

Veterans of the People's War – The
Representation and Identity of Second
World War Veterans since 1945

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representation and identity of Second World War veterans since 1945. The first section provides context in showing the origins of the most dominant images of the Second World War veteran in commemorative and political culture. These depictions highlight the selective representations of this generation as being tied to certain anniversary commemorations, or as the silent, proud and marching successors to the Remembrance Day rituals. Due to the life cycle, developments in awareness of war trauma and the surge in interest in war commemoration, their status has increased over time. While these representations are important to understanding the public image of Second World War veterans, they do not show the diversity of identities assumed by this generation. The remaining four chapters of this thesis argue that there is a spectrum of ways that this generation relate to their memories. While some adopt identities based upon many of the identifiable tropes of the cultural idea of the veteran, such as wearing medals, others have forged alternative identities surrounding pacifism or other aspects of their lives such as their career. Why some have chosen to remain silent about their memories is explored, to show the array of ways that this generation view the importance of the war to their lives. Exploring veterans associations, British Legion branches and clubs, uncovers the activities which are absent from cultural representations, but shape how veterans form a sense of group identity. This thesis also highlights how some individuals have cultivated veteran personas by using the internet.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

This thesis explores the representation and identity of Second World War veterans in Britain since 1945. Second World War veterans are readily interviewed, pictured and discussed in the public retelling and remembrance of the war. They are now mostly all in their nineties and older, and their numbers are reducing each year. As Patrick Finney described in 2016, ‘as the participant generation passes away, the current moment of Second World War cultural memory is suffused with a sense of an imminent ending and of our passing into a new phase of engagement beyond living memory’.¹ In recent years, the reporting of the passing away of this generation has become a prominent feature in newspapers and in the media.² The press mourn this transition, as Andy Gardner said of Battle of Britain pilots, ‘members who remain are all aged between 96 and 102 years old and the reality is they won’t be with us for much longer’.³ Like those who survived the Holocaust, the impending passing away of those who served in the Second World War also generates potential attention and reconsideration from scholars, governments, invested organisations and the media.⁴ As the war begins to pass from living

¹ Patrick Finney, ‘Politics and technologies of authenticity: the Second World War at the close of living memory’, *Rethinking History* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2017): 154-170

² See Josh Gabbattiss, ‘Peter Gouldstone: War veteran, 98, dies weeks after violent robbery at London home left him critically injured’ 1 December 2018 *Independent*

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/peter-gouldstone-death-robbery-london-attack-crime-burglars-war-veteran-met-police-a8662696.html> accessed 02 January 2019 and Caroline Davies, ‘Harry Leslie Smith, vocal critic of austerity, dies aged 95’ 28 November 2018, *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/28/harry-leslie-smith-dies-aged-95>

³ Andy Gardner, ‘WW2: Battle Of Britain's RAF heroes still alive are reduced to single figures’ 5 November 2017 *The Express* accessed 02 January 2019

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/875644/ww2-veterans-battle-of-britain-heroes-RAF-heroes-dying-BBFA>

⁴ See reflections in Esther Jilovsky, *Remembering the Holocaust: Generations, Witnessing and Place*

(London: Bloomsbury: 2015), 103 and government initiatives to ensure the memory of the Holocaust is retained post living memory include United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation, ‘UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre’ 2017, accessed 06 June 2019

memory, there is also an opportunity to reflect upon the legacy of this generation of veterans. Firstly, this thesis traces the evolution of the image of this generation by outlining how veterans as figures, have been represented as part of the commemorative and political legacy of the Second World War. Secondly, it will uncover the diverse ways in which veterans have viewed their own role in society by exploring their perceived veteran identity and how they connect to their wartime experiences.

This thesis argues that veterans have been important figures in the legacy of the war and have been central to the collective remembrance of the conflict. As McVeigh and Cooper highlight in a general study, veterans broadly have been ‘deployed by nations as tools of political and cultural hegemony, utilized in order to justify and perpetuate a status quo, and as a unitary figure’.⁵ Yet, they also possess ‘the ability to unsettle, or refuse reassurance’, and can ‘undermine the ideals proposed by national mythmaking’.⁶ McVeigh and Cooper assert the need to understand how veterans are ‘perceived by state and society’ and call for an understanding of the ‘identities’ of veterans.⁷ This study will address this call to further understand the representation and identity of war veterans by exploring these themes in the context of the Second World War generation.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/739559/UK_Holocaust_Memorial_public_exhibition_boards.pdf

⁵ Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper, ed., *Men After War*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 7

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Defining Second World War ‘veterans’

What is a ‘veteran’ and who should be included in a study focused on Second World War ‘veterans’? Dictionary and official definitions of the word veteran are vague and broad. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition notes that a veteran is ‘a person who has had long experience in a particular field’.⁸ Its origins stem from the early 16th century, ‘from French *vétéran* or Latin *veteranus*, from *vetus* “old”’.⁹ Age and experience are central to the official definition of the word. The presence of the term veteran in a British context is surprisingly common in the press prior to the Great War. Alongside the term ‘old soldier’, veteran was frequently seen in pre-1914 newspaper reports relating to ex-servicemen.¹⁰ Nielsen describes the British origins of the word as ‘a complementary late eighteenth-century term that not only referred to a man’s practical experience but implied his continued dedication to his private and his public obligations over many years’.¹¹ A Google Ngram chart which traces the use of the word ‘veteran’ in British English texts, shows the popularity and use of the word from 1500 to 2008.¹² Correlating with Nielson’s observation, the Ngram shows a climb in popularity in British English texts from the 1730s onwards.¹³ Later major peaks include during and after the Napoleonic Wars, and the biggest

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 20 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ ‘The War Medal’ October 30th 1848 *Observer* and ‘A Solitary Veteran’ December 31 1897 *Daily Mail*

¹¹ Caroline Nielsen, ‘Continuing to Serve: Representations of the Elderly Veteran Soldier in the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’ in *Men After War* ed. Stephen McVeigh, and Nicola Cooper (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 18

¹² Figure 1 - “Veteran” in British English texts from 1500-2008’ *Google Ngram Viewer* accessed 22 December 2018

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=veteran&year_start=1500&year_end=2018&corpus=18&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cveteran%3B%2Cc0

¹³ *Ibid*

height in usage in the 1850s.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the chart also uncovers the older roots of the word veteran, with a peak period before the climb in the 1730s taking place from around 1612 to 1620, during a period of military tensions, in the aftermath of the Spanish Armada and during the Eighty Years War.¹⁵ One early traceable reference to the word veteran can be found in *Here begynneth the boke called the example of vertu* by Steven Hawes, published in 1504. The story tells of a Knight sleighing a dragon. He is given thanks by a lady who addresses him saying, ‘welcome virtue the noble veteran’.¹⁶ The word clearly has a long history in British writing, and has always held connotations of chivalry, honour and heroism. Following the Second World War, the use of the term in British English remained low compared to previous peak periods of the 1890s and the 1940s. Nevertheless, small lifts in usage can be seen following the Falklands War and the use of the term has risen since the Iraq War in 2003.¹⁷ It appears that in more recent decades, the term veteran has peaked following involvement in conflict.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Steven Hawes, *Here begynneth the boke called the example of vertu* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1504)

¹⁷ Figure 1 - ‘“Veteran” in British English texts from 1500-2008’ *Google Ngram Viewer* accessed 22 December 2018

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=veteran&year_start=1500&year_end=2018&corpus=18&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cveteran%3B%2Cc0

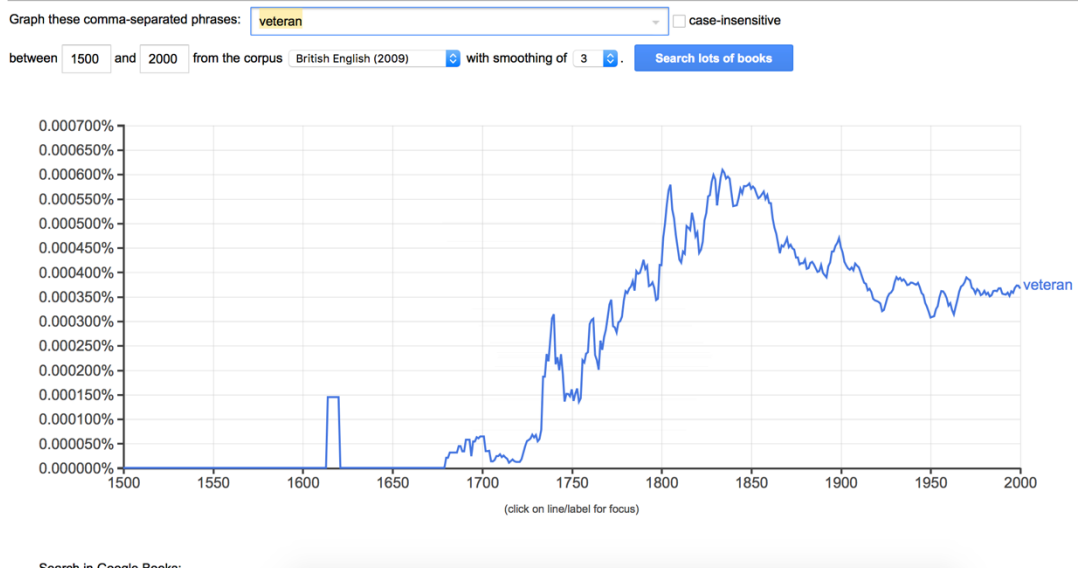


Figure 1 - “Veteran” in British English texts from 1500-2008’ *Google Ngram Viewer* accessed 16 December 2019

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=veteran&year_start=1500&year_end=2018&corpus=18&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cveteran%3B%2C0

Some of the veterans interviewed for this thesis view the term as an American invention, and something which has only been adopted to describe British ex-servicemen in recent years. Ron Goldstein described how ‘veteran is a new term to me, we were always known as ex-servicemen...I think veteran is an American term....we used to be known as ex-serviceman... but veterans...I’ve seen them using it on American [web]sites...I think it’s an Americanism...’.¹⁸ Despite these impressions, the term was clearly used to describe those who served their country long before the advent of the First World War as shown above.

¹⁸ Appendix 1

The huge peak in usage in American English following the Second World War could explain why some feel it is an American invention. In American English, peak uses of the term can be found seen during and after the American War of Independence, American Civil War, the Wars with Mexico and after the Second World War.¹⁹ The prominence of veteran issues in American politics and society since 1945, has made the term ever present in US culture, perhaps as a result of the famous GI Bill and in works which praise this generation of American veterans.²⁰ Notably, Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* and other works, have given American Second World War veterans a special and almost mythical status.²¹ It is works such as these and the ways in which American veterans have been treated since the war, that have made the term veteran synonymous with Americans who served during the Second World War. Similarly, the use of the word veteran has also been made prominent in America following the US government backed *The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study* which took place from 1984 to 1988.²² This study promoted a wider discussion and awareness of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder amongst Vietnam war veterans.²³ This could help to explain why, in recent decades, the term veteran has been

¹⁹ Figure 2 - "'Veteran" in American English texts from 1500-2008' *Google Ngram Viewer* accessed 22 December 2018

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=veteran&year_start=1500&year_end=2008&corpus=17&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cveteran%3B%2Cc0

²⁰ See works discussing the success of the GI Bill including Robert England, *Twenty Million War Veterans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), and books which praise American Second World War veterans, most famously, Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, (London: Vintage Books, 2010)

²¹ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, (London: Vintage Books, 2010) Also see works which contest the myth including, Kenneth D. Rose, *The Myth of the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Zinn, Howard, 'The Greatest Generation?' August 1 2001 *The Progressive* accessed 10 October 2015 <http://progressive.org/0901/zinn1001.html>

²² Charles R. Marmar, William Schlenger and Clare Henn-Haase et al; 'Course of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder 40 Years After the Vietnam War Findings From the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study' *JAMA Psychiatry* Vol 72, No 9:. (2015): 875-881

²³ Ibid

viewed as an American invention despite its usage in British contexts for hundreds of years.

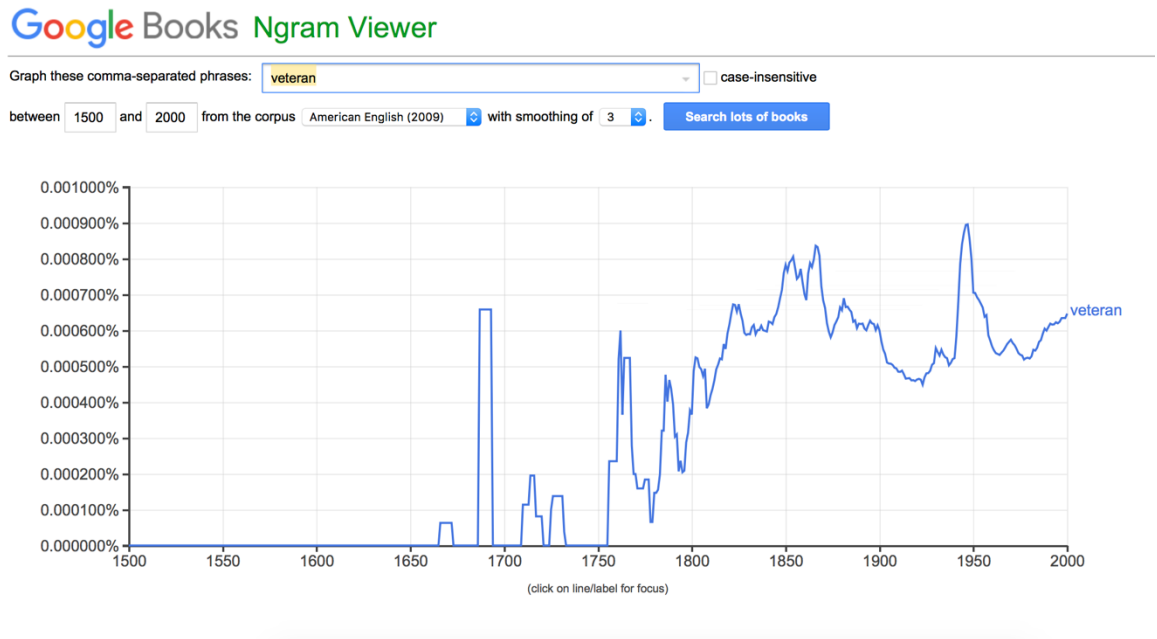


Figure 2 - “Veteran” in American English texts from 1500-2008’ *Google Ngram Viewer* accessed 16 December 2019

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=veteran&year_start=1500&year_end=2008&corpus=17&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cveteran%3B%2Cc0

In a military context, the term is also extremely broad. Recent understandings of the military veteran in Britain encompass both those in a military front line setting and those in a non-combatant role. In 2016, the UK government *Annual Population Survey* declared that there ‘were an estimated 2.5 million UK Armed Forces veterans residing in households across Great Britain’.²⁴ As Dandeker *et al.*

²⁴ Ministry of Defence, ‘Annual Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain 2016’ 26 October 2017, accessed 04 December 2018 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654734/20171023_-_APS_2016_Bulletin.pdf

highlight, in contemporary society, ‘definitions of veteran vary depending on whether the user is a government agency, engaged in determining who does and does not qualify for receipt of support and services due to their military standing, or wider publics who may have different views on what ex-service members need to have accomplished to be considered as deserving of veteran status’.²⁵ They highlight that in Britain, the government use ‘the most inclusive of the definitions available: all personnel who have served more than one day’.²⁶ They stress that this inclusive approach has ‘disadvantages’ in confusing the general public and in the difficulties in allocating ‘scarce resources’ to those defined as veterans.²⁷ The governmental definition also notes that ‘veterans need not have served overseas or in conflict’.²⁸ The contemporary idea of a veteran includes those in the armed services who may have served at home, even for a limited period of time. Civilians are also unofficially now incorporated into the idea of a veteran, specifically during periods of commemoration. It is now widely accepted that civilian war workers such as Bevin Boys are a type of Second World War veteran. While Bevin Boys were conscripted for their mining wartime work, they were not part of a uniformed service. There has been a sustained campaign to award Bevin Boys a special veteran badge.²⁹ They are also able to march past the cenotaph on Remembrance Day. A 2008 article in the *Daily Telegraph* describes that ‘it was 50 years before [Bevin Boys] were even allowed to march to the Cenotaph

²⁵ Christopher Dandeker, Simon Wessely, Amy Iversen, and John Ross, ‘What’s in a Name? Defining and Caring for “Veterans” The United Kingdom in International Perspective’ *Armed Forces & Society* Vol. 32, No. 2 (2006), 162

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ministry of Defence, ‘A Guide to Veterans Services’, February 2017, accessed 01/06/2017 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/616586/Veterans_services_leaflet_02-17-shrunk.pdf

²⁹ International Affairs and Defence Section - Claire Taylor and Louisa Brooke-Holland, ‘Medal Campaigns’, 27 July 2012, *House of Commons Library* accessed 16 October 2017 researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02880/SN02880.pdf

with other veterans on Remembrance Day'.³⁰ Articles such as this and the suggestion to award a special veterans badge to Bevin Boys, signals the growing acceptance of some civilians as legitimate veterans of the Second World War. Evidently, the recent British conceptions of the idea of the veteran are as broad as the dictionary definitions. This can be advantageous in the recognition of previously marginalised people who have been affected by warfare. Yet, these official and dictionary definitions of a veteran are extremely broad and raise complications when thinking about Second World War veterans in the context of this thesis.

A study which adheres to the inclusive and official dictionary and government idea of a veteran, would be required to include an analysis of men and women in any combatant or non-combatant role involved in the Second World War.

According to these conceptions, the representation and identity of men and women in reserved occupations involved in the conflict in a British context would also need to be explored. This would simply be too extensive and not allow for a thorough analysis of each type of veteran.

Exploring such a broad scope of those perceived to be veterans also complicates the understanding of the serviceman and woman which was formed during the war itself. This thesis therefore, has found a narrower focus in defining 'veterans' for the purposes of this study. It draws upon the ways in which the armed services were legislated about and described during the preparatory stages of mobilisation and during the war itself. The group of people that this thesis analyses are

³⁰ 'Bevin Boys: "Most of us couldn't wait to get out"' *Telegraph* 26 March 2008

predominantly males who have seen active, either overseas or home armed service during the Second World War and who mostly returned to Britain upon their demobilisation. Returning to contemporary definitions and understandings of who was perceived as a serviceman or woman can help to justify the parameters of this study.

In the process of mobilisation, the Military Training Bill introduced in April 1939, stated that ‘all men would be liable for call-up in their twentieth year’.³¹ They would be ‘trained and serve full time for six months, then would be called on for part-time service in the Territorial Units for a further three and a half years’.³² Men were encouraged to volunteer when the realisation of imminent war emerged and it was circulated that they could choose the service in which they would serve which included the Army, Navy or Air Force.³³ Gardiner notes that upon the outbreak of war conscription extended to men between the ages of 18-41, it then extended up to 45 in 1941.³⁴ These initial preparations highlight the specific, male orientated nature of mobilisation and the initial emphasis on men as service personnel and as those who fight overseas.

These initial ideas about who should be called up and the roles which were defined as the armed services were reflected in contemporary sources designed to promote war service and patriotism. A 1943 publication titled *Britain’s Wonderful Fighting Forces*, lists three groups as the ‘fighting forces’, the RAF, the Navy and the Army. The RAF, Royal Navy, Infantry Brigades, Tank Corps, Artillery

³¹ Juliet Gardiner, *Wartime - Britain 1939-1945* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2004), 76-79

³² Ibid

³³ *Britain’s Wonderful Fighting Forces* (London: Odhams Press Limited, c.1943)

³⁴ Ibid

Brigades, Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Engineers, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Corps of Signals, Royal Army Medical Corps and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps are all described as the armed services.³⁵ The Women's Auxiliary Service was also included. The book was dedicated to outlining each type of role and gives an idea of who was perceived as a military service personnel and who would be required to conduct work overseas for the war effort. It is this conception of an armed service personnel which can help construct a narrower definition of the veteran for purposes of this thesis. This thesis concentrates on veterans who formed part of this original construction of those in the armed services. Those who served in the army in particular will form the focus of this study, given the monopoly of representation held by this group in commemorative and political culture.

Women held a complicated place in the description of Britain's armed services during the war. They were shown as being capable of being a part of the armed services whilst always connected to the civilian war effort. Publications such as *British Women Go to War* by J. B Priestly claimed that 'no country which has engaged in this war has mobilised its women for the war effort more effectively than Britain has...'.³⁶ Women were shown as vital to the war effort and Priestley states that 'the government was freely given power, under the *National Service (No.2) Act*, to conscript suitable classes of women for the forces, and through the machinery of the *Registration for Employment Order*, to direct women to any civilian employment in which they might be needed'.³⁷ Priestley describes how

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ J. B Priestley, *British Women Go to War* (London: Collins Publishers, c.1943), 7

³⁷ J. B. Priestley, 7-10

the *Registration for Employment Order* in 1941, demanded that all women between the ages of 18 and a half and 45 (unless caring for children or already in ‘work of national importance’) are to be ‘called to the nearest Employment Exchange for an interview’.³⁸ The Women’s Auxiliary Services (W.R.E.N.S, A.T.S and W.A.A.F.) as well as factory workers and the Land Army are discussed together.³⁹ Rather than discuss the women in the armed services as separate, they are described and discussed as equal in terms of national importance to the war effort. Priestley stresses that women ‘will not be required to use lethal weapons unless they volunteer to do so’.⁴⁰ It is noted that ‘these girls have released thousands and thousands of men for active service’.⁴¹ Seen as distinct and separate to male military roles, women held a complicated place in the construction of wartime functions and identities. They assumed an alternative place in the mobilisation process and in the hierarchy of wartime roles as unlike men joining the armed forces, they could not handle weapons and their military careers were seen as enabling men to take up front line tasks. Scholars such as Summerfield have highlighted these complexities and inequalities and how they continued to impact women’s own sense of themselves and their memories in their post-war lives.⁴² Peniston-Bird emphasises how a memorial created in Whitehall, London in 2005 to women of the Second World War presents those in armed service roles alongside those in civilian war work.⁴³ As a result of the

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998)

⁴³ Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, ‘The People's War in personal testimony and bronze: sorority and the Memorial to The Women of World War II’ in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed., Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle location 2204-2781 kindle edition.

research already conducted surrounding the complex wartime and post-war roles of women, female veterans will not be widely analysed in thesis. Instances where female veterans of the Women's Auxiliary Services are present in the representations of the conflict will be noted, but females who participated in Home Front war work during the Second World War will not be studied in detail.

The Second World War and memory

The study of the representation of Second World War veterans must be contextualised within the vast literature surrounding memory of the conflict. As Noakes and Pattinson outline, the Second World War has 'remained potent and present throughout the past 70 years, has left a rich legacy in a range of media that continues to attract a wide audience: film, television and radio, photography and the visual arts, journalism and propaganda, architecture, museums, music and literature'.⁴⁴ These interpretations of the war 'are not a direct representation of events of the past; they have to be understood within the historical context of their creation and articulation'.⁴⁵

From the 1960s onwards, scholars such as Clive Ponting, Nicholas Harman and Angus Calder's works focused on contesting the 'myths' of the conflict which originated from the propaganda generated during the war itself.⁴⁶ Calder discussed

⁴⁴ Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, ed., *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle location, 401, kindle edition.

⁴⁵ Noakes and Pattinson, *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, Introduction

⁴⁶ Angus Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-45* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1969) and Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1991), Nicholas Harman, *Dunkirk – The*

the fabrication of a ‘People’s War’ narrative in his ground-breaking work in 1969 and later revisited the events of the Evacuation of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz in *The Myth of the Blitz*, published in 1991.⁴⁷ Pete Grafton’s work *You, You & You* was constructed from oral testimonies recorded in 1975.⁴⁸ It features a variety of deliberate counternarratives from veterans and civilians, in order to show the different opinions which existed surrounding the lived experience and meaning of the war.⁴⁹ As Calder wrote of Grafton’s work, ‘it shows us so many things that have been forgotten because they “don’t fit in”’.⁵⁰ Grafton’s work in particular highlights the importance of acknowledging the variety of views present amongst those who lived through the conflict.⁵¹ These include those with pacifist views, examples of disaffection of the forces, regrets in participating and the lack of progress in Britain since winning the war.⁵² This thesis similarly acknowledges the variety of attitudes present amongst Second World War veterans with regards to their wartime experiences and how they have been viewed as veterans.

This study takes a broad approach by charting how veterans who served in a range of campaigns have been represented. Other works have chosen to focus on the memory of specific wartime events, such as D-Day (Edwards, Buckley, Dolski, 2014), while others have explored the televisual and filmic depictions of the war.⁵³

Necessary Myth (London: Coronet Books, 1990), Clive Ponting, *1940 – Myth and Reality* (Chicago, Ivan R Dee, 1993)

⁴⁷ Angus Calder, *The People’s War – Britain 1939-45* and Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*

⁴⁸ Pete Grafton, *You, You & You! The People Out of Step with World War II* (London: Pluto, 1982)

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ Pete Grafton, *You, You & You! The People Out of Step with World War II*, Foreword

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ Sam Edwards, John Buckley and Michael Dolski ed., *D-Day in History and Memory – The D-Day Landings in International Remembrance and Commemoration* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014); Geoff Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and

Collections such as the *British Cultural Memory of the Second World War* have brought subjects including the filmic memory of the North African campaigns and the material culture of the conflict.⁵⁴ New technology has been examined by Noakes, in her analysis of the BBC People's War website.⁵⁵ Graham Dawson has written extensively on how the representations of the Second World War have emerged and evolved over time and their ongoing influence on politics and notions of national identity.⁵⁶ Smith specifically explored these configurations in relation to the events of 1940.⁵⁷ Similarly, Connolly analyses the complexity of the collective remembrance of the war as a whole, outlining how 'memory emphasises certain elements' in the 'representing of past to present'.⁵⁸ This thesis takes a different approach, by exploring the legacy of the Second World War from the perspective of the war veteran.

