Comradeship was often compared to being a part of the 'family' of military service personnel, which was seen as a great positive. Often, metaphor was quite powerful in discussions of comradeship, particularly in relation to feelings of belonging and individuality, or 'feeling like a cog in the machine.' Similarly, it was not something that could be understood by civilians and veterans felt a difficulty in trying to explain to people who had not served.

- Is there a difference between friendship and comradeship? What is it?
- Did you maintain contact with comrades after you left the forces?
- Have you had opportunity to experience comradeship since you've left the forces?
- What do you get from time with ex-services folk that you don't get from your civilian friends and acquaintances?
- How has comradeship has played a part in your life after military service?

LEAVING THE SERVICES

Leaving the services was often an unexpectedly difficult experience, with retrospective emotions like pride, guilt, shame and bitterness. Sometimes the experience had been transformative, and the person returning felt like they were a different person from the one who left home, who no longer fitted in or knew familiar people such as family or spouses. There was sometimes regret at the loss of comrades, comradeship, and purpose.

- How did you feel about leaving?
- Was it what you expected?
- How were relationships with: Friends? Family? Home? Civilians?

WORKING WITH EXTRACTS FROM LIFE STORIES

Working with short extracts from autobiographies focused conversation and encouraged reflection. Copyright restrictions prevent us from reproducing direct extracts here, but we have provided a guide to the texts we used, with suggested themes for discussion and background about the authors.

Author/ title/ reference to pages in published edition	Outline of author's experience/ background	Possibilities for discussion
George Orwell, <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> in Peter Davison ed., <i>Orwell in Spain</i> (Penguin 2001)	Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950), better known by his pen-name George Orwell, was an English writer and journalist, and the author of <i>Animal Farm</i> and <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> . He volunteered to fight on the Republican (anti-fascist) side in the Spanish Civil War in 1936.	Friendship; soldiers as family across differences; value of comradeship; goods in hardship
Tim O'Brien, <i>If I Die in a Combat Zone</i> (Calder and Boyars 1973), pp. 42-3	O'Brien (born 1946) is an American writer and academic who served as an infantryman in Vietnam 1969-70. He's best known for his story collection <i>The Things They Carried</i> , based on the war experience also explored in this memoir	Resisting comradeship; friendship as private vs comradeship as public; individuality vs being part of the machine
James Salter, <i>Burning the Days: Recollection</i> (Random House 1997), p. 69 and p. 70.	Salter (10 June 1925-19 June 2015) was an American army officer, military pilot, and writer. He joined the US Army as an officer cadet in 1942 and served until 1957, just missing active service in WWII but flying more than 100 combat missions in the Korean war. He's best remembered for the novels <i>Light Years</i> and <i>The Hunters</i> (which was made into a film starring Robert Mitchum). These extracts from his autobiography <i>Burning the Days</i> are taken from the chapter 'You Must', on his basic training at West Point.	The Romantic ideal of the hero vs the sometimes dreary reality of service; innocence; adopting a military ideal; conversion; remaking oneself vs being remade.
J. Glenn Gray, <i>The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle</i> (with a new foreword, Harper and Row 1970), p. 44.	Gray (1913-1977) was an American philosopher who served as a counter-intelligence officer in Italy and Germany during WWII	Value of comradeship; group action; not being able to explain to people who weren't there