World War II' in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 106, No. 3 (2001): 818-819, James Chapman, *War and Film* (Islington: Reaction Books Ltd, 2008), James Chapman, 'Television and History: The World at War', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2011): 247-275 and Geoff Hurd ed., *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984)

⁵⁴ Janet Watson, 'Total war and total anniversary: The material culture of Second World War commemoration in Britain' in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle locations, 5166-5602, kindle edition, Martin Francis, 'Remembering war, forgetting empire? Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British cinema' in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle locations, 3421-4007, kindle edition.

⁵⁵ Lucy Noakes, "'War on the Web": The BBC's 'People's War' website and memories of fear in wartime in 21st-century Britain' in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle locations 1676-2181, kindle edition.

⁵⁶ Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, ed., *The Politics of Memory - Commemorating War* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), Graham Dawson 'History Writing on WWII' in *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* ed. Hurd, Geoff, (London: BFI Publishing, 1984) and Graham Dawson and Bob West, 'Our Finest Hour? The Popular Memory of World War Two and the Struggle Over National Identity' in ed. Hurd, Geoff, *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984)

⁵⁷ Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940 - History, Myth and Popular Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000),

⁵⁸ Mark Connolly, *We Can Take it! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2004)

A number of studies have also focused on a specific group and their experiences of the conflict, particularly those who have been forgotten in the 'People's War' narrative. Alison Chand and Linsey Robb have documented the experiences of those in reserved occupations and their absence in the collective remembrance of the war.⁵⁹ Sonya O. Rose similarly examines those who were excluded from the narrative of citizenship during the conflict which had implications for post-war representations.⁶⁰ Wendy Ugolini's work focuses on recognising the experiences of non-British participants and residents in Britain during the war, including the Italian Scottish experience.⁶¹ She highlights the representations and the lived experiences of these groups and uncovers their place in the history of the war.⁶² Despite the vast number of studies concerning civilians and those from different nations, much less research has been completed surrounding British Second World War veterans.

The representation, memories and lived experience of female veterans have been recognised by scholars such as Penny Summerfield and Juliet Pattinson.

Summerfield explored the relationship between women's wartime memories and the wartime constructions of gender in their oral testimonies in her book,

⁵⁹ Linsey Robb "'The Cushy Number': Civilian Men in British Post-War Representations of the Second World War' in *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* ed. Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), Alison Chand *The Second World War in Glasgow and Clydeside: Men in Reserved Occupations 1939-1945* (PhD Thesis: University of Strathclyde, 2012)

⁶⁰ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

⁶¹ Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing war as the 'enemy other': Italian Scottish experience in World War II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), Wendy Ugolini, "When are you going back?" Memory, Ethnicity and the British Home Front in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Noakes, Lucy and Pattinson, Juliette, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), kindle locations 2783-3415 kindle edition.

⁶² Ibid

Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives.⁶³ Pattinson similarly analysed the testimonies of servicewomen and men employed in the Special Operations Executive during the war.⁶⁴ More recently, Peniston-Bird has explored the construction and reception of the *Monument to the Women of World War II* in London, which was unveiled in 2005.⁶⁵

Broad studies of war and memory have tended to make a number of statements about veterans and their place in the legacy of the conflict. Ashplant, Dawson and Roper stress importance and cultural significance of 'survivor testimony' to the 'media event' of war commemoration.⁶⁶ Yet, little has been written about the origins of this process or how Second World War veterans have been utilised specifically in commemorative contexts. In the introduction to *War Memory and Popular Culture*, Keren laments the 'frustration by veterans over the neglect or distortion of their message' which 'frequently leads them to put their faith in the agents of popular culture themselves'.⁶⁷ He describes 'the veterans' urge to share their heritage with future generations' as 'enormous'.⁶⁸ It is unclear whether the Second World War veterans described are British or American, but these statements do correlate to the findings of this thesis in highlighting the contrast between the politically orchestrated commemorative representations of the

⁶³ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War*, introduction.

⁶⁴ Juliette Pattinson, , "'The thing that made me hesitate ...': re-examining gendered intersubjectivities in interviews with British secret war veterans' *Women's History Review* Vol. 20, No. 2, (2011) 245–263

⁶⁵ Corinna M., Peniston-Bird, 'The people's war in personal testimony and bronze Sorority and the memorial to The Women of World War II'

⁶⁶ Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, ed., *The Politics of Memory - Commemorating War*, 4

⁶⁷ Michael Keren, 'Introduction' in *War Memory and Popular Culture – Essays on Modes of Remembrance and Commemoration* ed. Michael Keren and Holger H. Herwig, (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2009), Kindle locations 22-23. Kindle edition.

⁶⁸ Ibid

conflict and the low key efforts and wishes of veterans to commemorate and remember. They also reflect the desire seen in many veterans interviewed for this study, to share their memories for the future. Yet, statements such as these make vague generalisations about the wishes of veterans and do not account for those who do not wish to share their memories. Few scholars have directly assessed the memory of the conflict from the perspective of the veteran or explored the identity and views of veterans in a detailed analysis. The chapters which follow, enable the place of the veteran to be fully integrated into the historiography surrounding the memory of the Second World War.

Previous studies which chart the specific representation and experience of certain groups of veterans have been conducted by Francis and Tinker. Martin Francis touches upon the aftermath of the war for the RAF pilot in the early post-war period in a chapter of his book, *The Flyer*, published in 2008. The book aims to 'remedy a critical lacuna in the historiography of modern British masculinity', by exploring the wartime image and lived experience of RAF pilots.⁶⁹ The final chapter explores the transition from flyer to veteran. Francis notes how some reintegrated into civilian life whilst other 'found the transition problematic'.⁷⁰ He describes how the 'maladjusted flyer' was a 'surprisingly common character' showcased in the film and literature depictions in the post-war period.⁷¹ Francis' only briefly explores the post-war legacy in *The Flyer*. It raises questions about the representation of the veteran in relation to lived experience, and leaves room for further exploration of the early post-war representations of Second World War

⁶⁹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer - British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer - British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945*, 13

ex-servicemen more broadly. Similarly, Greg Tinker has explored ‘the voice of the veteran in remembrance prior to the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day and traces the ‘development of the of the sixtieth anniversary *Veterans Reunited* commemoration programme’⁷² He analyses veterans’ ‘accounts of war, of veteranhood and the meanings which they assigned to remembrance’.⁷³ Tinker’s work uncovers the role of D-Day veterans in the commemoration process and examines how they have shared their memories in one particular context.⁷⁴ This thesis builds on Tinker’s and Francis’s research by examining the representation of Second World War more broadly, regardless of which campaigns they served in.

Far East prisoners of war feature in a great number of studies on Second World War veterans. Rather than outlining the ways in which these men were represented or how they readjusted back into civilian life, many of these works are devoted to exploring the memory making activities of the Far East prisoners of war. In 2014, the *Journal of War and Culture* dedicated a special edition to the lived experience and memories of Far East prisoners of war in particular and legacy of the POW in a variety of contexts.⁷⁵ Hatley-Broad has explored the strains of returning POWs on post-war family life and marriage.⁷⁶ Murakami has uncovered the effects of commemorative pilgrimage and ritual for ex-Far East

⁷² Greg Tinker, 'The Cultural Memory of the Second World War: D-Day Veterans and Commemoration in Britain' (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2013)

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes, and Wendy Ugolini, 'Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War' *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 3, (2014): 179-190

⁷⁶ Barbara Hatley-Broad, 'Coping in Britain and France: A Comparison of Family Issues affecting the homecoming of Prisoners of War following World War Two' in ed. Bob Moore, and Barbara Hatley-Broad, *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War Two* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), 141

prisoners of war. He notices the ‘pilgrimage-like, perspective transformation’ of veterans visiting war graves and battlefield sites.⁷⁷ The *Journal of War and Culture* special edition builds on these works by examining a variety of topics surrounding POW veterans captured in both the Far East and Europe. Pattinson, Noakes and Ugolini introduce the journal volume and note that the articles act to ‘illuminate the exciting work that is being undertaken currently’ surrounding culture, memory and Prisoners of War.⁷⁸ Oliver explores the post-war exhibition of POW veteran, Charles Thrale, made up of images compiled during his captivity made from bartered materials, plants and blood.⁷⁹ She draws on the concept of ‘post-memory’ to explore how the exhibition not only provoked responses from Prisoners of War and other veterans, but also from their families.⁸⁰ Oliver uses the guest books as indicators of the impact of the exhibition and as examples which acted to add layers of opinion and information to the meaning of the collective remembrance of the war.⁸¹ Houghton’s article in this series explores the ways in which veterans themselves responded to the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*. She notes how they actively sought to debunk the perceived inaccuracies of the film in their own memoirs.⁸² Makepeace explores the formation, aims and impact of POW veterans associations and their determination to gain reparations and the

⁷⁷ Kyoko Murakami, ‘Commemoration reconsidered: Second World War Veterans’ reunion as pilgrimage’, *Memory Studies* Vol. 7 No. 3 (2014): 339-353

⁷⁸ Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes and Wendy Ugolini, ‘Incarcerated Masculinities: Male POWs and the Second World War’ 188

⁷⁹ Lizzie Oliver, ‘“What our Sons went through”: The Connective Memories of Far Eastern Captivity in the Charles Thrale Exhibition, 1946–1964’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 3, (2014): 236–252

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

⁸¹ *Ibid*

⁸² Frances Houghton, ‘“To the Kwai and Back’: Myth, Memory and Memoirs of the ‘Death Railway’ 1942–1943’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 3, (2014):223-235

divisions between Far East POW and European POW veterans.⁸³ In each of these articles, the veteran is shown as central to the construction of collective memory in forming their own groups, activities, sharing their opinions and their reaction to cultural depictions of the events they lived through. The articles highlight the voice of the veteran and uncover the views and efforts of veterans themselves. This thesis develops this idea further by exploring further veterans' own attitudes to their wartime experiences and the efforts made themselves to share their memories or form associations. Veterans associations outside the specific arenas of D-Day and Far Eastern prisoners of war have never been examined by historians. This study takes a broader approach than previous studies into the experiences of Second world War veterans, by examining those who served in various campaigns and comparing the ideas of a range of different veterans with contrasting experiences and attitudes. This enables a greater insight into how this generation have been represented based on wartime campaigns and how different experiences have helped to shape attitudes to veteranhood. Adding to the literature exploring the activities of veterans associations, this study also includes a chapter exploring the group identity of veterans in previously unexamined veterans associations and British Legion branches and clubs.

Little has been discussed about the post-Second World War impact of the British Legion. The interwar activities and development of the Royal British Legion has received exploration by Niall Barr and Adrian Gregory, who have noted the

⁸³ Clare Makepeace, 'For "ALL Who were Captured"? The Evolution of National Ex-prisoner of War Associations in Britain after the Second World War' *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 3, (2014):253-268

formation, purpose and power of the organisation.⁸⁴ Scholars such as Barr and Gregory have helped to showcase the real impact of the Legion but little has been discussed surrounding the post-1945 role of the organisation, particularly at a local level. Reece touches upon the post-war role of the Royal British Legion and how it continued to grow and provide housing assistance, remembrance organisation and how it extended ‘nationwide social responsibilities through its clubs’.⁸⁵ The memory making role of the organisation is largely overlooked as well as the role of veterans within the local branches. This study will add to the history surrounding the low key activities of veterans as part of British Legion branches, in a bid to understand how these groups helped veterans to forge a sense of collective identity.

The findings of this thesis complements the few studies already conducted surrounding how Second World War veterans perceive their self-identity and the importance they place on their wartime experiences. Sokoloff’s study written in 1994, explores the perceived identity of Second World War veterans in Birmingham. She suggests that in heavy engineering cities, where many were recruited into the Royal Engineers and other ‘practical, machine-orientated functions in an Army’, veterans do not place a vast importance on their wartime experiences.⁸⁶ Her study implies that in such cases, veterans themselves do not necessarily place a great value on their wartime experiences as fundamental

⁸⁴ Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy – British Veterans, Politics and Society 1921-1939* (London: Praeger Publications, 2005) and Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994)

⁸⁵ Peter Reece, *Homecoming Heroes: An Account of the Re-assimilation of British Military Personnel into Civilian Life* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), kindle edition.

⁸⁶ Sally Sokoloff, ‘Soldiers or civilians? The impact of Army service in World War Two on Birmingham men’, *Oral History*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1997), 60

events in their lives or as life changing moments that define them in later life.⁸⁷ It is suggested that in Birmingham, due to the mobilisation of factory workers and the home front experience of the Blitz, veterans viewed themselves as ‘civilians in uniform’ and aligned themselves with the home front experience.⁸⁸ Similarly, Hiscocks explores the identity of ex-servicemen in the Tyne and Wear locality and explored ‘the significance and meaning of memories of demobilisation through analysing the importance of this event in developing veterans’ identities and community bonds with former comrades’.⁸⁹ The study touches upon the experience of Second World War soldiers and concludes that they valued the comradeship of fellow soldiers, and these bonds continued into civilian life. Hiscocks notes that some veterans aligned with former comrades because many civilians saw veterans’ experiences as nothing unique, ‘given the large numbers who had served, as well as the fact military service was seen as no more dangerous than what they had faced during the blitz’.⁹⁰ Hiscocks’ study suggests that veterans viewed themselves within a group military identity and could not relate to the wider civilian population even after the war. This observation is in contrast to Sokoloff’s study that shows the aligning of the military and civilian experience. Hiscocks suggests that in some localities, the connections with other veterans were central to some veterans’ sense of post-war identity.

This thesis further adds to this debate, by showing the diverse range of attitudes present in the Second World War veteran community towards their sense of self

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ David Hiscocks, ‘Old Comrades: A study of the formation of ex-military communities in Tyne and Wear since the Great War’ (Master’s Thesis: Durham University, 2015)

⁹⁰ David Hiscocks, 120

identity and the perceived significance of their experiences. While some clearly connect to a sense of self based on the traditional ideas of veteranhood explored in the first section, others veterans do not rate their experiences as important as a result of other competing life events. When and how individuals began sharing their memories is also central to understanding veteran identity. It will be shown that not all engage with their wartime memories at the same time or until late in life, due to other life moments taking precedence or a lack of connection to other veterans in their peacetime communities. The efforts of veterans themselves in forming group identities can also add to the understanding of how this generation perceived themselves in groups and how they chose to organise themselves as ex-service personnel.

Scholars such as Allport and Reece have explored the demobilisation of the Second World War generation and the struggles that they faced upon returning home. Reece explores the demobilising of veterans from Ancient Greece to the Falkland's conflict the 1980s.⁹¹ He also analyses the experience of Second World War veterans and their demobilisation and place in post-war society.⁹² Allport's work similarly explores the experiences of veterans upon being demobilised. He argues that 'the demobilisation experience in 1945 and all the powerful hopes and fears that it generated has curiously vanished from our collective memory'.⁹³ In order to resolve this issue, he uses diaries, accounts and contemporary discussions of ex-servicemen to understand the realities of life for returning soldiers and their

⁹¹ Peter Reece, *Homecoming Heroes: An Account of the Re-assimilation of British Military Personnel into Civilian Life*

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Alan Allport, *Demobbed – Coming Home After World War Two* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), kindle location, 227, kindle edition.

families. His work readdresses the understanding of a time in British history publicly known for ‘images of gaiety’ and celebration of the end of the conflict.⁹⁴ He touches upon cultural depictions of the veteran experience, but aims to understand the lived experience rather than the cultural construction of post-war life. This thesis also highlights the ways in which veterans were treated upon their return home by civilians and the government, and adds to the discussion by showing connections between the post-war attitudes to veterans and whether veterans chose to share their memories with others.

This thesis seeks to uncover how veterans perceive and describe themselves and their own efforts to share their memories. Veteran memoirs and accounts of the war have been studied by Samuel Hynes, Mark Rawlinson and Frances Houghton.⁹⁵ Unlike previous scholars, Houghton uses memoirs to uncover the ways in which Bomber Command veterans have challenged the dominant narratives of the events they witnessed. Before any memorials had been constructed, Houghton argues that these accounts acted as ‘literary memorials’ to the men of Bomber Command.⁹⁶ These works highlight the need to further explore the memory making efforts of veterans themselves and their motivations. This thesis achieves this by studying how veterans describe their motivations in sharing memories, their efforts as part of groups and how some have used the internet to record their memories.

⁹⁴ Alan Allport, kindle location, 237

⁹⁵ Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers Tale* (London: Penguin Press, 1997), 158 and Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010)

⁹⁶ Frances Houghton, ‘The ‘Missing Chapter’: Bomber Command Aircrew Memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s’ in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Lucy Noakes, and Juliette Pattinson, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) kindle locations, 4602-5145, kindle edition

In the fields of psychology and medical history, Second World War veterans feature as an important group which can enable a greater understanding of the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and disablement. Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins have published widely on Second World War veterans. In a variety of articles they explore topics surrounding memory, trauma and coping strategies by using interviews conducted with veterans. They assess the importance of comradeship amongst veterans and conclude that ‘social support is an important lifelong coping strategy for World War II veterans’ in their article for *Aging & Mental Health*.⁹⁷ Similarly, in an article produced for *Oral History*, they explore the process of dealing with traumatic memories. Using oral testimonies, they explore how veterans have coped with their memories in the decades after the war.⁹⁸ Hunt and Robbins advocate the importance of writing and speaking about traumatic memories of conflict and the adverse effects of silence. They stress in the article compiled in 1998 (when many veterans were still living and retired) that ‘there are many veterans who have not over the last fifty years had any opportunities to talk about the experiences, the very act of which would help them enormously’.⁹⁹ Hunt and Robbins clearly utilised their interviews with elderly World War Two veterans in a variety of ways both in a psychological context and in the arena of memory studies and oral history. Hunt revisited these ideas in his book *War and Trauma* which focused on all forms of veteran trauma across all wars and generations.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, a study by Capstick and Clegg advocates the

⁹⁷Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, ‘The Long Term Consequences of War: The Experience of World War II’ *Aging & Mental Health* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2001): 183-190

⁹⁸ Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, ‘Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative’ *Oral History* Vol. 26, No. 2 (1998): 57-64

⁹⁹Ibid

¹⁰⁰Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

importance of valuing the war memories of veterans with dementia.¹⁰¹ Added to this, Ben Shepherd explores the psychiatric treatment and experiences of veterans from the First World War to the present day. As opposed to discussing veteran mental health in later life, Sheppard charts the earlier theories surrounding war trauma and how it was experienced, treated and understood at the time.¹⁰² He explores the developments of military psychiatric treatment and notes how the Second World War saw an improvement in the treatment of trauma.¹⁰³ The lives of those left physically disabled by the Second World War have been explored by Anderson. Anderson argues that the developments enabled an increase in ‘survival rate for injured people’ during World War Two.¹⁰⁴ She explores the RAF rehabilitation centres and notes how the ‘special status’ of the RAF transferred to the way in which these centres were viewed.¹⁰⁵ While this thesis does not aim to explore the theme of war trauma or disabled veterans in depth, these studies are vital to understanding the context in the life cycle of this generation and are used as examples of how some veterans viewed their experiences in later life.

Veteran Studies

This thesis adds to the growing interdisciplinary field of veteran studies by exploring the image and attitudes of the Second World War generation in a British context. Many studies of American Second World War and Vietnam veterans

¹⁰¹ Andrea Capstick and David Clegg, ‘Behind the Stiff Upper Lip: War Narratives of Older Men with Dementia’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies* Volume 6, Issue 3 (2013): 239-254

¹⁰² Ben Shepherd, *A War Of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994* (London: Pimlico, 2002), Chapters 14-21

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ Julie Anderson, *Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: Soul of a Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 94

¹⁰⁵ Julie Anderson, 123

have been produced which highlight the different attitudes towards two generations of American ex-servicemen.¹⁰⁶ Studies emphasise the negative representation of the Vietnam generation, and how they have been treated and memorialised in the aftermath of the conflict.¹⁰⁷ The study of veterans of other conflicts in an American context have been explored, including studies of Korean War memorials, veterans and the memory of the Civil War, and the American Revolution. French veterans have also been the topic of much discussion.¹⁰⁸ Antoine Prost's *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* has been described as 'the study of a generation' in its exploration of the political activities of French Great War veterans.¹⁰⁹ More recent publications include the edited collection by McVeigh and Cooper which features inter-generational explorations of the portrayal and identity of ex-servicemen in literature and film, the treatment of the disabled and the active role of veterans in post-war societies.¹¹⁰ This collection of work outlines for the first time, the importance of analysing the lived experience and portrayal of veterans. The edited volume explores 'the level of care accorded to veterans of conflict in return for their sacrifice, but it also raises questions concerning the status of men after war,

¹⁰⁶ Sam Edwards, *Allies in Memory – World War II and the Politics of American Commemoration in Europe c.1941-2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Loch Johnson, 'Political Alienation among Vietnam Veterans' *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 3 (1976): 398-409

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press 2009), Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image- Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (London: New York University Press, 1998)

¹⁰⁸ John Casey, *New Men: Reconstructing the Image of the Veteran in Late Nineteenth-century American Literature and Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), Crompton B. Burton, "'The Dear Old Regiment': Maine's Regimental Associations and the Memory of the American Civil War' *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 84, No. 1 (2011): 104-122, Patrick Hagopian, 'The Korean War Veterans Memorial and Problems of Representation' *Public Art Dialogue*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (2012): 215-253

¹⁰⁹ Bernard Boene and Olivier Forcade, 'Book Review: In the Wake of War: "Les Anciens Combattants" and French Society, 1914-1939' *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume 20, No 2, (1994): 334-337 and Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society* (Oxford: Berg, 1992)

¹¹⁰ Stephen McVeigh, and Nicola Cooper, 1

their identities, their sense of their own, changed, masculinity and their relationship with the nation and society at large'.¹¹¹ It features a study of the representation of elderly Eighteenth and Nineteenth century British veterans by Nielsen and articles exploring veterans from Bosnia and Italy.¹¹² This thesis adds to this growing and interdisciplinary field by using the Second World War generation as a case study to highlight how veterans have been used in the collective remembrance of conflict and how they identify with their wartime experiences.

There is a vast literature surrounding the generation of British veterans who fought in the Great War - the Fathers, Uncles and predecessors of the Second World War generation. These works have inspired this thesis and highlight some of the context surrounding remembrance practices and the origins of the image of the veteran in commemorative culture.

As the First World War slipped out of living memory, scholars began to reflect on the experience, legacy and representation of the veterans who witnessed that conflict. As Hurcombe and Fell note, due to mass conscription, the Great War made 'the figure of the veteran more visible'.¹¹³ Veterans became 'a recognised social group' and according to some scholars, 'a powerful political force'.¹¹⁴ Most pertinent to this study are works which explore the representation and media image of British First World War veterans, which largely emerged as the war was

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories – Living With the Legend, New Edition* (Monash: Monash University Publishing, 2013)

¹¹³ Alison S. Fell and Martin Hurcombe, 'Veteran Identities: One Hundred Years of the First World War' *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4, (2013), 263

¹¹⁴ Ibid

slipping out of living memory. As Gregory outlines, veterans were portrayed in society as ‘omnipresent and generally invisible’ in the interwar period.¹¹⁵

However, Dan Todman has traced the ways in which veterans shared their memories from 1919 onwards, suggesting that scholars must look further than the obvious efforts to share memories to uncover the ways ex-servicemen told their stories informally. They spoke to each other, ‘bought copies of regimental histories’, referred to the war to their families and sometimes recounted their experiences if they were part of the home guard during World War Two.¹¹⁶

Todman’s study provides inspiration for exploring how the next generation of veterans shared memories in subtle ways and how they saw their cultural image evolve as they began to pass away.

Other scholars have charted the representation and use of the Great War veterans by the media and government in later life. Hanna has explored the television depiction of Great War veterans, noting how ‘veterans on the screen have emphasised the development of history on television as an advanced form of oral history for the post-literate era’.¹¹⁷ She traces the introduction of veterans sharing their memories on the small screen, beginning with *The Great War* in 1964.

Although ‘historians are wary of what [veterans] thought they saw and what they have added, forgotten or altered since the events themselves’, documentary makers are highly keen to utilise living veterans.¹¹⁸ Other scholars have outlined the ways in which publishers and the media have utilised and represented this

¹¹⁵ Adrian Gregory, 63

¹¹⁶ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 189-191

¹¹⁷ Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 64

¹¹⁸ Emma Hanna, 71-72

generation of veterans. Trott suggests that publishers and the media used the last First World War veterans, Harry Patch and Henry Allingham, as a marketable tool to sell products about the conflict.¹¹⁹ Trott highlights how these works present the veteran as a victim and tie their memories to common narratives surrounding the conflict. McCartney argues that the ‘rise of the image of the victimized soldier of the First World War is a consequence of a long-term process through which negative views of the war as a whole have come to dominate a variety of different public narratives in Britain’.¹²⁰ Bavidge similarly explores how the planned funeral for the ‘last Tommy’ of the Great War romanticises ‘a man’s commonness’ and ‘monumentalises personal testimony’.¹²¹ In reality, the funeral never took place as planned, perhaps as a result of the hostilities surrounding it as noted in the article. While the government and the British public hoped to plan a state funeral, veterans and their families were reluctant to consent to the plans. Bavidge notes that ‘responses to the proposal from veterans show the disparity between their understanding of their own war experience and official narratives’.¹²² Long and Webber argue that Harry Patch ‘had been transformed from an unknown man into a war veteran, a now heroic figure defined by veteran status’.¹²³ They believe that his persona was ‘constructed by the media’ and Patch ‘came to represent the horrors of war as history’.¹²⁴ These examples show the way in which the images of veterans have been controlled and shaped by the

¹¹⁹ Vincent Andrew Trott, ‘Remembering War, Resisting Myth: Veteran Autobiographies and the Great War in the Twenty-first Century’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2013): 328-42

¹²⁰ Helen B. McCartney, ‘The First World War soldier and his contemporary image in Britain’ *International Affairs* Vol. 90, No. 2 (2014): 299–315

¹²¹ Eleanor Bavidge, ‘The Public Private: The Last Veteran’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2009), 228-229

¹²² Eleanor Bavidge, 226

¹²³ Nick Webber and Paul Long, ‘The Last Post: British Press Representations of Veterans of the Great War’, *Media, War and Conflict*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2014): 282

¹²⁴ *Ibid*

media and government. They also showcase that there is a clear difference between the veterans' own idea of their role in society and the cultural, government and commemorative image ex-servicemen are perceived to embody. These studies have provided the inspiration to ask how far the Second World War generation have been treated in similar ways.