Author/ title/ reference to pages in published edition	Outline of author's experience/ background	Possibilities for discussion
Philip Caputo, <i>A Rumor of War</i> (with a new postscript, Pimlico 1999), pp. 9-10	Caputo (born 1941) is an American writer and journalist who served with the US Marines in Vietnam 1965-66, and covered the 1975 fall of Saigon for the Chicago Tribune	Drill; group action; becoming part of something larger than oneself; value of being part of the machine; reasons for joining up; drill; innocence; heroic ideals
Keith Douglas, <i>Alamein to Zem Zem</i> ed. Desmond Graham (Faber and Faber 2008), p. 16.	Douglas (1920-1944) was a poet who commanded tanks in the North African campaign in WWII. He was killed in Normandy three days after taking part in the D-Day landings	Comradeship across enmity; war and soldiering as another, closed world; not being able to explain to people who weren't there
Paul Fussell, <i>Doing Battle: The making of a skeptic</i> (Little, Brown & Co. 1996), pp. 168-169.	Fussell was a university teacher, a literary critic and historian, and a US infantry officer in World War II, who landed in France in 1944 and was wounded fighting in Alsace. He's remembered especially for two books on the experience and literature of war: <i>The Great War</i> and <i>Modern Memory</i> on WWI and <i>Wartime</i> on WWII.	Service as ordeal to be escaped; bureaucracy and mechanics of leaving; bitterness about service
T. E. Lawrence, <i>The Mint: A day-book of the R.A.F. Depot between August and December 1922 with later notes by 352087 A/c Ross</i> (Jonathan Cape 1955), pp. 190-191.	Lawrence 'of Arabia' more famously wrote <i>Seven Pillars of Wisdom</i> about his experience fighting in the Middle East during WWI, but in 1922 he joined the RAF under the pseudonym 'John Hume Ross'. <i>The Mint</i> is his diaristic account of training and peacetime service before his identity was discovered and he was thrown out.	The goods of service: being part of something larger, belonging, comradeship; not wanting to leave; loneliness and its absence
Robert Mason, <i>Chickenhawk</i> (Penguin 1983), pp. 388-389.	Mason was a combat helicopter pilot in Vietnam.	Loss of home life and relationships with partners and children; civilian criticism and hatred; Service as ordeal; transformative experience: mutual lack of understanding between soldiers and civilians
Siegfried Sassoon, <i>Siegfried's Journey: 1916-1920</i> (Faber and Faber 1945), pp. 118-119.	Sassoon was one of the soldier-poets who shaped our understanding of WWI, and also the author of two autobiographical trilogies.	Transformative experience: home as 'repository for my defunct pre-war self', civilians as unable to understand soldiers' experience; who has authority to speak?

WORKING WITH EXTRACTS FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview extracts also encouraged personal reflection and the sharing of stories. The quotes presented here on specific themes could again be read aloud and/ or shared in hard copy with other veterans. They will be useful in facilitating discussion and can help bring the focus back to a particular topic. Extracts were not all used in each session, and there is no suggested order to their use. In our workshops, we used 2-5 extracts depending how the discussion flowed, and worked with them to either continue on a topic of conversation, or to introduce a new topic of conversation.

JOINING THE SERVICES

Appreciating a new life

I wanted to get away from home, and I think I did appreciate the discipline, because everything had to be just so. You didn't go in the billet with your shoes on, you have felt pads on your feet –and slid everywhere –to keep the floor shiny. So everybody had to wear these pads when they were in. And of course your bed was made specially, and measured. Just seeing that, it was going to be a different life altogether for me. (10: Female, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 4 years)

Experiencing military discipline and culture

How can you tell or expect people to understand what you call square-bashing? Drill. Marching up and down, yeah, turning left and right, doing about-turns. It's a means to an end, i.e. a combination of team work, reaction to commands, instructions, call it what you will, and moving in a unit of personnel as one, so that you react to commands and instructions and you do it, as I say, as one. Everybody turns right at the same time. Once you get it right, it feels great. Well, you see them on the Queen's birthday parades, Trooping the Colour, moving as one unit, everybody turns left at the same time. Means they're in tune, not just themselves and the musical score, but in tune with each other. (01: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 22 years)

The opportunity to travel

I wasn't going to be called up for National Service because I would have missed out, you see, just on the cusp of missing out being called up. So I heard all these wonderful stories from my friends who were in the forces, and served in far-flung places, I thought, "Oh, that's the life for me," so that's when I joined the Royal Air Force. (11: Male, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 15 years)

Meeting people from different backgrounds

I must say that although I didn't want to go into the forces, to be honest, I really enjoyed it. Yes, I did, because I met so many lads in the same predicament as me from all sorts of background, people that came from very wealthy families, people that came from very poor families, people with good education, people with very poor education, all lumped into one, and we all got on well together. Everybody sort of looked after each other, which was, you know, quite amazing, really. And it really opened my eyes, because I, you know, lived in a very small community, and didn't know much about the outside world, and all of a sudden, you're flung into the hotpot of all different sorts of people and things were quite different. But I must say, I really enjoyed it. (14: Male, RAF, National Service, served 2 years)

Going from a 'dead-end' environment to the forces discipline

I mean, the thing was, my mum and dad basically had no, monetary-wise, they were basically broke, and a lot of it was on the never-never, as it was in those days. [...] to this day, it's probably the best thing I ever did. [...] Because it got me out of an environment that really I think would have been a dead end. [...] I don't think I would have seen or done or been financially well-off as I am now, if I'd have stayed there. And the [forces] helped me achieve all that by bringing me up, I mean, the discipline in those days was, "If I say jump, you ask how high," which was, you know, as a young kid, to me, it was a very good thing. (38: Male, Navy, Voluntary Enlisted, served 22 years)

The difficulties of starting out

Motivation was an important factor, because you go through a lot of tribulation in the early days of the forces. Sometimes the failure rate is high, because either people can't take the training –because they are a bit rough with you, not physically, but mentally. If you did something wrong, you'd be called all the idiots under the sun, because these drill instructors and such like, they didn't have a lot of spare patience, you know! I always believed that: they were just there to get you into shape. They probably did a good job. (11: Male, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 15 years)

COMRADESHIP

The bond of service

I don't know how to describe it, actually, but it was a life-changer, that's all I can say. But I think any entrance into the forces is, because it's a different world, and unless you've actually done it, you can't understand, and you can't explain. But if I met someone and I found out they were ex-forces, immediately there's a bond, even if it's male-female. (09: Female, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 3 years)

Service causing change

Once you have been in the service, you're different, because from then on, forever. You're a former serviceman or ex-serviceman. You can't do anything about that: you are. [...] Because it does change you: it does change you, and once you've been changed, you feel a certain need to associate with other people who've been changed. (18: Male, RAF, National Service, served 25 years)

Loss of military social connections

There was quite a lot of loss, because you're leaving the social life aspect of it, leaving the friends you've made. Because these friends came from [...] all round [...] so they weren't, if you like, in the civilian social life. You had people who were well outside. So, once I left [...] I didn't see much of them anymore, unless it was a social event, perhaps once a year, perhaps once every couple of years. And a lot I've never seen since. So yes, it was, that was a wrench. (26: Male, TA, Voluntary Enlisted, served 25 years)

Missing the camaraderie

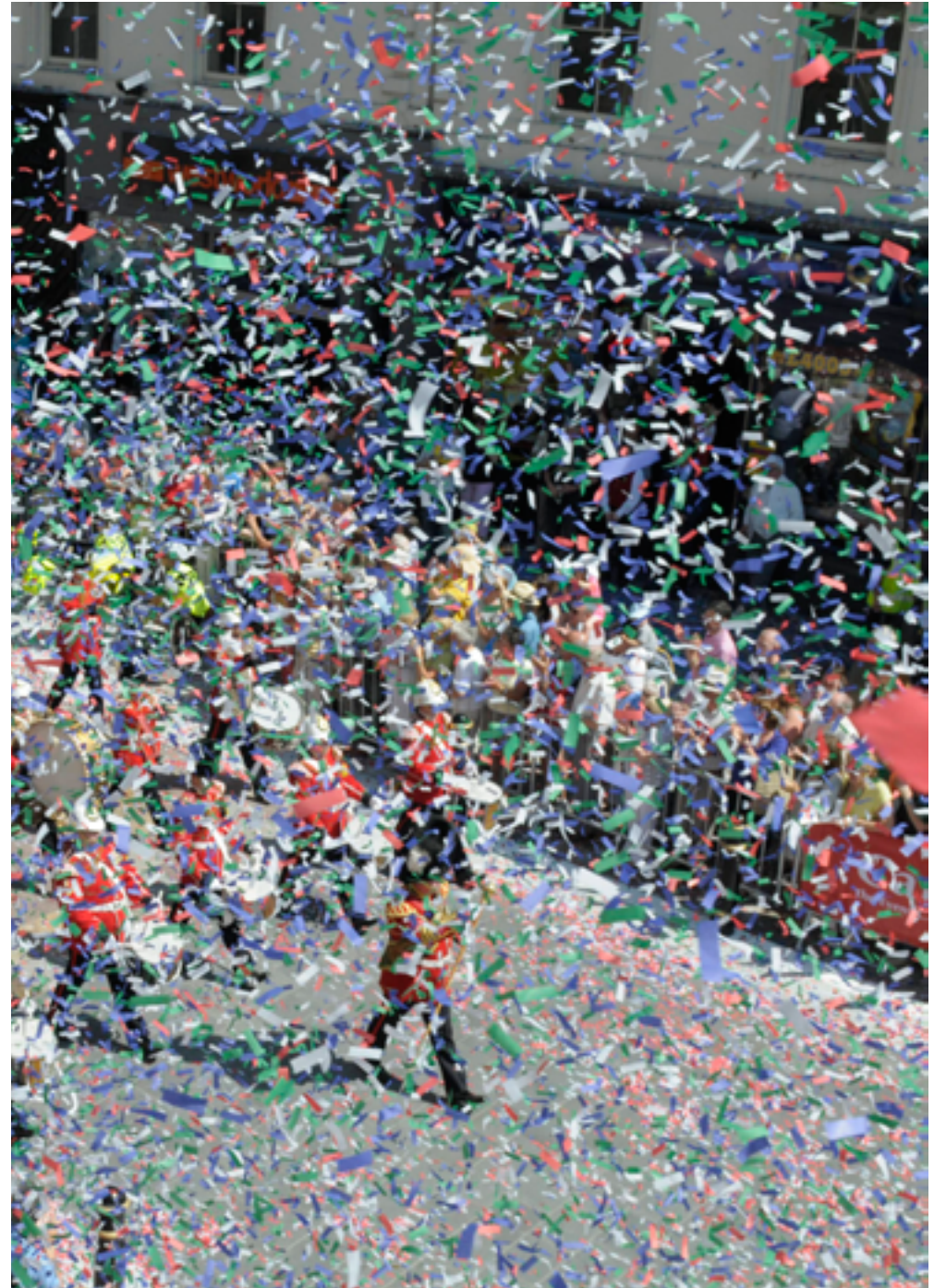
I was a bit sort of, how can you put it, not depressed, but not particularly happy with being back in civilian life, I suppose, and I said to my wife, "Oh, I'm just going out for a walk," and I went out and went round to the local police station, and I probably had about an hour standing with the desk sergeant, talking about joining the police, because, again, I was looking for this camaraderie which I was missing from the forces. (25: Male, RAF, National Service, served 2 years)