Alistair Thomson's ground-breaking work *ANZAC Memories – Living with the Legend* has proved hugely influential to this thesis. The study traces the construction of the ANZAC Legend and how the memories of veterans compare to the narratives. Thomson explores this dichotomy between the constructed memory of the Great War in Australian culture and the often repressed and traumatic memories of the veterans he interviewed.¹²⁵ He also uncovered how 'veterans had adopted and used the Anzac legend because it was resonant and useful in their own remembering'.¹²⁶ The book highlights the complexity of the remembering process and suggests that it is important to explore 'the relationship between public legends and personal memory'.¹²⁷ Thomson's work inspires further research into the connections between public and the private and the relationship between culture veterans, memory and identity. While this thesis does not compare memories of veterans to the narrative of the Second World War, it does explore the contrasts between the representation of war and the identity of veterans themselves. A section of Thompson's book asks how memories of war also change 'in relation to our shifting personal identity' and shows how some veterans have constructed a sense of self based on their wartime experiences'.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories – Living With the Legend, New Edition*

¹²⁶ Alistair Thomson, kindle location, 470, kindle edition

¹²⁷ Alistair Thomson, kindle location, 478, kindle edition

¹²⁸ Ibid

Like Thompson's study, this thesis aims to understand how the representations of war influence veterans on a personal level and how they have constructed a sense of self based around their experiences.

Memory Studies

The field of memory studies is central to the study of the place of the veteran in relation to the legacy of the Second World War. Memory is important to understanding how veterans have been imagined in relation to the collective remembrance of the war and in the significance of wartime events to their own sense of themselves. Memory studies has been described as a 'transdisciplinary phenomenon' spanning fields including history, psychology, sociology and linguistics.¹²⁹ As Cubitt notes, in recent decades, 'memory has become one of the central preoccupations of historical scholarship'.¹³⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of collective remembrance, and the relationships between individual and collective memory must be examined.

The discipline of memory studies is rooted in the theories of Halbwachs who saw 'the connection between a social group and collective memory' and those of Bloch and Febvre, who 'took seriously the history of collective representations, myths and images' and championed the exploration of 'collective representations and beliefs of people in the past by using historical and sociological tools'.¹³¹ The notion that memories are constructed socially has been frequently applied to the

¹²⁹ Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning ed., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 3

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1

¹³¹ Alon Confino, 'Memory and the History of Mentalities' in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* ed., Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, (Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 78

exploration of the legacy of warfare. Acts of public remembrance of war have been examined by Winter and Sivan who describe them as being influenced by groups including the government, the media, organisations or by veterans themselves.¹³² Rather than collective memory as ‘vague wave of associations’, Winter uses ‘remembrance’ to show the ways in which groups create and consume ‘artefacts or ceremonies’.¹³³ Scholars such as Geoff Eley argue that “‘remembering’ World War II requires no immediate experience of those years’ because of the existing ‘active archive of collective identification’ in popular culture, commemorative anniversaries and family histories.¹³⁴ The public are able to gain an understanding of the Second World War through these acts of collective remembrance. As Roper, Ashplant and Dawson suggest, ‘shared or common memories enter the public arena when they are articulated in some cultural or artistic form, or into a political narrative’.¹³⁵ These attempts to shape the collective remembrance of the Second World War can be useful for charting the place of the veteran within the changing re-interpretation of the events of the Second World War.

This study is also closely related to the connections between collective and individual memory. Veterans’ own sense of their identity can be partly explored through the use of oral history interviews. This type of evidence is a form of autobiographical memory.¹³⁶ Taking the *socio-cultural* approach accepts the view

¹³² Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, ed., *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9

¹³³ *Ibid*

¹³⁴ Geoff Eley, ‘Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II’

¹³⁵ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 20

¹³⁶ See 1.2 Harold Welzer, ‘Communicative Memory’ in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* ed., Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nunning, (Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 290

that the ‘mnemonic life of individuals as something not just casually influenced but framed and structured by those individuals’ positioning in society and culture’.¹³⁷ As Cubitt notes, this approach takes the view that ‘individuals always remember in social contexts’.¹³⁸ Seemingly, individual memories can therefore be shaped by the dominant representations presented in the public surrounding the legacy of the war and the figure of the veteran. As Hodgkin and Radstone note, ‘memory is not only individual but cultural: memory, though we may experience it as private and internal, draws on countless scraps and bits of knowledge and information from the surrounding culture, and is inserted into larger cultural narratives’.¹³⁹ This connection between individual and collective forms of memory is crucial to exploring how veterans conceptualise their own sense of identity. The dominant representations clearly influence how ex-servicemen view themselves, and individual memories must be viewed in relation to the narratives and images which are constructed culturally surrounding Second World War veterans.

Gerontology

This study compliments some of the aims of scholars in the emerging field of cultural gerontology which endeavours to illustrate the ‘range and variety of older people’s experiences and views, reiterating the point that people in later years, contrary to the stereotype, are more and not less diverse than the young’.¹⁴⁰ Possible causes of this rise in diversity are cited, including “grey” life-style

¹³⁷ Geoffrey Cubitt, 73

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, ed. *Memory, History Nation: Contested Past* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 6

¹⁴⁰ Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, ed., ‘The Challenge of Cultural Gerontology’ *The Gerontologist* Vol. 55, No. 3 (2015): 353-359

consumerism, technologic advance, and the possibility of virtual identities’ which have ‘multiplied the options open to older people’ and challenge traditional ideas of old age.¹⁴¹

This thesis appeals to this emergence of the scholarly examination of the elderly as a complex and diverse population. The range of attitudes and identities present in the following chapters correlate with the idea that the elderly, like veterans, are not one ‘homogenous group’.¹⁴² Kampf states that historians engaging in this field must explore a ‘‘fuller’’ account of ageing, linking the individual experiences of older people with their public representations’.¹⁴³ This study achieves this by exploring individual and group attitudes being a veteran and comparing them to the representations of them outlined in the first section.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into two sections, one exploring the ways in which veterans have been imagined by the government, the media and in the press, and another examining veterans’ own attitudes to their wartime experience and sense of identity using oral testimonies, ephemera and written material. The first section explores how Second World War veterans have been represented in commemorative and political culture since 1945. Representation is viewed as a creator of meaning and as a tool to understand how veterans are portrayed by the

¹⁴¹ Simon Biggs, ‘Beyond Appearances: Perspectives on Identity in Later Life and Some Implications for Method’ *Journal of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES* Vol 60B, No.3 (2005): S118-S128

¹⁴² Antje Kampf, ‘Historians of Ageing and the Cultural Turn’ in ed. Julia Twigg and Wendy Martin, ‘The Challenge of Cultural Gerontology’ *The Gerontologist* Vol. 55, No. 3 (2015): 353-359

¹⁴³ Ibid

media and in political culture.¹⁴⁴ These constructed images of veterans provide the context to understand how the veteran is most commonly understood and imagined in British culture.

Chapter One focuses on the ways in which veterans have been represented in annual commemorative events. The events of Remembrance Day, the Poppy Appeal, the Festival of Remembrance provide an annual point of remembrance in the UK. These events provide perhaps the most recognisable image of the Second World War veteran, and act as an ideal starting point to uncover the origins of the image of this generation of veterans in Britain which is closely linked to their predecessors. This chapter argues that the governmental decision to retain the remembrance rituals of the Great War caused the Second World War generation to be depicted in similar ways after 1945.

The second chapter explores the representation of Second World War veterans in 'round number' and anniversary commemorations, dedicated specifically to events and campaigns of that conflict. It highlights how the media and government control over which events become celebrated and which are sidelined. In part of celebrated events, veterans are portrayed in keeping with the tropes surrounding the war which are politically motivated and repetitive. Rarely have large anniversary events offered agency to veteran themselves outside of being interviewed or depicted by the media. Those who served in forgotten or less culturally dominant campaigns, have at times been missing from the anniversary

¹⁴⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 5

commemorations calendar. This chapter presents the complexity of anniversary and round number events dedicated to the Second World War. It shows the selective ways in which this generation have been portrayed and the efforts of some veterans to gain greater recognition.

Chapter Three charts the ways in which British politicians and political culture has discussed and imagined Second World War veterans since 1945. It argues that in the immediate post-war period, veterans were marginalised and viewed and treated as an extension of the citizens who had fought in the 'People's War'. As veterans became more valued in society, they would be used to bolster electoral support, act as figureheads for militaristic or social campaigns, and have become tied to the national meaning of the war in relation to politics and nationhood.

The second section of the thesis discovers the variety of ways in which veterans construct individual and group identities. Analysing their own perceived identity explores how far this generation of veterans view themselves in relation to the war. Jenkins describes identity as 'knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are and so on. This is a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectives'.¹⁴⁵ Identity is crucial to understanding veterans as individuals and how they have organised themselves beyond the popular depictions. This thesis adopts the notion that self-identity as something which is both socially influenced and deeply personal.¹⁴⁶ Drawing on

¹⁴⁵ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014)

¹⁴⁶ Giddens cited in Marjorie Mayo, *Cultures, Communities, Identities – Cultural Strategies for Participation and Empowerment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 43

the idea that ‘socially sustained discourses about who it is possible or appropriate or valuable to be inevitably shape the way we look at and constitute ourselves, with varying degrees of agonism and tension’.¹⁴⁷ The following chapters present cases of veterans whose sense of self has undoubtedly been influenced by the representations of veterans and the markers and ideas about what it means to be a veteran in British culture. On the other hand, others chose to reflect on their experiences of war in more unusual ways, perhaps by creating their own memory making initiatives or by rejecting the identity of being a veteran altogether.

Chapter Four of this thesis explores the perceived identity of the veteran, using material object of the war medal as a tool to examine how veterans view themselves. Scholars have stressed the importance of the material object as a marker of identity. Medals, like other artefacts can be seen as objects which help provide meaning. Miller notes that ‘material forms remain as one of the key media through which people conduct their constant struggles over identity and confront the contradictions and ambiguities that face them in their daily lives.’¹⁴⁸ Medals can act as a marker of the self-perception of Second World War identity and in the construction of their own social identity. The ways in which veterans describe requesting, wearing or disowning their medals is indicative of their own self perception of the importance of their identity as veterans. The chapter shows a range of connections to wartime experiences and the difference in attitudes present to adopting an identity as a veteran.

¹⁴⁷ Craig Calhoun, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1994), 20-21

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Miller, ‘Artefacts and the Meaning of Thing’ in *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life* ed. T. Ingold, (London: Routledge, 1994), 417

Chapter Five traces the concept of silence in relation to veteran identity and uncovers the reasons that some veterans choose not to share their memories. It explores cases of those who do not identify with their war memories as central markers of their lives and uncovers instances where silences can be broken. It argues that silence must be acknowledged as a marker of how veterans view themselves in relation to their wartime experiences. In some cases, the breaking of these silences is telling of when and why veterans chose to connect to their wartime memories. As Passerini argues, ‘when trying to understand connections between silence and speech, oblivion and memory. We must look for relationships between traces, or between traces and their absences; and we must attempt interpretations which make possible the creation of new associations’.¹⁴⁹ This chapter suggests that it is possible to explore some of the reasons why some veterans do not engage with their memories in public, or forge a sense of themselves based on their experiences of conflict, by examining several some of these modes of silence. Silence can include non-verbal memory making activities, a choice to avoid public recollecting and an absence of communication about the war altogether. Silences can also be broken, and this chapter explores some of the moments in the life cycle when veterans were most likely to break silences and adopt a sense of identity based on their wartime experiences.

Chapter Six explores how British Legion branches and veterans associations groups gave veterans the ability to connect to one another and generate group identities. As Turner *et al* note, when part of a group, ‘individuals tend to define

¹⁴⁹ Luisa Passerini, ‘Memories Between Silence and Oblivion’ in *Contested Pasts – The Politics of Memory* ed., Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 240

and see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the interchangeable representatives of some shared social category membership'.¹⁵⁰ The ways in which this generation categorised and described themselves, either through pre-existing British Legion branches, or via newly formed veterans associations showcases the variety of low key memory making activities and social environments which enabled veterans to create group identities. This chapter argues that the Second World War generation of veterans were less keen to adopt pre-existing group rituals from groups such as the British Legion, and preferred to engage in the social clubs or form associations which defined veterans by the specific locations in which they served or those that reflected common experiences.

Finally, Chapter Seven uncovers the efforts of two veterans who have used the internet to construct an online sense of self. It draws upon theories of online identity cultivation and internet use amongst the elderly to show how some have taken it upon themselves to share their memories and create a persona using new technology. While their motivations and uses of the web differ, the activities of Harry Leslie Smith and Ron Goldstein highlight how the web gives veterans a greater agency in their ability to share their memories and views to a wide audience. Goldstein is able to curate a digital legacy and share his memories in digital communities where he has gained status as a computer literate Second World War veteran. Meanwhile, Smith was able to publicly assert himself as a pacifist veteran. The actions of Goldstein and Smith showcase a lack of

¹⁵⁰ John C. Turner, Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, and Craig McGarty, 'Self and Collective: Cognition and Social Context' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* Vol. 20. No 5. (1994), 455

uniformity in the actions of Second World War veterans themselves. This chapter further emphasises how elderly people and veterans cannot be all viewed as the same.¹⁵¹ In the case of veterans, this chapter also shows ways in which they are able to bypass limiting official channels, and gain some control over the memories and views that they shared.

As the war slips out of living memory, this thesis presents the veteran in the legacy of the conflict as an important figure and gives an insight into the diversity of their own views surrounding their wartime experiences which have been largely overlooked.

¹⁵¹ Johnson 1976; Rapoport and Rapoport 1975: 312, cited in Paul Thompson, “‘I don’t feel old’ Subjective Ageing and the Search for Meaning in Later Life’ in *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 12 (1992)

Section One – Representation

Introduction

‘Representation’ is a complex term which can hold a number of alternative meanings in the fields of politics, law and the social sciences. The dictionary definitions of representation include ‘the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone’ and ‘the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way’.¹ For the purposes of this study, representation can be understood as the process that gives language and meaning in the depiction of the figure of the Second World War veteran. Rather than view representation as separate and distinct to the ‘perfectly clear meaning’ of the ‘natural and material world’, Hall views representation as central in creating meaning, as ‘the meaning is thought to be *produced*’.² As Webb describes, ‘what we see is not what is there, but what our social and cultural traditions and their contexts give us’.³ This thesis draws upon the ideas voiced by scholars of culture such as Turner showing the importance of popular culture in the creation of representations and meanings. Turner stresses the importance of ‘how our everyday lives are *constructed*, how culture forms its subjects’.⁴ In the context of this thesis, the veteran is the subject who is being culturally constructed and represented. The imagined figure of the veteran can be explored to understand how and why certain ideas about this generation have been formed, locate the impact of these images on veteran’s themselves, and ask about

¹ ‘Definition of *representation* in English’ *Lexico – Powered by Oxford* accessed 05/07/2019 <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/representation>

² Stuart Hall, 5

³ Jen Webb, *Understanding Representation* (London: Sage, 2009), Kindle Locations 106, kindle edition.

⁴ Graeme Turner, *British Cultural Studies – An Introduction [Second Edition]* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3

the limitations of these representations. Representations of veterans in legacy of the Second World War provide the context to understanding how this generation has been perceived and how their image has evolved in dominant depictions.

This section draws upon both the semiotic and discursive approaches of representation to analyse how veterans have been imagined in British culture and society since 1945. A semiotic approach allows for the exploration of ‘the *how* of representation’ and ‘how language produces meaning’.⁵ This will enable a discussion of the ways in which veterans have been described in political rhetoric or in commemorative cultural narratives which describe veterans using specific discourse. These could include referring to the veterans as heroes or describing them in relation to specific mythical ideas surrounding the legacy of the conflict. The discursive approach compliments this analysis by looking at the ‘effects and consequences of representation’ and asks ‘not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented...’.⁶ This will allow for an exploration of the context of the representations, including the political climate in which they were produced, who was producing them and why particular decisions surrounding them were made.

The concept of agency in the formation of representations is key to understanding how the image of the veteran has been developed and shaped over time. Webb

⁵ Stuart Hall, 6

⁶ Ibid

suggests that agency is the ‘term that incorporates human communication, knowledge and activity’ it ‘developed as a name for any individual or collective that acts in society’.⁷ Agents are the creators of representation and can include governments, the media or ‘individual people who draw on their own culture and its traditions...to represent themselves as well as any meanings they wish to make’.⁸ This section aims to explore how external bodies, including the government, the media and organisations such as the British Legion have constructed and re-constructed the representation of the veteran, in relation to the collective remembrance of the Second World War. Veterans can also act as agents in the formation of these perceptions and in their own sense of their self-identity. The ways in which veterans themselves have constructed their own sense of self and public persona will be the focus of Section Two of this thesis. However, it is important to note that the agency of veterans in participating in commemorative activities or sharing their political views, is significant when exploring how external bodies have attempted to control their image and the memory of wartime events and campaigns. In some cases, particularly in the context of anniversary commemorations, veterans’ own agency has been hijacked by the government and media or their own control over remembrance has altered in light of political or cultural changes.

The first two chapters in this section will highlight the place of the veteran in commemorative culture and analyse how ex-service men and women of the Second World War have been portrayed as part of the official commemorative

⁷ Jen Webb, 13

⁸ Ibid

activities in Britain over the last seventy years. Commemorations of war are important annual and anniversary public events during which the Second World War veteran is most commonly seen. Ankersmit argues that in British and French terminology, commemoration ‘makes us recall by reminding us of something’ and enables ‘memories to present themselves to us’.⁹ Unlike the words ‘remembrance’ or ‘monument’, commemoration is ‘suggestive of a social and public event’.¹⁰ The term commemoration can be seen as appropriate for the events explored in this study which include annual Remembrance Day and Poppy Appeal and anniversary events dedicated to campaigns of the Second World War. Scholars such as Frost and Laing highlight that commemorative events are planned to enable society to ‘remember and reflect upon past occurrences and their relationship to today’.¹¹ They are commonly planned ‘with intentions of affirming and reinforcing memories that present a sense of heritage and identity’.¹² Exploring commemorative events provide important occasions to trace how veterans are understood in British culture.

Remembrance events held annually in November, including Remembrance Day, the Festival of Remembrance and the Poppy Appeal, are the focus of the first chapter of this thesis. Frost and Laing believe that these annual events can be characterised as ‘War Remembrance Days’ defined as days to ‘observe Armistice or Remembrance Day on November 11, commemorating the end of World War

⁹ Franklin Rudolph Ankersmit, ‘Commemoration and National Identity’ in *Textos de Historia* Vol. 10, No.1-2 (2002): 2

¹⁰ Franklin Rudolph Ankersmit, 1

¹¹ Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, *Commemorative Events: Memory, Identities. Conflicts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), kindle location 132, kindle edition

¹² Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, kindle location, 140

One in 1918'.¹³ These events provide the most dominant image of the veteran and provide an opportunity to explore how the image of the Second World War veteran has become intertwined with the rituals and language of their predecessors. It can be shown that annual commemorative events present a very basic and generic image of the Second World War veteran.

Anniversary commemorations are explored in Chapter Two to uncover the ways in which veterans have been portrayed in events marking significant dates of the Second World War. Jordanova argues that these events are a 'feature of our times' and round number anniversaries are marked due to their distance in time between the events and the present day.¹⁴ Unlike Remembrance Day, these commemorations are specifically designed to commemorate the Second World War, and can highlight how the image of the veteran has been categorised by military campaigns or particular moments.

Finally, a third chapter in this section highlights how Second World War veterans have been represented in a public political discourse, which falls outside of specific commemorative occasions discussed in chapters one and two. The chapter uncovers the post-war marginalisation of veterans in political narratives of the war. Veterans were portrayed as part of a larger group of citizens who fought in a 'People's War'. Findings show that following the Falklands conflict, veterans have been used and referred to in rhetoric surrounding contemporary conflicts,

¹³ Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, kindle location, 259

¹⁴ Ludmilla Jordanova, , 'Marking time', in *History, Commemoration and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005* ed. Hooek Holger, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7-17

political campaigns and in connection to the legacy of the welfare state and National Health Service (NHS). Political representations highlight the evolution of attitudes towards veterans who have been mobilised as political symbols relating to campaigns and notions of British national identity.

Chapter 1

Annual Commemorative Events: Remembrance Day, the Poppy Appeal and the Festival of Remembrance

An event which can be traced over time to examine the most recognisable image of the veteran is Remembrance Day, held annually on the Sunday closest to November 11th. The associated traditions of the British Legion's Festival of Remembrance and the Poppy Appeal can also be examined, to showcase the place of the veteran in some of the most dominant recurring displays of war remembrance in Britain. As Wilson notes, 'in Britain the act of wearing a red poppy, the two minutes' silence to remember the dead, ceremonies and parades at the Cenotaph in Whitehall and The Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall have contributed to a shared culture of grief on Remembrance Day'.¹ These events are closely linked in public consciousness and form part of an annual commemorative calendar.

By exploring Home Office reports, British Legion promotional materials, television and documentary depictions and press coverage of the major annual commemorative events, the image of the Second World War veteran in annual remembrance culture can be charted. This chapter will showcase that Remembrance Day presents a most dominant, but also very basic image of the Second World War veteran, which is intrinsically connected to their predecessors,

¹ Philip Wilson, 'The Cenotaph and the Spirit of Remembrance' in *Lest We Forget: Remembrance and Commemoration* ed. Maggie Andrews, and Charles Baggot-Jewitt, (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), kindle locations 2239-2240. kindle edition.

the veterans of the Great War. Over time, this image has become more contextualised and distinctive, particularly in recent years as they now stand as the oldest veterans on parade. It can be suggested that the Remembrance Day, Festival of Remembrance and Poppy Appeal idea of a Second World War veteran centres on tradition, patriotism and continuity, in order to create a simplistic idea of the ex-serviceman which is still drawn upon today. This chapter argues that despite initial post-war discussions surrounding the future of annual remembrance and a crisis of commemoration in the 1960s and 1970s, Second World War veterans have continued to be imagined as patriotic, bemedalled and as ambassadors of the remembrance traditions of their predecessors.

The original Remembrance Day (known until 1945 as Armistice Day), the Poppy Appeal and the Festival of Remembrance all have their beginnings in the aftermath of the Great War. Grief was clearly the key concern in the development of the traditions and practices created as part of Armistice Day such as the two-minute silence and the laying of wreaths. As Wilson suggests, the cenotaph was designed to 'symbolise and remember the fallen' whilst the two-minute silence, inspired by silences for the dead during the Great War held in Cape Town, acted as a 'junction between private memories and public rituals'.² The grieving were also the central focus in the formation of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, which became a symbol of the Great War dead. It contained a body taken from the battlefields, chosen from four selected at random who had been killed in various locations. The Tomb gave grieving relatives a focus and the possibility that the man inside the tomb was their dead relation. As Wilson describes, the concept

² Philip Wilson, *Kindle location*, 2269

was an 'acknowledgement of the difficulties faced by those whose relatives' bodies had never been identified'.³ Gregory shows how as a result of the emphasis on the dead and grieving, Great War veterans 'came to have very little control over the development of commemoration'.⁴ This meant that their public presence and image was side-lined during the Armistice Day commemorations for rituals that aided grieving families and honoured the dead.

Commemoration became about the living as well as the dead with the emergence of the Poppy Appeal which reinforced the need to remember the plight of ex-servicemen. The British Legion set up the Poppy Appeal in 1921 as a way in which to raise funds 'to provide welfare support to the living' by selling paper poppies on November 11th.⁵ It was designed as 'an act of support for those who were suffering in the aftermath of war'.⁶ This was in part a result of the formation of the poppy factory, set up in 1922 to manufacture poppies in Britain. The factory employed ex-servicemen exclusively and 'funds raised were used to support and finance this factory and to provide support for both ex-servicemen and families of the bereaved'.⁷ Evidently, disabled veterans and those suffering in the interwar period were the key recipients of the Poppy Appeal which also began to align with the Armistice Day commemorations and promoted the veterans as 'victims of the war'.⁸ Nevertheless, the poppy flower was also adopted as it 'resonated with a sense of loss for the dead'.⁹ Iles describes how the poppy

³ Philip Wilson, kindle location, 2284

⁴ Adrian Gregory, 51

⁵ Jennifer Iles, In Remembrance: The Flanders Poppy' *Mortality*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (2008), 205

⁶ Adrian Gregory, 103

⁷ Adrian Gregory, 101

⁸ Adrian Gregory, 104

⁹ Ibid

became associated with the war dead because of the prevalence of the poppy in the fields of France and Belgium and the 'poetical literature which helped to establish the flower as Britain's universally respected symbol of remembrance for the fallen'.¹⁰ The wearing of a poppy predominantly became a marker of respect for the dead. As Moorhouse notes, even in local settings such as in the town of Bury, 'few...of the adults in the twenties and thirties would have dared to be seen in public without an artificial flower pinned to the buttonhole or coat'.¹¹ Despite the funds of the appeal helping the living veterans working in the factory and those receiving aid from the donations, the dead were still central to the representative meaning of the poppy appeal. Women were also central figures in the selling of poppies. Gregory outlines how 'selling poppies was a female prerogative up until the Second World War'.¹² Like the focus of Armistice Day, women acted as the principle figures of commemoration, even in the context of fundraising for living ex-soldiers. This clearly placed the Great War veteran as secondary in the images of the Poppy Appeal, as the poppy itself was a marker of respect to the dead and women were central figures in the Poppy Appeal.

The Festival of Remembrance did give veterans a public presence, particularly when recordings of the event were being held in cinemas during the 1920s and 1930s. The first Festival was held 'on the evening of 11 November 1927, with 10,000 bemedalled veterans each wearing a Flanders poppy, their faces hardly visible through the haze of tobacco smoke'.¹³ The event merged solemn

¹⁰ Jennifer Iles, 204

¹¹ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations – A Town, Its Myths & Gallipoli* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 179

¹² Adrian Gregory, 111

¹³ Philip Wilson, kindle location, 2299. kindle edition

remembrance practices in the presence of the King with camaraderie and reminders of their wartime experiences. Clearly, the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance enabled the veterans to hold a ceremony in which they were central, alongside a commemoration of their lost comrades.

Gregory argues that a shift occurred from 1929 so that the view of the war as 'complex and ambiguous, resistant to the simplifications required by the language of consolidation, would emerge to challenge the established meaning of Armistice Day'.¹⁴ He notes that the publishing of war related literature coincided with the economic depression and the election of a Labour government, which culminated in a reassessment of Armistice Day.¹⁵ The growing disillusionment surrounding the sacrifices of war was reflected in the changes in the tone of commemoration. No longer was the glory or the justification of conflict promoted during the events. Despite the government agreeing that the bereaved should still be central and there was to be 'remarkably little' change to the rituals ceremony, 'the First World War became an object lesson in peace'.¹⁶ The 1938 newsreel of Armistice Day emphasises a need for peace and notes, 'if there is one lesson that we have learned, it is the utter futility of brute force'.¹⁷ Evidently, a change in tone of the Armistice Day commemoration had been adopted as a result of a wider change in attitude towards the memory of the conflict.

It seems that during the interwar years, 'there were no undisputed guardians of memory'. Gregory notes that 'it seems unlikely that even the majority of members

¹⁴ Adrian Gregory, 104

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Adrian Gregory, 120-122

¹⁷ 'Armistice Day At The Cenotaph' November 14 1938 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 985.35

of the British Legion in the 1930s would have considered Armistice Day in Britain to be essentially a festival of Veterans'.¹⁸ Likewise, the Poppy Appeal and the Festival of Remembrance presented veterans in a controlled and particular way, as survivors who honoured their dead comrades along with a grieving population. As Gillis aptly describes, 'no wonder that the men who survived the war often identified with the dead, for there were few tributes, material or symbolic, for World War I veterans, few lands fit for heroes, much less for heroines'.¹⁹ Clearly during the interwar period, veterans held a subordinate place in the annual commemorative calendar. They were depicted as silent marchers, honouring their dead comrades.

1945 to 1960

The Remembrance Day commemorations of 1945 can be seen as a continuation of pre-war traditions and rituals, which were expanded to accommodate the two World Wars. *The Times* stressed that 'Every one will be glad that the simple yet impressive ceremonial linked hitherto with Armistice Day is to be renewed tomorrow, the first Remembrance Day' and 'again, too, when eleven o'clock strikes, speech and movement will be stilled'.²⁰ The change in name is seen simply as 'enriching' the day with a 'wider-scope'.²¹ Evidently, the Armistice Day service was developed into Remembrance Day in order to encompass all those who had served but retained the rituals of the original event. A later article

¹⁸ Adrian Gregory, 128

¹⁹ John R. Gillis, *Commemorations – The Politics of National Identity* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994), 12

²⁰ 'Remembrance Day' *The Times* November 10th 1945

²¹ *Ibid*

in *The Times* outlining the arrangements for the Festival of Remembrance and the Poppy Appeal, also highlights the continuation of the long-standing traditions. It notes that the money raised will continue to help ‘all those who have served for their country – of all ranks and all wars’.²² The newsreels also stress these continuations and portray a strong sense of tradition alongside a fresh outpouring of grief. The traditions as seen in 1938 are retained including the laying of the wreaths by dignitaries and royalty, the two-minute silence and the march past of veterans.²³ Strikingly, the hardships facing soldiers in the far-east and the continuation of the service in war torn Europe were not mentioned.²⁴ As with previous commemorations, the Remembrance Service of 1945 was in keeping with the emphasis of grief and emotion seen in pre-war ceremonies. Similarly, the dead of two World Wars are described for the first time as part of one large group, further legitimising the traditions of previous war commemorations. The article notes that ‘the two world wars were but separate parts of one, being waged against the same enemy in defence of the same principles’.²⁵ The *British Pathé* coverage of the 1945 Cenotaph service also highlights the connection between the two World Wars through describing an inscription from a woman who lost her father at Ypres in 1917 and her husband in 1944.²⁶ As Big Ben chimes during the two-minute silence, images show graves of British soldiers and ‘unknown British soldiers’ in comparison to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.²⁷ This coverage surrounding Remembrance Day in 1945 clearly aimed to depict the dead of the two Wars together whilst retaining the interwar images and rituals.

²² ‘Remembrance Day – Observances in London’ *The Times* November 10th 1945

²³ Armistice Day 1945’ November 15 1945 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 1167.10

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Remembrance Day – Observances in London’ *The Times* November 10th 1945

²⁶ Armistice Day 1945’ November 15 1945 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 1167.10

²⁷ Ibid

Despite the broadening and renewing of the Armistice Day traditions, there is a sense that a future of Remembrance Day might be very different. The 1945 *British Pathé* coverage of the Cenotaph ceremony begins with ‘it may be that the public have bought their last ever poppy’ as ‘a United Nations ceremony may replace it’.²⁸ *The Times* declares that the date of commemoration, ‘now that two world wars are over, will not necessarily be November 11th’ and the newspaper hopes that it will be a ‘union of commemorations’ rather than separate days, and continue to make sure that ‘those who fought and died in 1914-18 are never forgotten’.²⁹ Although rituals of the pre-war era had prevailed, it is evident that the potential changes to war commemoration were already being publicly declared.

Home Office reports show the debates within the government surrounding how best to commemorate another world conflict. The government had plans to create a new commemorative service which would have presumably formed new and distinct traditions reflecting the memory of those who fought in the Second World War. A list of alternative dates were drawn up by the Home Office and included D-Day (June 6th), El-Alamein Day (23rd October or 4th November) or Outbreak of War Day (3rd September).³⁰ Surprisingly, some unusual suggestions were also made including the ‘Signing of the Magna Carta Day’, ‘which has ‘historical and political significant’ or the ‘Adoption of the Charter of the United Nations Day’ on June 15th, which reflects a bid towards ‘peace and security’.³¹ These choices

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ ‘Remembrance Day’ *The Times* November 10th 1945

³⁰ ‘Remembrance Day’ (notes by the Home Office), October 1945 in in HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’

³¹ Ibid

reflect a desire to move away from days which only commemorate the two world wars altogether in order to perhaps broaden the meaning and idea of commemoration. November 11th is perceived to have ‘no immediate relation to the last war’ and is at ‘falls at an unsuitable time of the year’.³² Clearly, the Home Office were seriously considering dates which had a strong connection to the Second World War, which would enable the invention of new rituals.

Newspapers reported on the Home Secretary’s public claims that there would be a change in date for Armistice Day ‘to a date in the summer’.³³ Letters from the public to the Home Office arrived as a result of the discussion of the proposed changes in date and show that people were divided in their opinions. Some believe that the weather is a good enough reason to change the date to a time in the summer or autumn months.³⁴ Many of the letters give suggestions for different dates relating to the Second World War, reflecting the discussions in the Home Office.³⁵ One ex-serviceman of ‘two wars’ even believes that the two-minute silence and the rituals of the day should be amended as ‘our Armistice day celebrations didn’t prevent another war’.³⁶ Others wish for the date to remain the same given the long-standing significance of Armistice Day. An ex-serviceman of the Great War writes, ‘no other date in the calendar could have the true significance of November 11th’.³⁷ Veterans of the Second World War are notably

³² Ibid

³³ ‘Next Armistice Day May be in the summer’ *Daily Telegraph* 02 November 1945

³⁴ Letters from Mr Groundsell, Mr Norden, B. D. Elias in HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’ and PREM 8/134 ‘Selection of National Day of Remembrance [1945-1946]’

³⁵ See example Letter from ‘A Simple Soldier’ James V. Rogan, November 12th 1945 in HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’

³⁶ ‘Letter from [unknown member of the public] November 13th 1945 in HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’

³⁷ ‘Letter to the Editor from Cecil Granville Corfield’ 23rd November 1945 *Birmingham Post*

absent in the responses, most probably because most were still overseas in Europe or fighting in the Far East. The letters show a vast array of opinions which showcase a clear lack of public consensus surrounding the meaning and suitability of November 11th.

Despite the ambiguous public reaction, the Home Office chose to make a decision based on the wishes of the church and the British Legion. The Bishop of Winchester made his opinion plain, that ‘the last war has not yielded any one day in season, the commemoration of which would be generally felt to have any significance or ground of appeal comparable’ to Remembrance Sunday in November. He argued that November 11th has a ‘no less stronger appeal’ to the ex-servicemen of World War Two.³⁸ The Home Office reports suggest that the Royal British Legion were of similar opinions. They argue that D-Day (June 6th) would be the second most appropriate day but that ‘the possibility of better weather in the summer would not balance the loss in departing from a day whose meaning has become so engrained in the heart of the nation’.³⁹ Given that the British Legion was set up to aid Great War veterans and had local branches run by ex-serviceman of that conflict, the organisation obviously stood for the traditions in which they now played a crucial part. Gregory notes that similarly, the church and the British Legion both ‘had a vested interest in maintaining the commemoration on a Sunday’.⁴⁰ It was therefore decided that the Sunday closest to November 11th would be the date of Remembrance Sunday.

³⁸ HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’ and PREM 8/134 ‘Selection of National Day of Remembrance [1945-1946]’

³⁹ ‘Deputation regarding Remembrance Day to the Home Secretary’ November 12 1945 in HO 45/20696 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Day 1946: Ceremonial Arrangements’

⁴⁰ Adrian Gregory, 219

Press reports emphasise the rituals which were again observed including the service in Westminster Abbey as part of the Remembrance Day service which had all eyes ‘turned to the grave’ of the Unknown Warrior.⁴¹ The Great War traditions were clearly being upheld. As Mosse notes, ‘no second unknown warrior was brought home with great ceremony to keep the older hero company’.⁴² Newspaper reports reflected this continuation, with the *Daily Telegraph* noting how the 1949 ceremony would be simply, ‘similar to those in previous years’.⁴³ Other commemorative details such as the adding of names of the dead of the Second World War to the cenotaph were also continued.⁴⁴

Nick Hewitt argues that this subtle addition to the cenotaph reflected the ‘pragmatic mood of this more sceptical generation’.⁴⁵ He outlines how a Mass Observation Bulletin report from 1944, suggested that those experiencing the Second World War had a clear ‘objection to traditional memorials’ and wanted practical and utilitarian acts of commemoration such as rebuilding schemes or projects that aided the wounded. This lack of desire to create new memorials and rituals, coupled with the wishes of the church and the British Legion, could help to explain the continuation of the Armistice Day rituals on Remembrance Sunday.⁴⁶

⁴¹ ‘Abbey Remembrance’ *The Times* November 7th 1949

⁴² George L. Mosse, ‘Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1986): 491-513

⁴³ ‘Remembrance Day Plans’ *Daily Telegraph* 26 October 1949

⁴⁴ ‘Yesterday was Remembrance Sunday...’ *Daily Mirror* November 11th 1946

⁴⁵ Nick Hewitt, ‘A Sceptical Generation? War Memorials and the Collective Memory of the Second World War in Britain, 1945-2000’ in *The Postwar Challenge 1945-1958* ed. Dominik Geppert, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82

⁴⁶ Nick Hewitt, 83-88

Second World War veterans continued to be shown in a very specific way, which was in keeping with the traditions and requirements of the commemorative events of Armistice Day. A set programme and organisation of veterans continued to reflect the precise pre-war march past of the ex-servicemen and military personnel. Detailed documents note every action to be taken by the ex-servicemen, including when veterans should remove their hats and when they give ‘eyes left on passing the cenotaph’.⁴⁷ Newsreels highlight the tradition of the march past with veterans not differentiated by which war in which they had served.⁴⁸ It can be argued that there was little difference in the way in which Second World War veterans were portrayed in comparison to their forbears. This was clearly a consequence of the continuation of annual Remembrance on November 11th and the governmental decision to uphold the traditions of Armistice Day.

Despite a lack of definition in the image of the Second World War veteran, the commemorative events of the 1950s began to value ex-serviceman more than ever before. As Reece notes, ‘in 1946 the vast majority of the male population were veterans of 20th century wars’.⁴⁹ Society was perhaps becoming used to ex-servicemen and this was reflected in their growing portrayal in the commemorative events. Whilst images of crosses and grieving mothers and widows dominated the solemn Remembrance Sunday newsreels of 1946, by 1947

⁴⁷ ‘London District Special District Order – Remembrance Sunday 6 November 1949’ and ‘Arrangements, Home Office Whitehall – 25 October 1949’ in HO 45/24311 ‘Cenotaph: Remembrance Sunday 1949 – Arrangements’

⁴⁸ ‘A Page of History’ 13 November 1947 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 937.30

⁴⁹ Peter Reece, *Kindle Locations*, 3361. Kindle edition

the marching veterans were being acknowledged. The camera stays on the marching ex-soldiers as the commentator notes, ‘with familiar tunes, the veterans march again’.⁵⁰ This emphasises continuity but also represents a shift away from the dead and onto acknowledging the living veterans. As Gillis argues, it seems that ‘parades replaced cemetery pilgrimages as the typical memorial day activity’ in the post-war period.⁵¹ By 1954, veterans were becoming more pronounced, and *British Pathé* newsreels actively mentioned the marching ex-servicemen and women in the commentary. The newsreel begins with honouring the dead but then refers to the marching veterans by stating that ‘to them, this day is theirs, the funeral symphony is but a song of comradeship that they alone can and sing and on this day it has a song of victory’.⁵² In many ways this comment signifies the acknowledgement of Remembrance Sunday as a day *for* veterans, when previously it had seemed exclusively for the dead and grieving. The mention of victory reflects the wider way in which the war was being represented in Britain during this period. As Noakes argues, ‘in a climate of decreasing national significance and the loss of Empire, the war became perceived as the last time that Britain had been truly “great”’.⁵³ Unity is a theme that is also stressed in the coverage of Remembrance, perhaps reflective of the ‘ideal of camaraderie’ which was part of the narrative of the British Legion and marching veterans of the interwar years.⁵⁴ By 1956 the footage used by *British Pathé* shows close-ups of male and female veterans and their medals. These images perhaps give the first

⁵⁰ ‘A Page of History’ 13 November 1947 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 937.30

⁵¹ John R. Gillis, 13

⁵² ‘The Queen Pays Homage’ 11 November 1954 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 493.20

⁵³ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 4-5

⁵⁴ ‘Armistice Day 1949 [The Army Kinema Corporation]’ Circa November 1949 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 2282.02 and George L. Mosse, 494

glimpse at what would become the standard annual image of a Second World War veteran.⁵⁵ Whilst veterans of both wars are not differentiated, the images show veterans standing in silence, side by side, proud and wearing medals. This image originated in the marching soldiers of the Great War, but was now commonplace and acknowledged more directly with images as seen in the 1956 newsreels. Whilst there was virtually no change in the images of standard bearer veterans during the Festival of Remembrance between the 1945 and 1957 footage, the event provided another platform to promote a similar image of the veteran seen annually at the cenotaph.⁵⁶ The commemorative events held annually in the 1950s, clearly demonstrated an increased focus on veterans generally. Their portrayal was one of tradition which championed ideas of pride, heroism and patriotism in keeping with the broader representation of the Second World War in the 1950s.



Figure 3 - British Pathé screenshots from Remembrance Day 1956 - Image screenshots taken from Remembrance Day [Unused Footage – shots of public near the Cenotaph] circa November 1956 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 2838.24

⁵⁵ 'Remembrance Day [Unused Footage – shots of public near the Cenotaph] circa November 1956 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 2838.24

⁵⁶ 'BRITISH LEGION FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE (BBC) 09 Nov 1957 *ITN Source Story* ref: FS091157001 and 'Albert Hall Remembrance Sunday' 1945 *British Pathé*, Film ID: 2161.15

1960 to 1990

The 1960s represented a huge shift in the perception and acceptance of Remembrance Day and the vast culture surrounding 11th November. The press reactions, materials from the Royal British Legion and the government, all point to the building of a major crisis in the commemoration of war in Britain. Veterans were depicted in two ways during this period. On one hand, they continued to be portrayed in the traditional ways during Remembrance Day services which retained tradition, despite the criticism. At the same time, the Royal British Legion's relationship to this generation was complicated and included both praise and criticism of their attitudes and place in the remembrance of war. The public image and descriptions of this generation in the planning and presentation of annual remembrance events was complex as the attitudes towards commemoration were severely tested during these decades.

The Remembrance Day service and the Poppy Appeal faced huge challenges during the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the visible continuity of the Remembrance Day service of the 1950s, reports had already begun suggesting that the future of the British Legion and its Poppy Appeal was uncertain. An article in the *Daily Mirror* in 1948 reported that Lieut-Commander H. Pursey (Labour MP for East Hull) believes 'that 'the British Legion, as a charitable organisation, should be scrapped, because Government pension schemes are doing all that is necessary'.⁵⁷ This was perhaps an isolated public view by one MP in 1948, but this criticism reflected the opinions which would start to appear in the 1960s. During the 1960s,

⁵⁷ 'Scrap the British Legion, says M.P.' *Daily Mirror* 20 October 1948

these tensions had become serious as the climate of the nation changed towards a feeling anti-war. Press reports included those which detailed a lack of interest in the Poppy Appeal. A 1960 article declared that ‘there will be no Poppy Day in Stepney, London, because nobody wants to organise it. Nobody in the borough wants to be a collector. By all accounts, nobody is sufficiently interested’.⁵⁸ The article then sets about discussing what the British Legion appeal funds do for ex-servicemen and how important they are still in 1960.⁵⁹ The purpose and need for the Poppy Appeal was evidently being questioned by the 1960s. The article attempts to promote the cause of the British Legion and gain support. It suggests that there was clearly a decreasing interest in the November 11th traditions. Other reports discussed the idea that the Remembrance Day service could be replaced. In 1964 the *Daily Mirror* wrote “should it be discontinued before it becomes an empty and meaningless event” asked the Rev. Nicholas Stacey. The reverend advocated a new ceremony titled ‘Peace Day’ which would focus on ‘pledging the nation to peace’ as ‘Remembrance Day is becoming less well attended and it is in danger of becoming a formality’.⁶⁰ The vicar clearly felt that the ceremony was outdated and not in keeping with the need to promote peace. Even one Great War veteran declared that that he felt Remembrance Day ‘should be made a symbol of hope for the future rather than a wake for the glory—and folly—of the past’.⁶¹ Like the Reverend, the old soldier questions the meaning of the events and suggests they glorify war when they should promote peace. A lack of public interest is also reflected in the decision of London Weekend Television to ‘once

⁵⁸ Roy Blackman, ‘Poppies Fade’ *Daily Mirror* November 4th 1960

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ ‘Call it Peace Sunday Says Rector’ *Daily Mirror* 09 November 1964

⁶¹ Anthony Miles, ‘BUGLES . . BANDS . . DRUMS AND POPPIES - There are other ways to Remember’ November 19th 1963 *Daily Mirror*

again' refuse to broadcast the Remembrance Day service in 1975.⁶² The correspondence between the Home Office and the producer reveals a clear lack of interest from other production companies outside of the BBC to report on the annual events.

Taken together, these views suggest that there was a crisis in commemorative culture during the 1960s and 1970s.⁶³ The anti-war climate of the nation during the 1960s clearly helped to generate these direct, public declarations of a dissatisfaction with the traditions of annual remembrance seen in the press. The 1960s were characterised by a growing anti-war movement and a new youth culture which dared to be different from previous generations. As Noakes suggests, 'the emergence of an alternative youth culture in the 1960s, the popularity of anti-war movements such as CND and the campaign against the war in Vietnam...seemed to indicate that the Second World War had little relevance in British Public life in the 1960s and 1970s'.⁶⁴

The government and the Royal British Legion attempted to tackle this decline in interest in alternative ways. In 1974, the Home Office began to seriously re-consider the details of the cenotaph ceremony when the government branch was to move from the premises which had hosted the ceremony since 1919.⁶⁵ The

⁶² 'Letter from A. D. Bennett (Department of Entertainment, London Weekend Television' to Mr Mackenzie (Home Office)' 10 September 1975 in HO 342/228 Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph: Broadcast and Television Arrangements for 1975 Ceremony'

⁶³ Macleod and Inall have also noted the 'loss of interest in Remembrance Sunday and the commemoration of the two world wars' between the end of WW2 and 1980s. See Jenny Macleod and Yvonne Inall, 'A century of Armistice Day: memorialisation in the wake of the first world war' *Mortality* accessed 04 July 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2019.1611752>

⁶⁴ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, 4

⁶⁵ 'Sir Arthur Peterson – Future of Remembrance Ceremony' circa 1974 in HO 342/86 'Remembrance Day Cenotaph Ceremony: Change to Future Arrangements [1973-1976]'

decision to assess Remembrance Day could also have been a result of the dissatisfaction felt surrounding remembrance at this time as shown in the tone of the reports, which disclose that there is at present ‘shifting and conflicting tides of opinion, sentiment and loyalty’.⁶⁶ The ‘Working Party’ which was set up to report on potential changes, declares that there is a danger that the ceremony will become ‘emptied of meaning’ as those with personal connections fade.⁶⁷ The proposals include broadening the ceremony to remember all those who died in ‘service to their fellow citizens’ and making it more international in nature.⁶⁸ The Home Office also note that an overall theme that the public would respond to with ‘real unity and strength of feeling’ could be decided upon in the future.⁶⁹ Similarly, a major goal was to ‘make it meaningful and relevant for present day society’ by making sure it is not ‘inward’ looking and that the young are ‘specially represented’.⁷⁰ Clearly, the ‘Working Party’ was responding to some of the criticisms voiced at the time, including the idea that the ceremony was irrelevant and out of date.

There was an emphasis on making the ceremony and other Remembrance Day traditions appeal to younger generations. It seems that young people with their anti-war views and lack of personal war experience, were seen partly to blame in the decline in interest in war commemoration. As Captain Tinkner (in charge of the Poppy Appeal in 1971) noted in the official history of the British Legion, they

⁶⁶ ‘Remembrance Sunday – Form of the Ceremony’ ‘Working Party’ Home Office, 1978 in HO 342/347 ‘Remembrance Day: Correspondence Concerning Future Cenotaph Ceremonies [1977-78]’

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

have grown up ‘knowing nothing of war’ and ‘they’ve got this idea that Remembrance is somehow glorifying it’.⁷¹ In 1967, the Poppy Appeal turned to advertising the selling of poppies using young, scantily dressed fashion models.⁷² Although the image of women selling poppies was in keeping with tradition, it seems that the move towards models was viewed as distasteful as shown in complaints voiced by the public.⁷³ The Royal British Legion continued to take drastic action to make the Poppy Appeal appear relevant. The fashion models were eventually replaced with more conservative images of young poppy sellers alongside older volunteers (although these were not veterans).⁷⁴ Similarly, at a local level, branches of the British Legion were encouraged to work with young people to alter their perceptions of war commemoration. The 1976 Shropshire handbook featured an article which declared that, ‘our concern is...that the young people of today, far removed from real hazards of wars as we have known them, should understand not only that the nation was engaged in life-or-death struggles but WHY the nation was so engaged and WHAT is what that we fought for’.⁷⁵ The article encourages members of the branches to ‘give service to youth organisations’ or create Royal British Legion Youth Clubs to try and emphasise the traditions that the British Legion stands for.⁷⁶ These measures were attempts to encourage the nation to participate in war commemorations and to shift the attitudes of the younger generation who were partially seen as to blame for a lack of interest in commemoration.