Continued contact and reminiscence

Yes, I still meet them, [...]we started [...]an association, and we have an annual reunion and I've organised it for the last ten years. And I'm with people that I was with then and people who were [there]before or after me. Even this last weekend, a little group of us have been away for a weekend, so [...] I'm still [the armed forces] aren't !! [...] That bond stays: and whenever we're together[...]it's reminiscing, you know. We are, to some extent, still 18 again! And it's "Do you remember?" (24: Male, RAF, National Service, served 12 years)

Helping out fellow ex-service personnel

So yeah, the military's still a big chunk of me, it's not something I've walked away from and side-lined. As I say, I'm with the British Legion bit as well, where I took an interest in doing that, and getting people looked after, because they were not always capable of looking out for themselves, and it's a shame to just leave them when we can help out and try and get something done for them. (22: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 16 years)



LEAVING THE SERVICES

Making a break (but it's hard)

It was a hell of a wrench. It nearly ... yeah. It took me more than a year to cope with it. And I was uncertain for over a year whether I was going to go back or not. But...I had the redundancy payments to think about and the pension to think about, which means that, having gone one way, it was difficult to go back. And then, from there, it transformed into, well, you've got to make a break. You cannot keep going back and then going forward and then going back. (40: Male, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 20 years)

Moving on but missing the people

Well, I was happy, I was joyous, because I thought, "Right, I've now got my freedom again, I can go out on my bike, I can meet my friends, I'm living at home with my parents, and they're looking after me, and I've just got to find a job" –which I found quite quickly –"and I haven't got sergeants telling me do this, do that, and I've not got the fear of suddenly, oh, you're going to be sent to Singapore or somewhere". The only thing: I did miss the people that was in touch with, and I tried to keep in touch with a lot of them, and I did for a while, but then it gradually petered out. (43: Male, RAF, National Service, served 3 years)

Having different experience to those at home

Well [I felt], relief, but I was coming back to an unusual environment, because all my friends, well, a lot of them hadn't even done military service, and there was only two of them who'd been in the air force, but had been delayed getting anywhere, training for pilots, navigators or bombers, and hadn't seen any active service, so none of my contemporaries then had seen active service. So I felt a bit ... well, odd in many ways. Did they talk to you about it at all? They didn't want to know. Well, they didn't ask, and I wasn't saying it. (37: Male, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 3 years)