⁷¹ Anthony Brown, *Red for Remembrance – The British Legion 1921-1971* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1971), 86-87

⁷² ‘The Poppy Day Popsies’ *Daily Mirror* November 5 1968, 5

⁷³ ‘Public Opinion’ *Daily Mirror* October 5th 1973, 13

⁷⁴ ‘Advertisement – Come and Collect’ *Daily Mirror*, October 11 1970, 11

⁷⁵ ‘The Royal British Legion Shropshire – 1976 Official Handbook’ Ref: 3566/6/25 *Shropshire Archives*, 49, 51, 53

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

For the most part, veterans were not part of the plans for altering or enhancing the commemorative schedule. However, elderly Great War veterans could occasionally be seen in emotive imagery drawn upon by the British Legion and the press to promote a sense of obligation both to the dead and to the elderly war veterans. For example, a 1960 newspaper article uses veterans to try and persuade readers to volunteer as Poppy sellers. The article outlines the various ways in which the funds aid ex-servicemen and women in 1960. It ends by giving depictions of Great War soldiers sitting around the Stepney war memorial. It describes how ‘Ex-soldier John Callaghan, 81, looked at the banner of words “to the glorious memory of the brave who gave their lives”...”Forgotten...it’s hard to believe”’.⁷⁷ Veterans of the Great War clearly began to hold a further emotive power due to their old age and because of their connection to the war which had generated the remembrance rituals still seen in November. Similarly, a book released in 1971 to promote the Legion, similarly used traditional descriptions of Remembrance Sunday, which emphasised the significance of veterans. The book notes how ‘for fifty years the British people have honoured their dead in his manner’ and ‘the veterans in their bowler hats and medals have grown older – each year there are less who have been here from the beginning’⁷⁸ This is obviously a reference to the First World War generation and reflects a bid to make the nation aware of the decline of this group of veterans and the traditions that enable the nation to remember the sacrifices made. These examples of the public image of the Great War veteran highlight the growing awareness of the age of this

⁷⁷ Roy Blackman, ‘Poppies Fade’ *Daily Mirror* November 4th 1960

⁷⁸ Anthony Brown, xiv

generation which coincided with a greater acknowledgement of what they had experienced. Todman notes how documentaries such as the landmark series *The Great War*, made in 1964 used interviews with Great War veterans and this 'granted them status for what they had seen and done'.⁷⁹ The documentary has been seen to have 'marked the beginning of a more general public interest in them as living witnesses to an event that had shaped the century and seared the collective consciousness'.⁸⁰ The Great War veterans gained an increased cultural visibility just as they were beginning to decline. This meant that the Great War generation of veterans were portrayed with an ever increasing level of respect during the time of annual commemorations.

In contrast, Second World War veterans were not portrayed in the same way by the British Legion. Certain British Legion sources from this time suggest that the indifference of this generation of veterans was partly to blame for the decline in public interest in official remembrance. The British Legion gave opinions on the reasons behind their decline in popularity in the 1971 promotional history of the organisation written by Anthony Brown. The organisation chiefly blamed poor public relations noting how 'five years ago the Legion was at a low ebb from the point of view of getting publicity'.⁸¹ Added to this, the publication hinted that the lack of involvement with the British legion by Second World War veterans was also a factor in the decline in the appreciation of the traditions of annual commemoration. Brown notes that the organiser of the Poppy Appeal feels that there is an 'urgent need to get more help from the teenage generation' as '50,000

⁷⁹ Dan Todman, 199

⁸⁰ Peter Parker, *The Last Veteran: Harry Patch and the Legacy of War* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), 192

⁸¹ Anthony Brown, 86-87

of the older generation of collectors have had to give up'.⁸² Similarly, the book also states, 'the view is widely held that there is less enthusiasm for ceremonial' and 'the old chaps from World War One, they'll march' but they are 'getting past it'.⁸³ Yet, 'you ask a Second war man to march – he'll tell you he did enough bloody marching in the army'.⁸⁴ The organiser notes that this generation enjoy the 'get together' of the Legion clubs and they join the groups, not because of economic hardship but because they 'want a social life but with a purpose'.⁸⁵ These comments give the impression that the Second World War generation of veterans are not as keen to uphold the ritualistic traditions of Armistice as their predecessors. These comments imply that their lack of participation is adding to the decline in the upholding of the rituals of commemoration such as the Poppy Appeal. Scholars such as Reece and Mosse also note the lack of World War Two veteran participation in their studies of commemorative culture. Reece suggests that some were even 'liable to be affected by the anti-war feelings of their children...such men would not participate in Legion activities'.⁸⁶ Reece goes on to argue that 'during much of the 1960s and early 1970s British veterans suffered the age-old fate of their class' with 'wide indifference' felt towards them in a climate of anti-war campaigns.⁸⁷ Interestingly, he suggests that Great War veterans continued to be 'stoic' throughout this period given their treatment during the interwar years.⁸⁸

⁸² Anthony Brown, 111

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Anthony Brown, 112-115

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Peter Reece, kindle location, 3730 kindle edition.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

Whatever the realities of Second World War veteran participation, it seems their less enthusiastic attitude led to them being portrayed less favourably by the British Legion than the elderly Great War generation. Later chapters of this thesis emphasises this difference in interest in more depth, noting the more sociable activities that this generation participated in, including via local British Legion clubs and veterans associations, where they could assert a greater control over their role and form their own traditions. However, when it came to participating in the official commemorative rituals, the British Legion made note of the lack of willingness to uphold tradition by the Second World War veterans, when compared to the frail Great War generation. They were clearly described and portrayed differently to their predecessors at a time when tensions surrounding commemoration were most strained.

Despite the indifference and hostility being shown to annual remembrance traditions in the press, the lull in interest in commemoration failed to hinder the presentation and the coverage of the proceedings of Remembrance Sunday. The papers hinted at the protests of the younger generation, but confirmed that ‘no incidents marred the solemnity of the occasion, which was watched by crowds 14-deep in places – most with short haircuts and long memories, and a few for whom the world wars already are history’⁸⁹ The broadcasts of Remembrance Day events appear to show veterans as before without any obvious alterations to the traditions and rituals. They are still shown proudly marching, wearing medals and laying wreaths.⁹⁰ Similarly, despite the public controversies the traditional images and

⁸⁹ Michael Morden, ‘The Queen and Nation Remember War Dead’ *Daily Telegraph* 12 November 1970

⁹⁰ ‘Remembrance Day ITN News’ 8th November 1970 *ITN Source* Story Ref: FS 081170040

rituals prevailed. The British Legion continued to emphasise their original aims as seen in the 1971 history of the organisation. The author notes, “we will remember them” is not quite all what the Legion is about, but it is the essence⁹¹

Evidently, despite public concerns and attempts to change the commemorative cultures, it seems that the actual event of Remembrance Sunday and the traditions which underpinned it were conducted and broadcast as before. Similarly during the 1970s, Remembrance Sunday and the Festival of Remembrance were now staple features that were broadcast annually on television.⁹² This brought the image of the Second World War veteran to the homes of the nation in colour and offered a particular narrative of what this generation represented. Veterans are given a ‘warm welcome’ by the audience and look traditionally proud and patriotic as they march into the Royal Albert Hall wearing their medals.⁹³ Standard bearers ‘in the cherished tradition of comradeship’ are the principle group which contains Second World War veterans.⁹⁴ Clearly, the staple image of a veteran was transferred to the Festival of Remembrance. The commentaries of the Festival of Remembrance also highlight the growing importance of the Great War generation to British culture. The elderly Chelsea pensioners are singled out at the end of the opening ceremony (at this time made up of Great War veterans) and it is noted that this year is a ‘special anniversary’ of 50 years since the end of the conflict.⁹⁵ It seems the British Legion had always honoured the generation who were their original members. It seems that whilst remembrance traditions

⁹¹ Anthony Brown, xiii

⁹² ‘Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance’ 07 November 1970 *BBC* BFI Identifier: 273906

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

survived during this unsteady period, their focus was largely on the Great War generation of veterans.

By the mid 1980s, the public desire to commemorate had been restored for a number of reasons. Politically, Margaret Thatcher's rhetoric surrounding the Falklands conflict made use of the idea that it would be a 'rehabilitation of Britain as a world power by repeated reference to the Second World War'.⁹⁶ Similarly, the outrage projected towards Labour leader Michael Foot at the 1981 Remembrance Sunday service for dressing in informal attire, emphasised a public and press dedication to the rituals of commemoration. As Wright notes, the outrage directed at Foot was connected to him failing to uphold tradition and respect at 'a solemn act of remembrance'.⁹⁷ This incident, as well as the impact of the Falkland's conflict, were significant moments when the conservative government mobilised the memory of the Second World War and will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three.

The 1980s represented a period when veterans gained a new level of centrality during the commemorative events. The coverage of the Remembrance Sunday services make it clear that the event is for the veterans. The television broadcast of 1988 for example begins with the veterans marching, despite this taking place at the end of the ceremony. The narrator states 'the veterans had travelled from all over the British isles and the Commonwealth, thousands of medals glittering in the sunshine as their arrived to pay respects to the fallen'.⁹⁸ The news report closes

⁹⁶ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, 4

⁹⁷ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123

⁹⁸ 'Remembrance Day' 13th November 1988 *ITN Source* Ref: AS131188004

with images of marching veterans again with the statement, ‘the ceremony ending with a proud march past by the old soldiers, sailors and airmen’.⁹⁹ Whilst the veterans are once again not distinguished by the conflict they fought in, it is assumed that they are either First or Second World War ex-servicemen due to the continual reference to their old age.

It seems that by 1990, veterans in general were central to Remembrance Day – it was *their* day. Second World War veterans were also beginning to be portrayed with a greater level of distinctiveness, particularly during anniversary periods. The 1989 Festival of Remembrance, which marked the 50th anniversary since the start of the war, singled out veterans associations who had been invited to show their standards for the occasion. The narrator notes, ‘this is an extraordinary assembly seen for the first time at the Festival’.¹⁰⁰ The Festival draws attention to ‘little known’ veteran groups including the ‘Tin Hats’ and the ‘Rats of Tobruk’.¹⁰¹ It seems that the Second World War veterans were finally being defined by the war in which they had served and particular events were being acknowledged. Female veterans of the Second World War were also being noted as shown in the special performance segment of the 1989 Festival of Remembrance which heavily portrays the importance of the role of the women’s armed services.¹⁰² This suggests that there was a clear broadening of the meaning of the idea of the veteran and who should be remembered at annual commemorative events. There was evidently a greater contextualisation of the Second World War veteran during

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ ‘Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance’ Circa November 1989 *BBC BFI Identifier*: 358166

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

this period and the term became more inclusive to publicly acknowledge the women who had participated in the armed services. There was also a rise in the portrayal of the veteran in the British Legion promotional materials. The Poppy Appeal began to simply explain the need for the funds with illustrations of veterans receiving care. Promotional booklets emphasise the need for funding for the Second World War generation, who were now entering old age.¹⁰³ Clearly, during the 1980s Second World War veterans were becoming more noticeable and distinct during commemorative events as a result of the public and political desire to commemorate war and as result of their age.

1990 to Present

Since 1990, veterans of the Second World War have increasingly become more distinct during the annual commemorative events of Remembrance Day, the Poppy Appeal and the Festival of Remembrance. Three major factors have contributed to the creation of the important place that Second World War veterans occupy in the annual commemorations of the present day. First, social and political factors have served to expand the overall cultural importance of commemorative events and traditions. Secondly, an increase in the importance of personal testimony and shifts in attitudes to trauma and war, can be shown to have enabled more emotive and personal representations of this generation of veterans during Remembrance Day and in Poppy Appeal campaigns. Finally, as Second

¹⁰³ 'Advertisement – The Poppy Appeal' September 28th 1981, *Daily Mirror* and 'Guide to the British Legion 1988' (K 88 / 325) *Imperial War Museums*

World War veterans now hold title as the oldest on parade, they have gained a new level of centrality in the annual remembrance calendar. These interwoven factors showcase how traditional remembrance images and rituals have been merged alongside the veterans own mortality in a mass media age, to form how the Second World War generation are now perceived during annual commemorations.

The 1990s saw an increase in the overall commemoration and celebration of war in Britain. Ashplant, Dawson and Roper have viewed this as a period of ‘anniversary boom’ and have identified a number of causes.¹⁰⁴ These include the growing public awareness of the Holocaust, the acceptance of trauma as a consequence of war and the ageing of witnesses of the two World Wars and the increased media response towards war anniversaries.¹⁰⁵ Particular years were dominated by the anniversary events dedicated to certain wars and campaigns. The commemorations of the Second World War specifically became more celebratory in tone, with special public anniversary events created for the fiftieth anniversaries of VE-Day and D-Day being organised by the Ministry of Defence who saw themselves as ‘bowing to popular demand’.¹⁰⁶ Television coverage, street parties and celebratory and nationalistic narratives of the war were features of the events which have been seen by some scholars as ‘commemorative excess’.¹⁰⁷ These anniversary events will be explored in the next chapter to

¹⁰⁴ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 4

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ The MoD describe their involvement in organising the anniversary commemorations in ‘The Commemoration Game’ *Focus* November 9 1993 in Eph. C. *VE-Day Imperial War Museums*

¹⁰⁷ Geoff Eley, *Finding the People’s War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II*

showcase how the distinct commemorations of the Second World War depicted the veterans during this period.

As a result of the commemorative climate of the 1990s, the annual events saw a renewed popularity and embraced the re-introduction of traditional remembrance rituals including the wearing of poppies and the two-minute silence. Due to public demand and pressure from the British Legion, the two-minute silence was re-introduced on 11th November of each year. Articles from 1995 in newspapers such as *The Times*, describe how the British Legion ‘wants people to revive a tradition, by pausing on the day before Remembrance Sunday’.¹⁰⁸ The ‘request was made at the launch of the annual Poppy Appeal’ and reflects an “overwhelming public support” for remembrance.¹⁰⁹ The article emphasises how the tradition has long been ignored but was revived in 1995 during ‘the VE-Day and VJ-Day anniversary commemorations, with impressive effect’.¹¹⁰ The anniversary events commemorating the end of the Second World War were evidently generating a wider appeal to return to traditional remembrance practices and creating a greater media profile for annual remembrance events. The British Legion clearly saw an opportunity to re-engage the public further on an annual basis to build commemorative traditions back into the remembrance calendar. Coverage of the 1995 and 1996 Remembrance Day service highlights the public response to the call for silence showing veterans, supermarket staff, customers and pedestrians standing in reverent silence across the nation.¹¹¹ Both male and female veterans

¹⁰⁸ John Young, ‘The British Legion Pleads for Two Minutes Silence’ *The Times* 31 October 1995

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ ‘Remembrance Day Services’ 11th November 1996 *ITN Source*, Story ref: BSP111196001 and ‘Remembrance Day’ 11th November 1995, *ITN Source*, Story ref: BSP111195017

are shown emotionally honouring the two minutes silence at the cenotaph with just the sound of Big Ben chiming in the background.¹¹² Similarly, newspaper articles from 1995 and 1996 highlight the respect towards the ritual that swept the nation. They describe Britain giving ‘wholehearted support’ to the ritual and how schools and football clubs have pledged to pause at the 11th hour.¹¹³ Evidently, from the mid-1990s onwards there was a renewed interest in the traditions of commemoration.

The boom in commemorative practices also led to public discussions about the meaning of Remembrance Day and the importance of the symbol of the poppy. Due to the ‘success’ of the anniversary events including the 1995 commemoration of VE-Day, the British Legion called for the public to donate more to the Poppy Appeal and to ‘consider what the poppy represented and whether they ought not to increase their donations’.¹¹⁴ Clearly, the British Legion were capitalising on this time of public desire to commemorate by encouraging people to donate more to the appeal. Graham Stewart reflected upon the change in national attitude towards commemoration and hailed Remembrance Day as a ‘national day’ which was ‘locked into common memory’.¹¹⁵ He cited the anniversary events and their ‘unprecedented success’, as a direct cause which increased the already growing public desire to remember war.¹¹⁶ Whilst the appeal of remembrance had been growing in the 1980s, the mid 1990s onwards saw an evident surge in the

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Russell Jenkins, ‘From Downing Street to village green, pledges are given to pause and reflect on fallen warriors’ *The Times* 9 November 1996

¹¹⁴ John Young, ‘The British Legion Pleads for Two Minutes Silence’ *The Times* 31 October 1995

¹¹⁵ Graham Stewart, ‘Two minutes of silence that tell us Britain truly has a National Day’ *The Times* 11 November 2000

¹¹⁶ Ibid

popularity and observance of commemorative events and this clearly meant resurgence in the public response to the annual events. It is clear that the constant commemoration of particular anniversaries of war during these years impacted upon the heightened awareness and support of the annual commemorations and the associated rituals.

As a result of this commemoration boom, Second World War veterans began to be singled out and portrayed in line with the familiar narratives surrounding the memory of the conflict. At times of significant anniversary, specifically the years of 1994 (the 50th anniversary of D-Day) and 1995 (the 50th anniversary of VE-Day), the annual remembrance events were dominated by coverage and images of veterans. ITN footage of the 1995 annual commemorative events showcases veterans as upholders of the traditions which are being re-vitalised. Veterans are depicted as the instigators and as a force behind the campaign to return the two-minute silence and honour it on 11th November each year. The narrator states, ‘veteran groups campaigned to move this poignant tribute from Remembrance Sunday back to its original time, the eleventh of the eleventh of the eleventh.’¹¹⁷ A Second World War veteran is interviewed during the commemorations and declares ‘I think it’s most important that it should be upheld’.¹¹⁸ This presents this generation as the preservers of commemorative traditions and rituals. A consequence of the anniversary events boom was the return of the two-minute silence and this created the portrayal of Second World War veterans as the saviours of the traditions for the first time.

¹¹⁷ ‘Remembrance Day’ 11 November 1995 *ITN Source*, Story ref: BSP111195017

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*



Figure 4 - The Daily Mirror Speaks for the Nation – ‘Lest You Forget, We Owe him Everything’ *Daily Mirror* November 11th 1995

The anniversary events also caused Second World War veterans to be singled out and further contextualised during the years when the D-Day and VE-Day anniversaries were taking place. A Remembrance Day article in the 1995 *Daily Mirror* declares ‘Lest you forget, we owe him everything’ and showed a cartoon sketch of an elderly Second World War veteran, bemedalled and proudly saluting and standing next to a small child who copies his stance.¹¹⁹ This image instantly places the Second World War ex-serviceman at the centre of the commemorations. Whilst the dead are mentioned, the article stresses, ‘we must not forget the living...they deserve respect and recognition as much now as during the war years. We should all be speaking up for our pensioners’.¹²⁰ The article

¹¹⁹ ‘The Daily Mirror Speaks for the Nation – Lest You Forget, We Owe him Everything’ *Daily Mirror* November 11th 1995

¹²⁰ *Ibid*

suggests that remembrance is as much about the living as it is about the dead and the public must acknowledge and thank them. Specifically, a Second World War veteran is the figure in the image, made recognisable by his age and medals. It ties the anniversary events with the annual commemorations by acknowledging that ‘there have been two solemn days of remembrance marking victory in Europe and Japan...as the length of time since those triumphs grows, so it becomes more, not less, important to remember’.¹²¹ In many ways, the article promotes Remembrance Day and the Poppy Appeal in the style of the successful VE-Day commemorations which placed veterans at the core of the celebrations.¹²² The article reflects the nationalistic narratives of the war which had been promoted during the VE-Day anniversary events. The article states that soldier ‘fell on three continents while Britain at home stood alone between freedom and Nazi tyranny’.¹²³ These comments depict a very basic narrative of the war which was often recalled to show a time when Britain was ‘resolute in a crisis and at its best when alone’.¹²⁴ The Second World War generation were evidently being depicted in line with broader celebratory rhetoric which depicted the war as a time when Britain was heroic, patriotic and great. The anniversary boom clearly enabled Second World War ex-servicemen to be singled out and honoured for their connection to a war which featured heavily in British popular culture during the annual commemorations of 1994 and 1995.

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, 2-3

¹²³ ‘The Daily Mirror Speaks for the Nation – Lest You Forget, We Owe him Everything’ *Daily Mirror* November 11th 1995

¹²⁴ Mark Connolly, 14

The introduction of interviewing during the broadcasts of Remembrance Day and in the Festival of Remembrance and Poppy Appeal coverage, enabled the portrayal of the Second World War veteran to become more personalised and emotive. Wider developments in the understanding and acceptance of war trauma can also be seen to have contributed to the tone of the events and the desire to share veterans own personal feelings about war to the nation. As Andrews suggests in recent times, Britain has witnessed a shift towards the acceptance of a ‘therapeutic culture’ and the expectation of a sharing of intimate ‘emotions and experiences’ as a result of social and cultural change.¹²⁵ By the 1990s, the impact of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder was also being fully realised.¹²⁶ Hunt views this development, alongside the heightened desire to commemorate, as having caused society to reach ‘the stage where ‘we expect people to break down after a traumatic event’.¹²⁷ These wider developments evidently had an effect on the portrayal of the Second World War generation during the annual commemorative calendar. In 1998 ITN chose to interview veterans in a ‘vox pop’ style as they plant crosses at the field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey. One Second World War veteran says, ‘I’m just thinking about the friends I left behind... I don’t know, it’s a sad day, it’s an emotional day’.¹²⁸ Another veteran is interviewed while standing with a group of comrades. He notes ‘you remember them as though it was yesterday sort of thing...even though it was more than 50 years ago’.¹²⁹ While these short clips only give snippets of information retrieved

¹²⁵ Maggie Andrews, ‘Mediating remembrance: Personalization and celebrity in television’s domestic remembrance’ *Journal of War & Culture*, Vol 4, Issue 3 (2011), 362

¹²⁶ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 105

¹²⁷ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* 123

¹²⁸ ‘Queen Mother: Field of Remembrance Service 05 November 1998 *ITN Source*, Story Ref: BSP051198021

¹²⁹ *Ibid*

from the interviews with veterans, they represent a change in the overall way in which ex-servicemen were valued during commemorative events.

Associated documentaries broadcast to promote the work of the British Legion include *Poppy Men* made in 1994. This short documentary illustrates the encouraging of emotion in the interviews with veterans. It focuses on a Second World War veteran who had lost all hope after suffering a stroke until he began his recovery at a British Legion care facility and started to work in the Poppy Factory.¹³⁰ The interviewer encourages the veteran to convey what it was like to fight and kill during the war and the veteran becomes emotional and discusses feelings of guilt.¹³¹ He then states ‘you’re only making me talk about it now...I don’t really like talking about it...you’re making me think about the war’.¹³² *Poppy Men* is an extreme example of the shift towards the encouraging of veterans to show their emotions and convey traumatic experiences. It showcases the move towards a grittier and emotion fuelled portrayal of veterans as a result of the developments in the understanding of PTSD. While the Poppy Appeal itself may not have depicted veterans as emotional as those in *Poppy Men*, it highlights a change in the way in which the veterans could be discussed around the time of annual remembrance.

The 2008 coverage of Remembrance Day also conveys the shift towards the expectation to see visible emotion among veterans during these events. A large image of a red beret wearing veteran crying and covering his eyes is shown in the

¹³⁰ ‘Poppy Men’ 23 May 1994 *Hauer Rawlence Production* BFI Identifier 424508

¹³¹ *Ibid*

¹³² *Ibid*

Daily Mirror coverage of the 90th anniversary of the Armistice.¹³³ The veteran is not named in the article, perhaps conveying a sense that he could represent any veteran in the emotion he is experiencing. Whereas previously, veterans were restricted in their actions during these events and were certainly not conveyed showing this level of visible emotion, modern commemorations encourage and expect an outpouring of grief for fallen comrades. It is clear that Second World War veterans were no longer being portrayed as simply silent, marching, anonymous figures during annual commemoration coverage. As a result of the wider interest in interviewing and in the acknowledgement of PTSD, veterans have been contextualised during annual commemorations and in documentaries made during the remembrance period.

As the Second World War veterans have grown older, their status during commemorative events appears to have grown. The honouring of the most elderly veterans of a particular war or campaign, cannot be seen as a new practice. Pre-First World War newspaper reports occasionally noted the death of extremely old veterans. The *Daily Mirror* featured the death of ‘old soldier’ of the Crimean War, 106 year old ‘Robert Coles’ on the front page of the January 30th 1914 edition.¹³⁴ It is likely that the public significance of the death of this veteran is as much a result of the man’s extreme old age, as it is about him being a Crimean War ex-serviceman. By 1914, newspaper stories about elderly veterans of Victorian military campaigns were frequently featured during the Great War to inspire the

¹³³ Victoria Ward, ‘90 Years of Remembrance’ *Daily Mirror* 10 November 2008

¹³⁴ ‘Death at 106’ *Daily Mirror* January 30th 1914

younger generation. These included the recruitment drives featuring Chelsea during the First World War. Depictions of recruitment events in the *Daily Mirror* showcase images of elderly men appealing on a stage to young recruits. A front page article from November 1916 declares that a Chelsea Pensioner ‘secured twelve recruits’.¹³⁵ Their fragility is emphasised with statements such as ‘the speaker held out his old, gnarled hand to assist them on to the platform’.¹³⁶ The veterans were evidently being used to stir the younger generation to go to war and the Chelsea Pensioners are portrayed as proudly pro-war, wise and heroic.

Elderly veterans were also commonly seen in recruitment campaigns in the form of posters. Notable examples include the Frank Dadd depiction of a Chelsea Pensioner shaking hands with a soldier in ‘The Veteran’s Farewell’.¹³⁷ This poster promotes the idea of the Victorian ex-serviceman as wise, pro-war and influential to the young men called for duty in 1914. The text under the image declares ‘I only wish I were young enough to go with you’.¹³⁸ As Christopher notes, the poster ‘conveyed a sense of a continuing with tradition by taking up the fight for King, Country and Empire’.¹³⁹ Patriotism is more explicitly referenced in the poster titled ‘A Chip Off the Old Block’ by Lawson Wood from 1914 which depicts a frail veteran wearing medals, with the words ‘Your King and Country Need You’.¹⁴⁰ The veteran is used to convey a wider message about patriotism, the monarchy and Empire, which was characteristic of the high spirited tones of

¹³⁵ ‘A Chelsea Pensioner Secures Twelve Recruits’ *Daily Mirror*.16 November 1915

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Frank Dadd ‘The Veteran’s Farewell’ (1914) poster in *British Posters of the First World War*, John Christopher, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), Kindle Edition.

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Lawson Wood, ‘A Chip Off the Old Block’ (1914) poster in *British Posters of the First World War*, John Christopher, (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), Kindle Edition.

1914. The age of the veterans is emphasised in both posters. Both are wearing medals and the Wood poster shows a particularly frail pensioner shaking hands with a soldier. The image of the bemedalled, elderly veteran clearly has its roots in pre-Great War images, where Victorian ex-servicemen were depicted as inspirational figures who had fought for King and Empire. This is subtly repeated in the build-up to the Second World War, with an image showing a laughing Chelsea Pensioner sharing ‘good ‘uns about his campaigning days’ war stories with young men at a recruitment office in 1939.¹⁴¹ Clearly, elderly veterans have been commonly depicted in the press for a variety of reasons, including for their extreme longevity and for their ability to inspire younger generations as wise heroes who had proudly served for their country.

The British Legion Journals also provide an insight into how elderly veterans were publicly acknowledged for different reasons after the Second World War. They were singled-out as inspirational British Legion members in the ‘Legion Personalities’ section of the journal. Biographies detailed their years of service and their work for the British Legion.¹⁴² Similarly, one veteran is pictured in the run up to Remembrance Day as being an inspirational ‘old soldier’ who enabled other members to feel ‘an old soldiers pride’ along with ‘millions’ who ‘saw this picture’ in the newspapers.¹⁴³ His age is not acknowledged but his status as an ‘old soldier’ lies in his dedication to remembrance in proudly parading and wearing his

¹⁴¹ ‘Old Soldiers Never Die! (They Don’t Even Fade Away)’ 04 May 1939 *Daily Mirror*

¹⁴² ‘Legion Personalities – Legion’s Senior Guest’ *The British Legion Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 1952) E.80 / 258 *Imperial War Museums*

¹⁴³ ‘The Old Soldier – Millions Saw His Picture’ *The British Legion Journal* Vol. 32, No. 11 (November 1952) E80 / 258 *Imperial War Museums*

medals.¹⁴⁴ The British Legion Journals showcase the continued importance of acknowledging the ‘last’ and ‘oldest’ veterans. These early examples of the oldest veterans in the public realm clearly show the roots of the cultural interest in elderly veterans.

Unlike the veterans of previous generations, the last veterans of the Great War experienced an unprecedented level of media coverage. From 1990 to 2009, the last veterans of the Great War were fast declining in number and media interest in the remaining elderly ex-servicemen reached an unprecedented scale. As Hanna suggests that the media interest in the remaining veterans of the Great War increased dramatically ‘when the eightieth anniversary of the armistice was marked by an upsurge in public commemoration’ and the ‘old soldiers and their memories were placed at the core of national remembrance’.¹⁴⁵ The ways in which this generation were portrayed in their last years during annual commemorations, can be seen to have set a tone for the descriptions and images now drawn upon to represent the ageing veterans of the Second World War during annual commemorations.

The Great War generation transformed the image of the veteran during annual commemorations to become more central and respectful in tone, and enabled a greater emphasis on personal accounts of war from individuals. The 90th anniversary of the Armistice in 2008, Remembrance Day was marked with a special service which specifically focused on three out of the four remaining Great

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Emma Hanna, 64

War veterans. They were central to all the rituals and traditions of the annual event and became part of the fabric of the commemoration which tied the remembrance practices of 1918 to the ceremony of 2008.¹⁴⁶ The BBC coverage of the events shows the three elderly veterans being guided in wheelchairs by serving personnel.¹⁴⁷ The coverage continues to show the familiar faces of the remaining veterans during the ceremony and crowds clap and cheer as they are wheeled past.¹⁴⁸ Despite their immobility, the men are shown as symbolic of the meaning and tradition of remembrance. As the BBC article suggests, 'lit up by rays of winter sunshine, the men watched silently as their armed forces representatives laid wreaths on their behalf, one by one'.¹⁴⁹ They are depicted as symbols representing both the past and the present. As Long and Webber describe, veterans shown together are 'like a council of wise elders' to 'underscore their time-won authority and the gravitas of their opinions about war and its conduct'.¹⁵⁰ They were depicted as 'heroic' in the press, in documentaries, biographies and during anniversary events and were 'defined by veteran status'.¹⁵¹ The annual commemorative events reflected this way in which Great War veterans were becoming figures and celebrities in their own right, moulded by the press and media.

The last First World War veterans also pushed annual commemorations towards a greater emphasis on individual stories, as the British Legion began to embrace the

¹⁴⁶ 'WW1 Veterans Mark Armistice Day' 11 November 2008 *BBC Online* accessed 02/09/2016 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7720601.stm>

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁰ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 280

¹⁵¹ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 282

image of the last veterans in their campaigns. They strikingly used Harry Patch to launch the Somerset Poppy Appeal in 2007. Stirring images used for the campaign depict the frail Harry Patch in his wheelchair, bemedalled holding a wreath of poppies.¹⁵² He is the only figure in the image as poppy petals float around him.¹⁵³ The use of Harry Patch for the Poppy Appeal signifies the shift towards the perceived importance of the image of the war veteran to annual commemoration. Patch acts as a link between the war and the present day and was clearly being utilised as an emotive tool to stir the nation to buy a poppy. He states that he is proud to represent his generation.¹⁵⁴ This reflects what Andrews describes as ‘personalisation’ of modern remembrance whereby ‘one individual, one life, one family’s sufferings become representative of those of a generation.’¹⁵⁵ In this case, Harry Patch was only one of a few still alive who could represent his generation in upholding the traditions of the British Legion and the Poppy Appeal. The last veterans of the Great War evidently made individual accounts, images and stories of veterans a staple part of the annual commemorations.

As a consequence of the greater emphasis on personal stories and the portrayal of the most elderly veterans as wise and central to annual commemorations, the Second World War generation also began to be referenced in this way. The *ITN* coverage of the 2006 Remembrance Day events used an interview with one Second World War veteran who gives his opinions on current affairs, ‘it is very upsetting to see what is going on with the world today’ and ‘we had hoped that

¹⁵² ‘War Veteran’s Tribute to the Fallen’ 27 October 2007 *BBC Online* accessed 02/09/2016 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/somerset/7065746.stm>

¹⁵³ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁵ Maggie Andrews, 364

our war would have been the last war and we would have had a lot of peace...I feel sorry for the young people of today because they have got to face what we had to face'.¹⁵⁶ This interview shows the move towards sharing the views of individual veterans and depicting them as wise during the coverage of the commemorations.

After the death of Harry Patch in 2009, the use of personal accounts and references to the importance and heroic status of Second World War veterans during annual commemorations became more apparent. Personalised stories of war during annual commemoration have become a staple feature of Remembrance Sunday and during the Festival of Remembrance. In the 2015 Festival of Remembrance, an interview with one elderly veteran of the Battle of Britain is featured. The veteran tells his story and how they 'never gave up control of the skies'.¹⁵⁷ He then goes on to discuss the trauma of his experiences, 'I don't like to think about the horrors of war and what I have seen in London during the bombing and things like that'.¹⁵⁸ A mixture of archival footage of the Blitz and Battle of Britain is used alongside close ups of the veteran as he talks about his memories.¹⁵⁹ Rather than focusing on a group of Second World War veterans, the story of the war and the honouring of Second World War veterans is largely achieved through highlighting the individual experience of one veteran. As Webber and Long highlighting in their study 'the concentration on the individual

¹⁵⁶ Anniversaries: Remembrance Day: Ceremonies' 11 November 2006 *ITN Source*, Story Ref: T11110614 2697

¹⁵⁷ 'The British Legion Festival of remembrance 2015' *Youtube* uploaded by user 'British Military Music' 9 November 2015 accessed 03 September 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfhrDpErodY>

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*

enforced by the passage of time shifted attention for the generalised address at the Cenotaph to a personalisation of history’¹⁶⁰ The legacy of the last veterans of the Great War can clearly be seen in the portrayal of personal accounts of individual Second World War veterans. During Remembrance Sunday and the Festival of Remembrance, the image of the veteran is now constructed by showing both the traditions of marching veterans and wreath laying and through a new emphasis on individual stories and encouraging the memories of particular veterans. There is little doubt that as the Second World War veterans become fewer, the depiction of veterans as individuals with personal stories will continue to grow as it did with their predecessors.

Unlike previous generations, the last Great War veterans did not hide their anti-war attitudes even during the commemoration period. These public declarations by veterans would most certainly have been scorned by the press previously, even during the commemoration crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. Harry Patch openly stated his anti-war views, which reflected ‘modern sensibilities’ and attitudes to war backed up by revisionist histories which presented it as a futile waste.¹⁶¹ The media sympathy towards the anti-war and anti-heroic attitudes of Second World War veterans, can be seen as one of the consequences of the media portrayal of Harry Patch and his comrades. Second World War veteran, George Evans, spoke of being ‘sacked’ from a local Remembrance Day parade for sharing his anti-war views in the form of a poem in 2015. In the article in the *Independent*, Evans states ‘Of course wars are stupid. No one who has ever been in one would ever

¹⁶⁰ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 281

¹⁶¹ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 284

say they are a good idea. They are the triumph of stupidity over diplomacy'.¹⁶² He was clearly keen to share his views with the public and the press articles appear to be sympathetic to this elderly veteran who is depicted as a hero like his predecessors. Harry Patch is cited as a direct influence in Evans' choice to voice his opinions. The article notes, 'that poem – it was inspired by the words of Harry Patch, "the last Tommy" of the First World War. Patch, too, had declared: "War is organised murder and nothing else"...Now, Mr Evans says, it was the turn of his generation of old soldiers to fade away'.¹⁶³ This comment places Evans as the successor to Patch, both as a modest elderly war veteran and as an anti-war champion. Public pacifist declarations from veterans in the press, showcase how the veteran is now able to share anti-war feelings near to the time of Remembrance Day without being scorned. Nevertheless, these views have not been readily voiced during the actual annual commemoration events like Remembrance Sunday. Despite the press being more inclined to share pacifist attitudes of veterans, the images of them during annual commemorations remain patriotic, militaristic and in keeping with the traditions created in 1919.

Conclusion

Overall, despite changes in attitudes to remembrance, a lull in interest in commemoration and the ageing of veterans, the Second World War generation have largely been depicted in keeping with the rituals and images of their Great War predecessors during annual commemorative events. Although plans had been

¹⁶² Adam Lusher, 'George Evans: World War II veteran explains why the cult of military triumphalism repulses him' *Independent* 09 October 2015

¹⁶³ *Ibid*

formed to create a unique event dedicated to the dead of the Second World War, both the dead and the living who served in both wars were to become part of a large group to be commemorated and seen in November each year. The post-war period saw the re-installation of the traditions of pre-war commemorative practices in the official war remembrance events. There was a wider acknowledgement of the ex-serviceman by the 1950s and this served to cement the image of the Second World War veteran as marching on parade on Remembrance Day, proud, wearing medals and honouring comrades.

From 1960 to 1990, the representation and changing image of the Second World War veteran in the annual commemorations in Britain altered dramatically. The Second World War veteran was still in the shadow of the veterans of the Great War throughout the period 1960 to 1980 in commemorative culture. During this period, tensions surrounding the annual events were strained which was reflected in the alternative ways the two generations of veterans were portrayed. Since 1990, veterans of the Second World War have come to hold a central place in the public annual remembrance calendar. An increased interest in Second World War anniversaries and the revitalisation of traditions such as the two minutes silence, have enabled veterans to become important and distinct figures in the annual commemorative events. The increased awareness of war trauma and the media interest in personal testimony has allowed veteran stories to be shared and granted them a new level of contextualisation. The representation of the last veterans of the First World War has set the tone for the ways in which the elderly veterans of the Second World War are now portrayed at remembrance events. As the oldest veterans on parade during the cenotaph service and during the Festival of

Remembrance, they have become central to commemorations and personal stories and opinions are highlighted and encouraged. The annual events now depict individual ex-servicemen of the Second World War as wise figures of commemoration each year.

Chapter 2

Anniversary Events

This chapter explores the ways in which veterans have been represented in round number anniversary commemorations relating to the Second World War.

Anniversary commemorations are a form of ‘dominant memory’ where public representations of the Second World War are largely organised by the state and media and narratives about the meaning of the conflict are broadcast widely. As Dawson describes, public representations ‘circulate within the arenas of public culture’ and gain dominance and power via their association with politics and major organisations.¹

The analysis of anniversary commemorations related to the Second World War will facilitate a greater understanding of the ways in which this generation of veterans have been portrayed in British culture in direct relation to the memory of the events they lived through. These state and media organised events have divided veterans by the campaigns in which they served, praised some and sidelined others, and organising bodies have contended for agency over the planning of commemorations. Anniversary commemorations present veterans in an unequal way and highlight a struggle between veterans’ own individual memories and wishes and those of politicians, dignitaries and the media. These reflect the ‘processes of subordination and marginalisation’ which form part of the

¹ Graham Dawson, ‘The Theory of Popular Memory and the contested Memories of the Second World War in Britain’, in *Myths, gender and the military conquest of air and sea* ed. Katharina Hoffmann, Herbert Mehrrens, and Silke Wenk, (Oldenburg: BIS Verlag, 2015), 205

construction of public and dominant representations of the war.² These depictions do not always allow for broader or meaningful understanding of this generation. They can be shown to clearly omit certain groups of veterans, generalise and politicise the meaning of their experiences, and take away their control in organising commemorative anniversary events.

Commemorative events

Three types of commemorative event exist which feature Second World War veterans. Annual remembrance events form one type of recurring commemoration as discussed in the previous chapter. During these occasions, veterans have been imagined as proud and marching heroes as part of a larger group of ex-servicemen. They have been shown as conducting traditions which were directly associated to their Great War. As shown, this image of the Second World War generation encourages a generic idea of the veteran in British popular culture.

Low-level commemorative events organised by veteran groups or local communities are another form of remembrance activity which is important to understanding how veterans connect to their wartime experiences. As veterans have aged, their participation in setting up commemorative activities has evolved. As Winter suggests, these forms of ‘fictive kinship’ groups are low key and change over time:

² Ibid

‘Once completed in this initial phase, these “sites of remembrance” are never stable, never fixed. In the process of composition, they begin to decompose, losing little by little the force and content of their original meaning and evocative power. The reason for this transformation is imbedded in the life cycle of agency itself. Those who join in this activity do so at the cost of other ventures; when their lives change, and other business calls, the bonds of such agency begin to fray, and unravel...
... Fictive kin are small-scale agents... Their work is liminal. It occupies the space between individual memory and the national theatre of collective memory choreographed by social and political leaders. They flourish at a point between the isolated individual and the anonymous state; a juncture almost certainly closer to the individual than to the state’.³

This description of ‘fictive kinships’ can be used to define the Second World War veteran groups organising low key commemorative events. Events such as pilgrimages to the battlefields, local church services and parades or reunion dinners are all types of low key event organised by veterans themselves. These events mostly appear to have gained little media coverage or government support. Chapter Six will focus on these events in more detail, and highlight the forgotten ways in which veteran groups have curated their own remembrance events and rituals outside official channels Yet, they are important in the context of this chapter, to understanding how the agency of Second World War veteran groups has been overridden by governmental and media bodies. The ways in which these

³ Jay Winter, ‘Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War’ in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), kindle location 1003-1009, kindle edition.

low key remembrance activities are overshadowed by large scale events is telling of how certain narratives about veterans dominate the common representations of this generation.

Finally, the large scale events backed by the government, which receive press coverage and media attention, are some of the events during which veterans are most commonly seen. These dominant commemorations only take place during certain years and on specific, usually ‘round number’ anniversaries, which commemorate particular moments, battles or campaigns. As Frost and Laing note ‘years in groups of tens and hundreds capture our imagination’ and ‘focusing on the date in these cases makes a strong statement’ which ‘justifies the organisation of the event’.⁴ They argue that organisers and stakeholders organise such events to help ‘society to remember and better understand its heritage’, aims which fit ‘with the way popular media are constructed’ which can generate significant coverage.⁵ These large-scale events transmit particular portrayals of veterans to the public, in the creation of collective memories surrounding certain moments of the Second World War. They can be described as dominant forms of ‘cultural memory’. Hoskins believes that ‘memory...is “mediated” and these forms of commemoration reflect the changes in how dominant and ‘official’ memory is transmitted.⁶ There has ‘emerged a more publicly and visually explicit “new memory”...which is both the media-affected formation and reformation of shared or social memory in the contemporary age and the consequential reassessment of the nature and very value of remembering (and forgetting) subject to the

⁴ Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing, kindle location, 164

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Hoskins quoted in Alexandre Dessingue and Jay Winter, ed., *Beyond Memory – Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2

technologies of and the discourses disseminated by the mass and other media'.⁷

As noted by Anne Rigney, 'cultural memory' such as those broadcast via the media, facilitate 'individuals and groups who have no actual connection in any biological sense with the events in question' to 'learn to identify with certain vicarious recollections'.⁸ This chapter will focus on these dominant forms of cultural memory, to uncover how veterans have been depicted in relation to the memory of the war.

Using government records surrounding the planning of commemorations, ephemera and media coverage, this chapter will plot the place of the veteran during these large-scale remembrance occasions. It will also consider the contribution of veterans in related documentary television programmes, which were broadcast around a particular anniversary period. These provide evidence of 'event television' surrounding the anniversaries of the Second World War. As Gray and Bell suggest, anniversaries 'offer the opportunity for programme makers and national broadcasters to create and air material which offers knowledge of...significant past events'.⁹ Programmes made to commemorate events, as well as the organisation and coverage of the anniversaries themselves, will enable a further understanding of the representations of the Second World War generation.

This chapter focuses on a number of events which each illustrate the evolving nature of the place of the veteran in anniversary commemorative culture. D-Day

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Annie Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory' in *Journal of European Studies* Vol. 35, No. 1 (2005): 16

⁹ Documentaries can also be included in the idea of "historical event" television as noted by Ann Grey and Alison Bell, *History On Television* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 100

will be explored to understand how ‘signal’ events which took place on European soil have promoted specific images of the veteran as heroic and emblematic of the British and American wartime experience. The case of the Battle of Britain shows how some veterans, like ‘the few’, have continuously held a special place in British culture, with very little change or contestation over time. Other events, such as El Alamein have occupied an unusual place in the legacy of the war, owing to the unique culture of the desert campaign and the importance of the figure of the wartime leader Montgomery. A fourth case study will examine the events relating to the end of the war and the ‘forgotten’ nature of VJ-Day when compared to VE-Day. Tracing these events shows the efforts of veterans themselves to address the lack of visibility of the war in the Far East and the plight of Far East prisoners of war. Finally, this chapter will note the events which have never gained cultural dominance, notably, Monte Cassino, and how this has impacted upon the visibility and attitudes of veterans who fought in these events. Taken together, these examples will highlight the complex and uncertain depiction of veterans of the Second World War during anniversary commemorations.

Signal Events and D-Day

A number of events, which gained special or mythical status during the Second World War, have been commemorated on a large scale during the post-war period and beyond. These include Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, D-Day, El Alamein and VE-Day. These events symbolised the British and allied experience of the war and veterans were largely depicted as heroes as part of a wider story of victory during

this period. Rose has suggested that these events can be described as ‘signal events’ as they embody the ‘British experience of the Second World War...due to myth-making during the war itself but also due to the demands of the present’.¹⁰ The reasons behind the formation of ‘signal’ events can be attributed to the ways in which the ‘cultural recall of the past is governed’ through a ‘system of relevance that gives priorities to certain aspects of the past and sidelines (effectively, ‘forgets’) others’.¹¹ In the case of the Second World War, the ‘signal’ events came to dominate commemorative culture in the post-war decades.

The government’s motivations in cultivating an international image and to connect with former allies, helped to maintain the presence of certain ‘signal’ wartime events in the post-war decades. In the 1960s, the government acknowledged the benefit of attending commemorations related to the Battle of Waterloo, the First World War and specifically, those related to D-Day and the end of the Second World War. Yet, they were cautious about attending commemorations with former enemies and proposed to consider carefully whether the UK should be present at any non-NATO based commemorations:

‘The 150th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo is not perhaps very likely to raise problems of this kind with the French [nationalistic antagonisms], although we should bear French susceptibilities in mind, but the revival of the still fresh memories of the First and Second World Wars must be handled as to avoid damaging our relations with federal Germany. France

¹⁰ Sonya O. Rose, 1

¹¹ Anne Rigney, 18

has exactly the same problem as ourselves as far as Germany is concerned and we can be reasonably sure that all officially sponsored activities in France will be arranged accordingly; but difficulties could arise over celebrations in some other countries e.g. Norway...in celebration of Western countries, the religious and humanitarian significance of the occasion and the need for reconciliation should be stressed'¹²

'It is possible that countries other than our NATO allies may invite the U.K. to be represented at the commemoration of war anniversaries. Such invitations would have to be considered on their merits'.¹³

Clearly, the government were only keen to participate and help organise events which connected to NATO partners, such as D-Day and VE-Day, rather than those connected to the communist nations during the Cold War period. They were also concerned about organising and attending events which may feature former enemies such as Germany. This can help to explain why commemorations of events which took place on European soil were more visible in popular culture in the post-war decades.

Despite this intervention which ensured that D-Day was publicly commemorated, in the planning of the 1960s commemorations, veterans were presented in a fairly muted way. The D-Day ceremonies were organised with a strict political agenda, which aimed to strengthen relations with France and America and to emphasise

¹² P. Dixon 'The Twentieth Anniversary of the Allied Landings in Normandy' June 29 1964 in FO 371/177838 'Commemoration of War Anniversaries' 1964 *The National Archives*

¹³ 'Commemoration of War Anniversaries' 1964 FO 371/177838

the allied victory. Records relating to sending a military presence, dignitaries and how much money would be required to participate in the event show the political motivations for the government in getting involved.¹⁴ As records surrounding 1964 anniversary commemorations outline, ‘our achievements and losses in these wars justify extensive participation’ and they provide ‘an opportunity for demonstrating the strengths of our ties with Europe’.¹⁵ The records show plans to invite the Royal Family, hold a fly-past, a naval presence and ‘various contributions by Old Comrades Associations etc’.¹⁶ There is little mention of veterans as the focus from the government perspective was clearly to gain political recognition for the role played by Britain during the war and strengthen international ties. The Americans had ‘warned their veterans associations to make their own arrangements’ and there is a hint that the British veterans should be advised the same.¹⁷ Letters sent to and from the British Legion, to the Ministry of Defence regarding the planning of the 25th anniversary, highlight the friction between the plans from the government to organise the event and the priorities of the British Legion towards veterans and war widows. The British Legion Chairman wrote:

‘I would like to stress that we are not concerned with British Legion representatives at the ceremonies on the continent, but with the men who

¹⁴ ‘Anniversaries 1964’ in WO 32/19622 ‘Anniversary Commemorations Relating to World Wars I and II –Military Arrangements 1962-1966’ *The National Archives*

¹⁵ Correspondence from the War Office to His Excellency Sir Pierson Dixon surrounding ‘Commemoration of War Anniversaries’ 30th January 1964 in FO 371/177838 ‘Commemoration of War Anniversaries’ 1964 *The National Archives*

¹⁶ ‘British Representation at D-Day Celebrations’ in ‘D-Day Celebrations – British Contribution’ FO 371/177838 ‘Commemoration of War Anniversaries’ 1964 *The National Archives*

¹⁷ ‘Washington Telegram No. 1220 – D-Day Celebrations’ April 2 1964 in ‘D-Day Celebrations – British Contribution’ FO 371/177838 ‘Commemoration of War Anniversaries’ 1964 *The National Archives*

served in the area and the relatives of men who died ...the great majority of the people are not members of the Legion at all, but come to us for assistance...It is difficult to understand why your Ministry staff speak of a problem in ascertaining who is responsible for co-ordination...Mr Rivers replied to the effect that we did not propose to take advantage of the offer to march past behind the Regular Forces...'.¹⁸

The Secretary of State for Defence, Denis W. Healey on behalf of the Ministry of Defence responded:

‘The Ministry of Defence are not and never have been, unlike the Ministry of Ancient Combattants in France, responsible for such parties. We are very happy to include your representatives in such parades as we may arrange should you wish to take part and we have always set aside space for your spectators where we have the ability to do so... As I have said in my previous letter it is unlikely that we will be supporting any further major anniversaries for some years to come but when we do I am sure that the difficulties to which you have pointed in our two letters will be avoided by close personal contact between your staff and that of the ministry of defence’.¹⁹

¹⁸ Letter from D. I. Cedman, Chairman of the British Legion to The Secretary of State for Defence, Denis W. Healey 28 July 1969 in DEFE/24 425 ‘Ceremonies’ *The National Archives*

¹⁹ Letter from The Secretary of State for Defence, Denis W. Healey to D. I. Cedman, Chairman of the British Legion [date unknown circa July 1969] in in DEFE/24 425 ‘Ceremonies’ *The National Archives*

This heated correspondence reveals the contrasting motivations of the government and the British Legion. The Ministry of Defence do not appear interested at all in the veterans and war widows attending the event, and describe them in a rather demeaning terms as simply ‘parties’. This language reflects the neutral ways in which veterans were perceived during this period, also seen in chapters one and three of this thesis. The letters do reveal the British Legion taking some ownership over the events and making it clear veterans would not march after present day armed forces. As the government were not overly invested in commemorative anniversaries during this period, veterans and the British Legion clearly held more agency in the planning of the events. Nevertheless, the government were attempting to influence the events and include their own motivations to make the ceremony politically beneficial. It seems that being a veteran of one of the ‘signal’ events of the war did not automatically generate an accurate and broad representation.