Cast out of the community

But I suppose when you leave, and the one thing I felt when I did leave, was that it just came to an end. There was no connection with the regiment after that. All regular soldiers must feel that, that when they leave the regular army, nothing happens. You are completely on your own. There is no support from anywhere. I felt –how can I put this –I felt cast out, let's call it casting out into the community. (34: Male, TA, Voluntary Enlisted, served 16 years)

Civilian life and military life are totally different

You can't really equate the two conditions, because they're never, ever going to be the same. Like my civil aviation and my military aviation, the two, apart from having one thing in common, which is an aeroplane, they just don't go together, and it's, you know ... it's hard, life's totally different, isn't it. It's not surprising a lot of people have difficulty stepping over, moving into a different environment, different life. It's not surprising, because unless you've actually been a member of Her Majesty's Forces, you don't understand the camaraderie that is involved, and the fact that everyone, more or less, pulls together. (40: Male, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 20 years)

I did settle but I didn't settle

So how did you feel about leaving the service? Gutted, absolutely gutted, because on the one hand, I wanted to see what civvy life was like, and secondly, I didn't want to leave the army, because that was my family, really. But my missus was, "No, you're coming out, you're coming out; if you don't come out, we're going to split up," and all that, so I decided then to leave the army and, you know, start a family life, really, have a proper family life. I came out and, like I say, I got a couple of jobs driving. I couldn't really – I did settle but I didn't settle. (27: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 10 years)

Civilians don't work in the same way as the military

How did you feel about leaving? A bit unstable. ...I mean, because life outside is not the same. Even if you were an airframe mechanic, it's still not the same job in civvy street as it is in the services, because, remember, you're protected by lots of procedures and orders, where out in civvy life, you work on your own, using your own initiative, and you're not supported. It's completely different. So was it a bit of a shock to the system? It was a bit of a shock. I'll be perfectly honest: civvy life ...I thought they was disrespectful to people in the military, because they didn't understand it. ...It was completely different. I think they just thought we were on a jolly, some people. (36: Female, RAF, Voluntary Enlisted, served 4 years)

Civilians are lackadaisical

The first shock I got when I started working in civvy street as a porter was the lackadaisical attitude, "Oh, five minutes late, it doesn't matter," and I used to think, "Yes, it does: it does matter". It did matter to me, but not to them, they were so lackadaisical, and the lack of comradeship, "Oh, he's a pillock, we don't talk to him," and I thought, "Oh". So when I first came out, I think I'd had this 28 years of comradeship and strict time-keeping ... and discipline. That was the biggest shock, ...the shock of the ill-discipline and the poor time-keeping, you know. (44: Male, Army, Voluntary Enlisted, served 28 years)

EXAMPLE TIMETABLE



Military Lives and Transformative Experiences

Thursday 25th April 2019, 13.00 – 16.30

The Reserved Bar Lounge, The Union Jack Club

Sandell Street, London. SE1 8UJ

Dress code: casual attire

13.00 – 13.45: Welcome and lunch

13.45 – 14.00: Introduction to the research and the workshop

14.00 – 14.45: Exercise 1: Leaving

In groups we will discuss excerpts from military memoirs on the topic of leaving the service, and consider whether these relate to your experiences.

14.45 – 15.15: Refreshment break

15.15 – 16.00: Exercise 2: Post-service lives

In groups we will discuss your transition into civilian life after leaving military service. We will do this with reference to what other veterans have said in interviews with our research team.

16.00 – 16.30: Workshop evaluation, thanks and goodbyes

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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TOOLKIT USE AND FUTURE EDITIONS

This toolkit should be viewed as a living document which can be adapted and will evolve as the generations of veterans change. We are aware that it captures a 'snapshot' of a particular generation of veterans, and information contained within it may not be useful to work with, for example, younger veterans, who have had different experiences of combat, service and demobilisation.

It provides insight into the older veterans community, but we recognise that improvements can always be made and greater clarity may perhaps be required in some areas. To that end if you are using the toolkit and/or have suggestions as to how it could be improved, please contact us via: e.brewster@lancaster.ac.uk