In keeping with the governmental stance, British media emphasised the allied role in the Normandy Landings during the large-scale coverage of the twenty-fifth anniversary. The *British Pathé* coverage emphasised that ‘many of those who survived those bloody days of those invasion went back...they remembered’.²⁰ It stresses that ‘there were VIPs, there were ordinary soldiers, there were civilians who once wore uniforms. Rank and position are of little importance’.²¹ The presence of the British Ambassador is pictured as well as images of veterans gathered in France. Veterans are described as ‘greeting old comrades,

²⁰ ‘D-Day Anniversary’ 1969 *British Pathé* Film ID: 2207.01

²¹ *Ibid*

remembering those violent times so far off...yet so fresh'.²² The newsreel appears to honour both veterans and governmental props including dignitaries and current soldiers. Veterans are given more respect in the newsreel than by the Ministry of Defence, but are shown briefly and as part of the narrative of British victory. The veterans were used to present a positive narrative about the meaning of the war and the importance of Britain to the allied victory.

It can be noted as a comparison, that the commemoration of Dunkirk gained similar treatment by the government from the 1960s onwards. Yearly commemorations marking the evacuation of Dunkirk were organised by the *Dunkirk Veterans Association*, alongside the French local government in the post-war decades. Ephemera relating to the 1963 pilgrimage reveals how the association organised its own timetable, held ceremonies conducted by the association chaplain, held ticketed social evenings and created programmes and pamphlets.²³ Publicised in the local press, non-round number commemorations do not appear to have gained wide press and media coverage.²⁴ These low key yearly commemorations highlight how veterans themselves had some control over commemorating the events, even if they could not shape when and how their image would be portrayed in the national and international media.

In 1965, the government wanted input in the organisation of the events but they were not central in the planning of the ceremonies. The Ministry of Defence's questions surrounding the planned ceremony include 'who will marshal the

²² Ibid

²³ Ephemera relating to the 8th annual pilgrimage to Dunkirk Ref: SO236/1/3 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

²⁴ See 'Norfolk Veterans among pilgrims to Dunkirk today' Ref: EEN 1/6 63 in SO236/1/3 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

various detachments and bands taking part in the parade?', 'who are being invited to the reception?' and 'Who provides the wreaths and who lays them at the cenotaph?'.²⁵ Asking these questions show the government's lack of experience in running these events and shows their interest in wanting to be involved. Veteran groups had a strong role in the planning of these events, yet they were not readily given media coverage on a yearly basis.

In 1965, the Committee for Special Ceremonies voiced their worries that there 'was a hint of French, American and Belgian participation (to celebrate the liberation rather than the evacuation)' and 'if the Foreign Office advise that it is to our advantage to go in on rather a grander scale than has up to now been envisaged, the Ministry of Defence may find itself, once more, chasing the proverbial Jones'.²⁶ A number of suggestions were made including, 'participation by the British Services by the Foreign Office as demonstration of Anglo-French solidarity' and participation from the current British Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force.²⁷ Similarly, it was decided that 'for political reasons' the British government 'should do our best to participate' and 'exclude' commemorating the Normandy landings alongside Dunkirk.²⁸ These discussions surrounding the planning of the 25th anniversary of Dunkirk show how the government was beginning to view anniversary commemorations as politically significant events which could be used to promote certain narratives.

²⁵ Letter from A. F. Monteath (Ministry of Defence) to Lieutenant Colonel L. H. Landon (British Embassy, Paris) 10 May 1965 in DEFE 24/83 '25th Anniversary of Defence of Dunkirk'

²⁶ Government document D/DPR 235/1/6 surrounding the planning of the 25th anniversary of Dunkirk in DEFE 24/83 '25th Anniversary of Defence of Dunkirk'

²⁷ Ministry of Defence D.S. 15 18 March 1965 surrounding the planning of the 25th anniversary of Dunkirk in DEFE 24/83 '25th Anniversary of Defence of Dunkirk'

²⁸ Report by the Committee on Special Ceremonies' March 5 1965 in DEFE 24/83 '25th Anniversary of Defence of Dunkirk'

The publicity surrounding the ten-year anniversary of Dunkirk highlighted similar themes of heroism and victory as seen in the D-Day commemorations. The coverage of the 1950 commemoration states that ‘these survivors look upon these beaches on which the drama was enacted, resulting in freedom, captivity or death for the gallant Expeditionary Force’.²⁹ The veterans are depicted as heroes alongside the ‘self-sacrifice of the men who manned the little ships’.³⁰ The *British Pathé* newsreel reporting on the 25th anniversary similarly states that troops were ‘at the end of their tether’ at the time, but today people ‘rejoice’ that Britain and France ‘live today in freedom because the veterans of Dunkirk, marching so proudly here, escaped the Nazi threat, reformed and years later returned to France and victory’.³¹ They note that when troops landed in England they said, ‘we shall go back’.³² The comments connect Dunkirk to D-Day and the allied victory and present the events as part of a larger story of Britain’s role in the conflict. These examples do not highlight the role played by veterans themselves in organising events, or the gatherings attended by veterans during the commemorative period. Despite descriptions of veterans as heroes, the government stance and coverage of the commemorations of Dunkirk and D-Day were focused on creating politically beneficial narratives.

In the planning of the fortieth anniversary of D-Day, records show how events commemorating ‘signal’ European events of the war became more politicised, but the role of veterans became more recognised and increasingly praised. In a letter

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Dunkirk: 25 Years After (1965) *British Pathé* Film ID: 1808.20

³² Ibid

from Baroness Young of the Conservatives to Mr Cartwright MP of the Social Democratic Party regarding how the UK should commemorate the end of the Second World War, it was described how ‘the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of D-Day originated with French veterans associations at the initiative in particular of M. Raymond Triboulet, a former Minister of War Veterans and President of the Normandy Landings committee. The arrangements were subsequently taken over by the French government’.³³ British politicians also took a greater role in participating in the events. While in the 1960s, politicians wanted to gain control over ceremonies without taking an interest in veterans, the 1980s appear to show a change in attitude towards those who survived the Normandy Landings. There was an ‘Americanising influence’ of international war commemoration which was exemplified in the 1984 D-Day commemorations.³⁴ The messages of Thatcher and Regan in the official programme highlight how in the 1980s, events such as the anniversary of D-Day and its veterans, became tools in the renegotiation of British and American identity politics. Thatcher’s forward states that, ‘characteristically, as at other great moments in our maritime history both before and since, the British people rose to the occasion magnificently, carrying out their many and varied tasks with determination and distinction’.³⁵ This line in the official 40th anniversary brochure emphasises how Thatcher viewed D-Day and its veterans as emblematic of British traits and is in keeping with her reworking of the memory of the war. Similarly, Ronald Reagan’s piece

³³ Letter from Baroness Young to Mr Cartwright Esq MP regarding the commemoration of the end of the Second World War in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

³⁴ Sam Edwards, 11

³⁵ ‘D-Day 40th Anniversary official brochure’ K84/1082 *Imperial War Museums*, 2-3

highlighted the heroism of American and allied veterans and the connections between D-Day and European unity:

‘What happened on June 4th 1944, was a massive demonstration of trans-Atlantic teamwork for freedom...In alliance and reconciliation we ended the war, and based on our enduring commitment to European security we have kept the peace – through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Two months ago we marked the 35th anniversary of NATO. Today, I am pleased and proud to join with you in commemorating the 40 years of peace and prosperity in Europe that the heroic landings in Normandy helped make possible’.³⁶

Reagan emphasised how D-Day and the Second World War helped to create European collaboration and peace. Veterans are depicted again as heroes in the story of Europe and symbols of American and British greatness. For Reagan, the 40th anniversary of D-Day was used to promote themes of American and European collaboration and to woo voters back home as part of his European tour.³⁷ As the previous chapter highlighted, large scale commemorations and the figure of the British and American veteran, particularly during D-Day commemorations, reinforced the transatlantic relationship and served to show both nations as world leaders. As political interest in the large scale anniversary commemorations increased, the use of the figure of the veteran was also amplified at the expense of veterans’ own agency to manage their own reunion events.

³⁶ ‘D-Day 40th Anniversary official brochure’ K84/1082 *Imperial War Museums*, 3-4

³⁷ Janet Watson, ‘Total War and Total Anniversary - The Material Culture of Second World War Commemoration in Britain’, kindle location 5166 of 6640

The media coverage of the British 1984 ceremony, similarly shows a more veteran centred narrative. Raymond Baxter, who also presented Battle of Britain events, provided a sense of commemorative continuity and his participation in both implies that D-Day and the Battle of Britain were still very much perceived as important wartime events in need of commemorating with vast coverage. Despite including traditions such as the Battle of Britain memorial flight, the 40th anniversary of D-Day was commemorated in a less militaristic and more emotional tone and it is noted that the event includes some ‘very informal scenes’.³⁸

Veterans became central to the events rather than current armed forces parades and dignitaries. Their motivations for attending are discussed by Baxter as being ‘not a sentimentality or a yearning for a high point of their lives on the whole it seems to be a feeling of almost curiosity to see the place again’ and an ‘interest in seeing friends and certainly the opportunity to pay a tribute to the many of them who have friends who were killed here on D-Day or afterwards’.³⁹ He notes, ‘some of those faces I recognise from the streets...I have seen over the last few days’, people ‘who haven’t been back for 40 years but who have come here because on this occasion the queen was going to be here and they wanted to take part in this march past’.⁴⁰ These descriptions reflect the centrality of the veteran to the occasion and the inclusion of the perceived feelings of the veterans and emotion surrounding their return. This reflects the development of Post-traumatic

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ ‘D-Day: 40 [Forty Years On] 06 June 1984 *BBC Television* BFI Identifier: 154624

stress disorder that also influenced how annual commemorations would depict veterans. As shown in the previous chapter, showing emotion became an expected part of commemorative events following the greater understanding of PTSD.⁴¹ The narrative of the event is also in keeping with the patriotic and nationalistic tones seen on Remembrance Sunday, with suggestions that veterans wanted to participate because the Queen was attending. The monarch is shown to be giving respect to the veterans as Baxter notes, ‘the Queen has said she’ll stand there just as long as they choose to march past’. She also praised ‘the heroism and the deeds of those who crossed the channel’ during her speech.⁴² This highlights how dignitaries and monarchs now viewed veterans, as heroic and worthy of great respect.

In 2019, as D-Day veterans are now in their late 90s, they became central feature of the 75th anniversary events. A British commemoration, held in Portsmouth, was attended by the Royal Family, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, and American President Donald Trump. The event consisted of a celebratory array of speeches, performances and live tributes. A most significant moment featured memories of veterans shown on a large screen, followed by surviving veterans in attendance appearing on the stage together, symbolising their rarity and status.⁴³ The Queen and the Royal Family are shown standing, clapping and giving the veterans a standing ovation.⁴⁴ This highlights the level of respect now shown to veterans and their perceived importance in the proceedings.

⁴¹ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 105

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ ‘D-Day: 75th anniversary ceremony highlights’ *Youtube* Uploaded by User : CBC News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdvfJFU7lvE> accessed 01 July 2019

⁴⁴ Ibid



Figure 5 – D-Day veterans on stage during the 75th anniversary commemorations - ‘D-Day: 75th anniversary ceremony highlights’ *Youtube* Uploaded by User : CBC News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdvfJFU7lvE> accessed 01 July 2019

As with previous commemorations, the events were also used to emphasise ties between America and the UK, as shown in the discussions surrounding Brexit and in the language of allied friendship.⁴⁵ Yet, the events themselves featured a marked focus on the veterans. The event which took place in Normandy further paid tribute to the veterans. Donald Trump began his speech by addressing the ‘over sixty veterans’ present and proclaimed, ‘our debt to you is everlasting...today we express our undying gratitude...these men enlisted their lives for a great crusade, one of the greatest of all times...to the men who sit behind me and to the boys who rest in the field before me, your example will never, ever grow old...’.⁴⁶ Trump’s speech gives veterans an almost mythical status in describing their experiences as a ‘crusade’. Referring to both the example

⁴⁵ Ashley Cowburn, ‘Trump says NHS must be ‘on the table’ in post-Brexit trade deal’ *Independent* June 04 2019

⁴⁶ ‘D-Day: Trump praises Allied forces in speech on 75th anniversary - BBC News’ *Youtube* Uploaded by User : BBC News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJLo3aaWGRA> accessed 01 July 2019

of the dead and of the veterans together also suggests that veterans are now being viewed with the same honour as those who gave their lives on D-Day.

Theresa May's speech in the official programme of the Portsmouth event also emphasises the centrality of the veterans to the 75th anniversary:

‘At the heart of those events will be hundreds of veterans: those who fought together from allied nations to secure the freedom we cherish today...It is thanks to their courage and that of our other allies that today Europe is free and at peace. It is thanks to their ingenuity and resolve that today we have the freedom to live our lives the way we wish...We will never forget all that they gave – or the sacrifices of the fallen’.⁴⁷

Despite still being a political opportunity for British and American governments, the events became veteran focused, describing them as figures of the shared values, history and friendship of allied nations. Rather than the political tactics or planning of D-Day by military officials, it is the actions of veterans themselves being described as enabling European freedom. The 75th anniversary of D-Day highlights that with every major anniversary, veterans have become more and more central to the narrative surrounding the allied victory of the war. When compared to previous years, the 75th anniversary represents a further increase in the centrality of veterans in events commemorating European ‘signal’ events. Despite not holding agency in the organisation of these politicised, mass media

⁴⁷ ‘75th ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY 1944-2019 – Official Brochure’ *Gov UK* accessed 01 July 2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/.../D-Day75_Brochure_FINAL_Lowres.pdf

events, their age and now rarity has granted veterans status in line with the Royal Family, and they are shown as much honour as tributes to the fallen.

The case study of D-Day, highlights how certain wartime events have long been promoted by the government and media due to their politically beneficial nature. Both D-Day and Dunkirk have been used to strengthen international relationships and tell a story about the allied role in the Second World War. While veterans were not central to the events in the 1950s and 1960s, more recently they have been showed with greater respect and become more central to the events as they have aged. The evolution of the representation of veterans of 'signal' events such as D-Day is in keeping with the pattern shown in the previous chapter, which saw the interest and respect for veterans increase since the 1980s as veterans have aged.

The Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain became part of British national myth, and made those who participated into famous heroes in ways that have been unique to the memory of the Second World War. As Crang describes, 'no other group of British combatants has been individually commemorated in this way and membership of the 'few' confers upon the veterans a heroic status that in some cases borders on adulation'.⁴⁸ The speech by Churchill which stated 'never was so much owed by so many to so few...' initiated the iconic status of the Battle of Britain and those that fought in it.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁸ Jeremy A. Crang, 'Identifying 'the few': The Personalisation of a Heroic Military Elite' *War and Society* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2005): 13-22

⁴⁹ 'The Few' Churchill's Speech to the House of Commons August 20 1940 *The Churchill Society* accessed 20 January 2016 <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/thefew.html>

official narrative and dates of the battle were publicly outlined in a revised Air Ministry pamphlet, which was altered by Sir Hugh Dowding and published in 1946 in the *London Gazette*. Crang outlines how efforts to document and commemorate those who fought and died in the Battle of Britain began during the war, with attempts to plan medals and commemorative lists taking place shortly after 1940.⁵⁰ Initially, difficulties arose in obtaining the details of all those living, who were entitled to be described as ‘the few’.⁵¹ This halted some of the proposals to name and give fame to surviving pilots and ‘the exact number of aircrew who took part in the battle is a matter of contention’.⁵² Nevertheless, those who were been identified as fighting on the dates set out by Dowding, between 10 July to 31 October 1940, have been awarded a special cultural status. This has grown as records of the names and details of ‘the few’ have been studied in the decades following the war.

Government records show a keen interest from 1945 onwards, to organise commemorations, memorials and other events to mark round number anniversaries of the Battle of Britain.⁵³ Unlike Dunkirk and D-Day, which saw only specific round number anniversaries being given mass coverage, the Battle of Britain dominated the press and newsreels yearly throughout the 1950s.⁵⁴ During

⁵⁰ Jeremy Crang, 15-17

⁵¹ Jeremy Crang, 17

⁵² Jeremy Crang, 22

⁵³ PREM 11/3525 ‘Secretary of State for Air Suggested provision of a permanent to commemoration of Battle of Britain’ 1960-61 , AIR 2/15455 ‘Battle of Britain: 20th Anniversary; Proposed Publication of short history’ 1960, and PREM 13/582 ‘Services, Celebrations to Mark 25th Anniversary of Battle of Britain’ 01 July 1965-30 November 1965

⁵⁴ ‘The “Many” Honour “The Few” - Battle of Britain’ 32 September 1954 *British Pathé* Film ID: 184.29

the yearly commemorative ceremonies held after the war, which featured dignitaries, modern day pilots and honours to the dead, 'the few' are singled out and named. The newsreel of 1954 states, 'men like group Captain Cunningham, George Paige...and Douglas Bader' 'meet again to re-live those days'.⁵⁵ The narrative describes the events as a time 'when a handful of young men flew to glory in our skies' and emphasises that this is 'a story that the years cannot dim'.⁵⁶ These depictions suggest that there was initially an 'infatuation directed towards the pilots of Fighter Command, the branch of the service most closely associated with the Battle of Britain'.⁵⁷ These descriptions present the veterans like heroes as shown in the commemorations of D-Day. Yet, they also present 'the few' as unique and special and as men who would have become household names and celebrities due to their participation in the most celebrated event of the Second World War in Britain.

The newspaper coverage surrounding the death of Churchill, showcased the strong cultural meaning and emotion that the Battle of Britain and its veterans generated. The front page of The Daily Mirror states 'Saluted by the few...Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft piloted by ex-Battle of Britain officers may fly over London on Saturday as a fitting tribute to Sir Winston Churchill'.⁵⁸ The article states that 'some of those "few" whose heroism in scraps over the Channel and Southern England changed the course of the war in the autumn of 1940'.⁵⁹

Having the Battle of Britain and its veterans as the main feature in the discussion

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Martin Francis, *The Flyer - British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945*, 20

⁵⁸ 'Salute by "The Few" - Spitfires Fly for Churchill?' *Daily Mirror* January 26 1965

⁵⁹ Ibid

of Churchill's funeral and legacy, is indicative of the Battle's most prominent place in the memory of the war and the unique way that 'the few' were imagined. Similarly, coverage of the funeral service for Churchill included an article featuring a large image of some of the men. The article focuses on the veterans describing how 'they gathered again yesterday ... some of the heroes who clawed Hitler's Luftwaffe from the skies of Britain and 'they gathered to do honour the man who so praised them . . . to march today at the head of his funeral procession.'⁶⁰ It describes them as no longer 'fiery, carefree young men who dared all odds. But they are still in the RAF...and the old spirit is still there'.⁶¹ This depiction in many ways serves to reaffirm the heroic place of the veterans. Their continued role in the RAF also separates them from the rest of the population and indicates they hold a continuing bravery and heroism.

As shown in the case of D-Day, ageing veterans of many battles and campaigns now receive the type of awed treatment which was originally reserved to Battle of Britain pilots. Yet, in the decades following the end of the war, these experiences and depictions of ex-servicemen were unique to the Battle of Britain and not replicated in commemorations of D-Day or Dunkirk. The individual portraits of the veterans of the Battle of Britain were therefore much more personal and selective. Those who fought in the Battle of Britain were treated in this way due to their unique position and the hugely popular and mythic appeal of the events in national memory. Distinctively, these men were shown in keeping with how they had been portrayed during the war, as 'knights of the sky, gentlemen and

⁶⁰ 'Their Debt of Honour – And Ours' *Daily Mirror* January 30 1965

⁶¹ Ibid

officers'.⁶² This combination allowed a limited group of men to assume the role as figureheads in the memory of the Battle of Britain and to become well known. There were obvious limitations to this narrative. Those who had been mechanics, ground crew or female controllers were all excluded in this definition of the Battle of Britain hero. It would not be until decades later, that other participants would be assimilated into the legacy of the Battle of Britain.

While 'the few' have continued to be praised, changes to the commemoration of the Battle of Britain reflect the evolution of the definition of the veteran as discussed in the introduction of this thesis. As Bevin boys, female veterans and others in civilian roles have become accepted veterans who can march alongside ex-service personnel on Remembrance Sunday, definitions of who is worthy of being commemorated in events such as the Battle of Britain have expanded. In 1990, the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain was commemorated with a fly past and ceremony. Raymond Baxter presented the event and described the Battle of Britain Fighter Association as a 'most distinguished and exclusive club' and 'the few' are named and interviewed including Pat Hancock and Dennis David who would continue to be featured in commemorations until their deaths.⁶³ Yet, the Battle of Britain groundcrew are 'included in this distinguished gathering' despite the focus still seems to be on 'the few' and the airplanes.⁶⁴ Evidently, groundcrew were now being featured in anniversary commemorations as important participants worthy of being praised. The 60th anniversary commemorations saw an even greater emphasis being placed on both those that

⁶² Mark Connelly, 97

⁶³ 'Battle of Britain Flypast' 1990 *BBC BFi* Identifier: 364140

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

flew and groundcrew. David Dimbleby stresses ‘it really is the veterans day and their families day to commemorate’ and notes that ‘those on the ground, they were critical’.⁶⁵ It is noted that the ceremony ‘is probably the last significant anniversary when we will see so many veterans gathered together...and the men and women who supported it’.⁶⁶ Clearly, as the definition of the veteran has increased, the inclusion of male and female groundcrew into the narrative of the Battle of Britain has become commonplace in anniversary events.

Documentaries broadcast around the time of the 60th anniversary, also began to expand the narrative of the Battle of Britain veterans. An ITV special programme to commemorate the anniversary used interviews with pilots alongside speaking to civilians who witnessed the battle from the sky.⁶⁷ Some documentaries even attempted to debunk the ‘skewed image’ of ‘the few’ by uncovering the varied nationalities and backgrounds present among the 3000 pilots and also show the importance of the groundcrew. A channel 4 *Secret History* Battle of Britain special, showcased the class divisions present amongst those who fought in the sky.⁶⁸ It also tells the story of the Polish pilots as well as Charles Pallister, an ace in the sky who was not widely featured in the publicity surrounding the battle because he did not fit the ‘particular pilot image in mind’ due to his ‘North of England accent and an engineering background’.⁶⁹ It describes how *The First of the Few* film perpetuated the myth of the upper class Battle of Britain pilot using

⁶⁵ ‘Battle of Britain 60’ 17 September 2000 *BBC TV* BFI Identifier: 587983

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

⁶⁷ ‘Battle of Britain’ *ITV* 22 August 2000 BFI Identifier 791964

⁶⁸ ‘The Few [Part of Secret History]’ 25 July 2000 *Scottish Television Enterprises* BFI Identifier: 581823

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

upper class members of ‘the few’.⁷⁰ Clearly, this documentary was made to challenge perceptions surrounding the idea of the Battle of Britain veteran and reflects the growing inclusion of forgotten participants in the Second World War.

Despite examples of commemorative programming aiming to include groundcrew and civilians, the memory of the Battle of Britain is still tied to ‘the few’. As of 2019, the last Battle of Britain pilots receive vast media attention and obituaries and newspaper coverage upon their deaths.⁷¹ These include acknowledging the life of Charles Pallister, the northern ace excluded from wartime depictions of the battle.⁷² This emphasises the status and fame given to these individuals. As shown above, the Battle of Britain has always treated ‘the few’ with a unique level of personalisation and respect.

El Alamein

In the post-war period, difficulties surrounding accessibility to the El Alamein battlefields, international hostilities and key differences in the location and lived experience of the desert war, meant that El Alamein was commemorated in two unique ways. Ceremonies were held in El Alamein to honour the dead ‘on

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ ‘Obituaries - Wing Commander Pat Hancock’ *Daily Telegraph* 25 April 2003 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1428275/Wing-Commander-Pat-Hancock.html> accessed 03/04/2019; ‘Obituaries - Gp Capt Dennis “Hurricane” David’ *Daily Telegraph* 09 September 2000 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1354606/Gp-Capt-Dennis-Hurricane-David.html> accessed 03/04/2019

⁷² ‘Air Force Obituaries - Flight Lieutenant Charles Palliser’ *Daily Telegraph* 23 November 2011 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/air-force-obituaries/8911044/Flight-Lieutenant-Charles-Palliser.html> accessed 03/04/2019

October 23rd or the closest Sunday to it'.⁷³ These were sombre in tone and included government officials and a ceremony of remembrance at the war graves cemetery in Cairo. The ceremony was depicted in 1963 as 'a simple secular ceremony' where 'representatives' of a number of nations 'lay wreaths'.⁷⁴ The 1954 ceremony combined the unveiling of the memorial to the dead in North Africa. Montgomery is depicted in newsreel footage honouring the dead alongside 200 relatives and a number of serving personnel.⁷⁵ Veterans do not appear to be included in the commemorative event and are not mentioned.⁷⁶ A Foreign Office document sent from the British Ambassador in Cairo to the Foreign Office, outlined plans for future events in 1962, stating that 'the Commonwealth Missions in Cairo, and certainly the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, do not regard the Alamein ceremony as a victory celebration' and 'it is an appropriate occasion to remember our dead'.⁷⁷ Evidently, these events were maintained in the 1950s and 1960s as solemn political commemorations to the international dead of the North African Campaign.

Foreign Office discussions highlight how the tensions in Egypt including the Suez Crisis and further Egyptian unrest impacted upon the nature of the commemorations. By 1959, the British had 'been represented by one of our Commonwealth ambassadors in Cairo' for a number of years owing to the

⁷³ 'Report on the Annual Remembrance Ceremony at El Alamein from H. Beeley (British Ambassador in Cairo) to the Foreign Office' 30th October 1962 in FO 371/ 169025 'Commemoration of Military Anniversaries' 1963

⁷⁴ 'From Cairo to the Foreign Office, Letter sent by En Clair, Mr Maitland to Consular Department' in FO 371/ 169025 'Commemoration of Military Anniversaries' 1963

⁷⁵ 'El Alamein – 12 Years After' 1954 *British Pathé* Film ID: 254:05

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

⁷⁷ 'Report on the Annual Remembrance Ceremony at El Alamein from H. Beeley (British Ambassador in Cairo) to the Foreign Office' 30th October 1962 in FO 371/ 169025 'Commemoration of Military Anniversaries' 1963

tensions.⁷⁸ There was talk in 1959 of a new ceremony to take place in El Alamein after ‘the Italian Ambassador in Cairo has informally put forward to his Canadian colleagues the idea, apparently emanating from ex-service organisations in Rome, that the Commonwealth ceremony and the German and the Italian ceremonies should be held on the same day and be co-ordinated’.⁷⁹ The British government voiced its concerns over the proposal and mentioned that the change ‘would probably provoke the popular press here the sort of comment which the Germans and Italians find particularly wounding’ and did ‘not suppose it would find favour with the ex-service organisations’.⁸⁰ Tensions restricted earlier overseas access to the sites of commemoration and fears over political repercussions, clearly impacted upon the UK government’s reaction to change the low key ceremony in 1959. In fearing international tensions, the ceremonies evidently focused on providing low-key commemorative events for governments to pay their respects to the fallen. These decisions clearly limited veteran participation and meant that they could not be represented in El Alamein itself during anniversary periods.

Alternative, veteran reunion events marking El Alamein ‘were arranged by a small group of officers close to Monty... the organisation was usually placed in the hands of a professional producer’.⁸¹ Initially held in the Royal Albert Hall in London, they also gained financial and promotional assistance from a variety of advertisers and organisations including Tobacco companies and the BBC.⁸²

⁷⁸ Letter surrounding ‘Annual Ceremony at El Alamein’ from J. G. S. Beith to the Foreign Office [?] June 24th 1959 in FO 371/142080 ‘Attendance at Annual Commemoration Ceremony held in Allied War Cemetery at El Alamein’

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ ‘El Alamein Reunion – 50 Years 1992 ’ Programmes: S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *Imperial War Museums*

⁸² See official ‘El Alamein Reunion’ Programmes: S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *IWM*

Unlike the official ceremonies in Cairo, which played down the victory of El Alamein, these events upheld the idea of the desert rats as heroic, victorious and key to the overall allied victory, in keeping with the ways in which the campaign was presented during the war. Newsreels made during the conflict, show the ‘desert rats’ as fearless and brave soldiers, who had to navigate a harsh climate in the fight for freedom.⁸³ As Fennell suggests, the North African campaign and the battle itself was given ‘saturation coverage’ and spawned a myth of the epic ‘Eighth Army and Montgomery’.⁸⁴ The ITN footage from the 1947 reunion shows a joyous celebration of victory far beyond the depictions of veterans shown in D-Day or Battle of Britain commemorations.⁸⁵ There is also a more informal tone to these events when compared to other commemorations. Veterans are also interviewed by the press about their memories of the events.⁸⁶ They are shown sitting on the floor cheering, clapping and even shouting comments during the speeches of Churchill and Montgomery.⁸⁷ A section of Churchill’s speech is shown, while the crowds shout ‘C’mon Winney’ in a playfully disrespectful manner.⁸⁸ These informalities are in stark contrast with the ways in which the Royal Family and politicians are treated during annual commemorative events, and in the official events commemorating El Alamein or the European battles.

⁸³ Overview of troop communications and events in the Middle East during 1942’ *Gaumont ITN Source Story Ref: BGU408250011*

⁸⁴ Jonathan Fennell, *Combat and Morale in the North African Campaign – The Eighth Army and the Path to El Alamein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Introduction, kindle edition.

⁸⁵ ‘Veterans Reunite at El Alamein Reunion... *Gaumont*’ 30 October 1947 *ITN Source Story ref: BGU410260104*

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁸⁷ ‘A Desert Rat Salutes Them’ 1946 *British Pathé Film ID: 1412.37*

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

The separation of location, away from the memorials and cemeteries in North Africa, perhaps enabled a more informal, celebratory style of commemoration, which could never have been acceptable at the remembrance events taking place on the beaches of Normandy, where honouring the dead was a central focus. The open celebration of victory was perhaps also made possible by the way in which the campaign was perceived during the war. According to Francis, due to its remoteness, the North African campaign 'was able to secure the status of a uniquely "civilized" war, free from the taint of violence against non-combatants that had become such a dramatic feature of military conflict in metropolitan Europe'.⁸⁹ The acceptance of celebration in the North African campaign which did not hold the connotations of the loss of civilian life seen in commemorations of D-Day and Dunkirk, perhaps facilitated the informal tone of the El Alamein reunions.

The events also reflected the unique cultures and comradeship formed in the campaign. Montgomery's speeches during the events stressed the comradeship of the desert. He stated in 1948, 'we were conscious that we were all one'.⁹⁰ This was reflected in the informal and celebratory tones of the reunions. Similarly, during the war, the 'desert rats' formed their own rituals, style and even slang as they adjusted to another climate during a time of war. These are depicted in the popular 'Two Types' cartoons created during the campaign which showed the adventures of two eccentric soldiers who cannot break free from the habits formed as result of life in the desert. The eccentric characters were perhaps inspired by

⁸⁹ Martin Francis, 'Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema' kindle location, 3437

⁹⁰ 'Battle of EL Alamein Celebration at Royal Albert Hall' *Gaumont* 25 October 1948 *ITN Source Ref*: BGU411070130

Montgomery's own 'highly individual wardrobe' and general steadfast attitude.⁹¹ They were re-invented for the reunion events, and cartoons were printed in the official programmes. These images convey the unique slang, dress and culture, which would be familiar to veterans of the desert campaign.⁹² The coverage of the events show variety acts featuring the 'two types' characters and a sing along of 'Lili Marlene' which became the signature to the memory of the North African Campaign.⁹³ As Francis suggests, the 'Desert War allowed the refurbishment of the clichés and heroic myths of an earlier era of imperial adventure', themes which are visible in the cartoons and during the reunions.⁹⁴ These cultural differences and level of comradeship most certainly contributed to the informal and unusual way in which the veterans were portrayed during reunion events.

⁹¹ Mark Connelly, 216

⁹² 'But Lady, it's the Same on Every El Alamein Reunion Night' Cartoon by 'Jon' in 1952 Official Programme El Alamein Reunion in 'El Alamein Reunion' Programmes S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *Imperial War Museums*

⁹³ 'El Alamein Reunion 1950' *British Pathé* BFI ID: 2531.18

⁹⁴ Martin Francis, 'Representations of the North African Campaign in 1950s British Cinema', *kindle location, 3473*



Figure 6 – ‘But Lady, it’s the Same on Every El Alamein Reunion Night’ Cartoon by ‘Jon’ in 1952 Official Programme El Alamein Reunion in S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *Imperial War Museum*

The anniversary reunion events to commemorate El Alamein appear to have lost cultural status after the death of Montgomery in 1976. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the events were broadcast via the television and radio and held at notable London venues including the Royal Albert Hall and the Empress Hall.⁹⁵ In 1976, after the death of their leader, they were brought to an end by Montgomery’s team who organised them. The 1986 reunion programme notes that ‘Monty’s ageing colleagues and former staff-members who had been involved in running the annual event decided that the passing years and the death of our revered leader

⁹⁵ See ‘Television’ *Lincolnshire Echo* 20 October 1950 and ‘Television and Radio’ *Daily Mirror* 25 October 1963

made the 1976 Reunion at the Albert Hall a suitable occasion to end on a high note' and 'there was tremendous disappointment amongst the veterans'.⁹⁶

Evidently, the event organisers did not see the need to continue the high profile events after the death of Montgomery. The event and its status was tied into the figure of the leader of the desert campaign and his death signalled a change in the status of El Alamein as a signal event of the war.

The death of Montgomery gave veterans the opportunity to take control over the organisation of the commemoration of El Alamein and to plan new reunions as they wished. The events were perceived as a rightful continuation of those that had been set up by Montgomery and were held as 'there was considerable feeling that he, himself, would have wished the El Alamein Reunion to continue, so that veterans of the 8th Army and the Desert Force could meet together, each year, for as long as they could possibly do so'.⁹⁷ Programmes still used the same 'Two Types' cartoons, references to desert cultures formed during the war, and continued to praise Montgomery as their leader up until the last event in 1994.⁹⁸ New events were held in Blackpool, to afford those in the North 'an opportunity to attend'.⁹⁹ The organiser of the new reunion, Alec Lewis, also set up a veterans' association, to 'ensure the continuation of the El Alamein reunion, to maintain the pride and comradeship of the Eighth Army, and to keep members informed of existing organisations and all matters of interest to veterans of the desert campaigns'.¹⁰⁰ They also created their own newssheet titled the 'new crusader' to

⁹⁶ 'El Alamein Reunion, - 1986' in Programmes S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *Imperial War Museums*

⁹⁷ 'El Alamein Reunion, - 50 Years 1992' in Programmes S.96-10-1 (1946-1991) *Imperial War Museums*

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ 'Army that's worth remembering' *Liverpool Echo* 14 October 1976

¹⁰⁰ 'Veterans' Get-together' *Liverpool Echo* 17 March 1978

imitate the ‘crusader’, the ‘official weekly newspaper’ that they had received during the war.¹⁰¹ In 1979, they also began to plan trips to the El Alamein battlefields and cemeteries.¹⁰² These efforts highlight the low-key efforts made by veterans themselves to create their own reunion events and veteran community after the death of Montgomery. While advertised in the local press, the events never regained the cultural status they had achieved when held in London and organised by Montgomery. However, it seems that the death of their leader granted veterans of the desert campaigns new opportunities to gain agency over the commemoration of El Alamein.

As veterans aged and the Eighth Army Association reunions came to an end in 1994, veterans of the desert campaign started to be imagined in keeping with those other campaigns, as elderly heroes reliving the traumas of their wartime experiences. An article commemorating the 60th anniversary in 2002 highlights this change, and was written from the perspective of a veteran’s granddaughter visiting the battlefields in El Alamein:

‘IN a dusty strip of desert, my grandfather bowed his head and wept. It was 60 years since Sergeant Jack Smith, of the Essex Regiment, had been in El Alamein, Egypt, fighting Rommel’s mighty Afrika Korps. But the sense of loss for fallen comrades was as raw as if it were yesterday. And it was the first time I had seen him cry. Jack, now 85, was one of 90 British veterans who gathered here at the weekend for the 60th anniversary

¹⁰¹ ‘Helping Hand - A Meeting for Desert Veterans’ *Liverpool Echo* 19 January 1979

¹⁰² *Ibid*

of El Alamein and the Commonwealth's last official service of remembrance. With weary limbs, walking sticks and wheelchairs, these courageous men made a 2,000-mile journey to honour their dead' ...I watched as he swapped stories with fellow vets, including men of the 7th Armoured Division – the Desert Rats... Ex-gunner Eddie Clothier, 83, of the 7th, said: "I remember Monty giving a pep talk. He said, 'We will fight or die'." The Duke of Kent, president of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and Monty's son Viscount Montgomery laid wreaths on Saturday..¹⁰³

This depiction of El Alamein veterans contrasts with the reunion events which showed young veterans as Montgomery's desert rats, celebrating their wartime achievements and desert cultures. This could be seen as a result of the ageing of veterans and the winding down of the Eighth Army Association as well as the ability for veterans to visit the graves of their wartime comrades in North Africa. In the 1950s, the Suez crisis and tensions made the desert inaccessible for veterans to organise anniversaries where they had fought. By 2002, veterans were portrayed in keeping with the solemnness of the European battles which emphasised the trauma and emotion felt by veterans re-visiting where they served. Other articles emphasise veterans reuniting with former enemies.¹⁰⁴ In keeping with similar narratives to D-Day, coverage from 2002 focuses on the aging and heroic veterans reliving traumatic memories.

¹⁰³ '60 years on, one soldier's return to El Alamein' *Daily Mirror* 21 October 2002

¹⁰⁴ 'National news – 60 years on, foes of El Alamein united in tribute' *The Guardian* October 21 2002.

Events marking the end of the war

The celebration of dates which served to mark the end of the Second World War, namely VE-Day and VJ-Day, have been commemorated in contrasting ways. VE-Day became the chosen day to celebrate victory, whilst VJ-Day and those who served in the Far East, were largely side-lined in large-scale commemorative events until the 1990s. The ways in which veterans were treated and responded to the commemoration of the end of the war, highlights the inequality present in the image of veterans in anniversary events and how veterans' own agency could change the status of 'forgotten' wartime anniversaries.

VE-Day largely promoted the idea of 'The People's War' during initial anniversary celebrations. Veterans were depicted in interesting ways, both as part of a domesticated story of the war and in light-hearted and in nostalgic tones, which reflected the celebratory nature of the anniversaries. Coverage of VE-Day emphasised London's chaotic descent towards Buckingham Palace and Piccadilly Circus.¹⁰⁵ As many service men and women were still abroad, the images of celebration were largely focused upon civilians, conveying the part played by the British people during the blitz.¹⁰⁶ Newspapers such as the *Essex Chronicle* documented the celebrations, declaring 'And all of you deserved it – May 8th...The County Town has a splendid war record of heroism, hard work and

¹⁰⁵ 'VE Day London 1945' *British Pathé* Film ID:1986.16

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

sacrifice...long live Essex'.¹⁰⁷ Local areas such as Chelmsford in Essex clearly celebrated the achievements of their civilian populations and used the celebrations to take pride in their local area. In the 1950s, this narrative continued to be present in the 'cinematic celebration of the people as hero' in films being produced and in commemorations of VE-Day.¹⁰⁸ Television specials were also produced, including 'Bless Em' All' created in 1955, which featured sketches which mocked life during the war. It was described in the *Radio Times* as a 'variety' show 'presenting some of the stars who have lightened the dark hours, and reviving memories of the war years'.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, VE-Day gained a cultural status as being the date to mark the end of the war and encouraged celebration rather than sombre remembrance.

In contrast, VJ-Day was initially absent in the anniversary events calendar. On June 5th 1946, VJ-Day was commemorated in London with a militaristic parade and commemoration. Unlike VE-Day where images of men, women and children celebrating were commonplace, VJ-Day was marked with a more military centred celebration in London. The *Illustrated London News* VJ-Day special edition includes pages displaying 'signs of victory - "heraldic" badges of British and Allied formations made famous in the late war'.¹¹⁰ The generals and war leaders who led the troops are singled out and photographed. The event seems to have been more military orientated than the VE-Day celebrations of the previous

¹⁰⁷ 'All of you deserved it' *Essex Chronicle* May 11 1945

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity – From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 129-131

¹⁰⁹ 'Bless 'Em All' 9 May 1955 *Radio Times* Issue 1643, 06 May 1955 *BBC Genome* accessed 28/01/2017 <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a75d7906576641268168a6e05285b71e>

¹¹⁰ 'Illustrated London News – VJ Day Special Edition (June 15th 1946)' in Eph.C. VJ-Day *Imperial War Museums*

year.¹¹¹ Whilst the soldiers themselves are discussed mainly as one large group, the battles in which they fought and the emblems which adorned their uniforms were celebrated. The service men and women are described as taking part in ‘the march past the King in celebration of the victory to which they had contributed so gallantly’.¹¹² The tone of the VJ-Day event of 1946 was strikingly militaristic, traditional and centred on the Royal Family.

VJ-Day was not to be a recurring date for official anniversary commemorations to take place. This could perhaps be explained by the contrasting nature of the two dates. VE-Day had been a celebration centred on the whole nation and their efforts during the war. VJ-Day on the other hand represented the end of some extremely traumatic events of the war. From the end of the war with Japan, Prisoners of War were encouraged to keep silent about their traumatic experiences. Oliver highlights that some Far East prisoners of war were required to sign a declaration and told in the Allied Land Forces South East Asia ‘warning leaflet’ not to discuss their memories and experiences with loved ones or the press upon their return.¹¹³ The painful legacy of the war with Japan was in stark contrast to the celebratory tones of VE-Day and the European battles and it is evident that governments did not want to encourage a discussion of the traumas endured.¹¹⁴

The events signalling the 40th anniversary of VE-Day in 1985, acted as a platform for ‘forgotten’ veterans to assert their own agency over their own lack of recognition and the side-lining of VJ-Day in official commemorations. The

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ Lizzie Oliver, 243

¹¹⁴ Ibid

government made a choice to commemorate VE-Day as the day to remember the end of the war in 1985, and ‘a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said...’when we celebrated VE-Day it was to commemorate the end of the war, including the Far East campaigns, so there is nothing specific to celebrate now [on VJ-Day]’”.¹¹⁵ Records relating to the planning of the 40th anniversary of VE-Day highlight the emphasis on the political motivations in choosing to celebrate VE-Day. Government reports highlight how ‘there was no major event to celebrate the 25th anniversary in 1970’, but the 40th anniversary would be marked with a special commemorative event ‘without any specific direction at either VE or VJ Day’ and ‘the date should be neutral in order to avoid resentment by VJ veterans if there were a VE event, .¹¹⁶ The event was clearly designed to avoid international antagonisms, and to present very particular themes including heroism, celebration, European friendship and reconciliation. A letter sent to the Soviet Union by Margaret Thatcher stresses that ‘it is right that we should look back and pay tribute with pride and thankfulness for the heroism of those in both our countries who fought in a common cause...the experience of the last 40 years points to the vital importance of our efforts to work patiently and realistically for better understanding and co-operation between our two countries and peoples, acknowledging our mutual desire for security and lasting peace’.¹¹⁷ The official programme for the service held at Westminster Abbey also stresses these themes, it states ‘in our prayers for *reconciliation* and *healing* we remember others as well

¹¹⁵ ‘Low Key Approach to VJ Celebration’ *The Times* 15 August 1985

¹¹⁶ ‘40th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War – Background 18th January 1985’ in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

¹¹⁷ ‘Prime Minister’s personal message to Mr M. S. Gorbachev relating to the 40th anniversary of VE-Day’ in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

as ourselves’ and ‘*Flowers* of many kinds and colours are reminders of the rich diversity and interdependence of the peoples of the world’.¹¹⁸ Clearly the events were politicised to ensure Britain could strengthen its relationship with Europe and ensure the least antagonistic reaction from German or Soviet Union leaders. There was a concern by politicians that if other nation’s ‘achievements’ were not acknowledged, that the commemorations may, according to Conservative Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Baroness Young, ‘risk’ being viewed as ‘at best nostalgic, and at worst anti-German, unbalanced and open to historical distortion by the Soviet Union’.¹¹⁹

Veterans were present at the event and seats were allocated by the British Legion to veteran’s groups. A letter from the Ministry of Defence to the Prime Minister outlines that ‘The British Legion will have an important part to play in allocating seats to the various veterans associations. I am in no doubt that they will carry out this task with sensitivity and complete fairness; nevertheless it is an area which could be subject to controversy. We therefore believe it would be helpful to provide guidelines to how the seats are to be allocated’.¹²⁰

Given the traditional nature of the service and the political motivations, it seems veterans were not central to the commemorations but played an important symbolic role in the narratives the government wished to promote. It does not appear that veterans’ own activities and parades were permitted during the event,

¹¹⁸ ‘Westminster Abbey Service to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War, Wednesday 8th May 1985’ in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

¹¹⁹ Letter from Baroness Young to Mr Cartwright Esq MP regarding the commemoration of the end of the Second World War in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

¹²⁰ Letter from Ministry of Defence to the Prime Minister - 19th March 1985’ in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

as the plans outlined, ‘military pageant and martial display by either serving forces or veterans should play second place to the to the commemorative aspects and should be avoided.’¹²¹ While veterans attending the VE-Day commemorations gained recognition as symbols and creators of the themes of peace and reconciliation, they appeared to have no agency in the planning of the event.

Veterans of the Burma Star Association and others responded that they felt anger towards the lack of Governmental support and recognition of VJ-Day. A spokesperson for the War Widows Association and FEPOW noted in 1985 that ‘it is not the people or the media of this country but the government. That old tag of the forgotten army is around our necks once again, and it is time that the Government did something for us’.¹²² Veterans and campaigners held their own events in response to there being no official commemoration to VJ-Day which included one described as a ‘protest’.¹²³ Held at the Imperial War Museum, an event was organised by veteran groups with Vera Lynn and Countess Mountbatten who stated “‘the decision to hold a general celebration of VE-Day in May was not really good enough for those people who spent another three months fighting in the most ghastly conditions and surviving in worse conditions in prisoner of war camps’”.¹²⁴ Similarly, they sought the support of local newspapers such as the *Eastern Daily Press* which commemorated VJ-Day with a special supplement to mark the 40th anniversary in 1985 and included memories from

¹²¹ ‘40th Anniversary of the End of the Second World War – Background 18th January 1985’ in PREM 19/1435 ‘DEFENCE. Celebration of 40th anniversary of Victory in Europe (VE) Day’ *The National Archives*

¹²² ‘VJ Day Anger Over “Forgotten Army”’ *Eastern Daily Press* 12 August 1985

¹²³ ‘VJ Day Protest’ *Eastern Daily Press* August 16 1985

¹²⁴ *Ibid*

local veterans.¹²⁵ Low key events held at local level were given press attention, as well as veterans' visits to Singapore and Thailand.¹²⁶ The *Eastern Daily Press* in particular voiced the views of veterans in an article condemning the official 40th anniversary of VE-Day commemorations stating:

'VE-Day was marked with celebration and thanksgiving... VJ Day by comparison will pass almost unnoticed. The lack of what might be called "official" remembrance of the battle in the Far East has stirred great emotion among many of the veterans of the campaign as well as among the widows of those who did not return. There is a deep and unshakable feeling that their war has been forgotten'.¹²⁷

Statements such as these, published in local newspapers, highlight how veterans of 'forgotten' campaigns felt about the absence of large scale commemorative coverage of the anniversaries related to VJ-Day. Similarly, these views being published show veteran groups working together with local press could act as a platform to make the views and experiences of forgotten veterans become visible.

The 50th anniversary commemorations, including the first jointly organised VE-Day and VJ-Day 50th event, shows a change in attitude towards forgotten campaigns such as the Burma Campaign and highlights the government responding to the anger and pressure from veterans. As Dawson notes, the actions

¹²⁵ 'Eastern Evening News Supplement' *Eastern Evening News* August 16 1985

¹²⁶ '650 attend VJ Day memorial service' *Eastern Daily Press* 19 August 1985; 'Special tour includes bridge of memories' *Eastern Daily Press*; July 12 1985 'Pilgrims Salute Fallen Heroes' *Liverpool Echo* November 05 1985; 'Poignant Journey to the Far East' *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* 06 August 1985

¹²⁷ 'Far Away, Yet Close to Home' *Eastern Daily Press*. 15 August 1985

of the Far East prisoners of war are examples of groups creating ‘agencies capable of re-casting its narratives into new, integrated collective form and projecting this into “public arena”.¹²⁸ The efforts of veterans themselves enabled them to gain compensation and recognition and changed how VE-Day and VJ-Day would be commemorated.

The 50th anniversary commemorations of VE-Day and VJ-Day were organised together by the government which had a dedicated ‘World War Two Commemorations Team’ to plan and run the events.¹²⁹ This commemoration, alongside those held for D-Day, show a distinct change in how the government perceived veterans and which events were being commemorated. The events also represent a shift towards large, scale mediated commemorations which were organised by the government. The 1990s saw a boom in memory and ‘the increasing number and enhanced profile of anniversary commemorations to mark the beginning and ending of wars, and their key episodes’ which were ‘fuelled and amplified by public communications media’.¹³⁰ Commemorative planning and programming expanded and became more politicised, seeking ‘to represent a historical national identity’ and ‘to create a sense of community within a culturally disparate nation’.¹³¹ An article titled ‘The Commemoration Game’ in *Focus* summarises this change in view which began in the 1980s and reached a peak in the planning of the D-Day and VE-Day/VJ-Day commemorations in the 1990s. The article describes:

¹²⁸ Graham Dawson, ‘The Theory of Popular Memory and the contested Memories of the Second World War in Britain’, 212

¹²⁹ ‘Press Release No 2’ Eph C. VE Day K95/2279 *Imperial War Museums*

¹³⁰ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 4

¹³¹ Gray and Bell, 100

‘Initially the MoD had no intention of commemorating anniversaries linked to the Second World War, but it soon became clear that the policy had to be changed...

...All sorts of events have been organised to mark the anniversaries of famous victories, mostly without any MoD involvement but, bowing to popular demand, the ministry picked three, Single service occasions to commemorate officially: The Battle of Britain and those of the Atlantic and El Alamein. Now, a tri-service project team is planning UK in two of the greatest joint events of all: firstly, the 50th anniversary next June of the Normandy landings and secondary, the end of the war.¹³²

The changes highlight the further political mobilisation of events that had previously been organised by local communities or veteran groups. The MoD declare that they will deal with the planning and co-ordination, public relations, security and ‘handling liaison with veterans wanting to participate’.¹³³ This shows the increasing importance of veterans to the government organising bodies, who had previously not perceived the cares or wishes of ex-service personnel attending events as their priority.

The press release for the events declared that ‘the government will sponsor a programme of events to commemorate the anniversary of VE Day & VJ Day in 1995. They will take place over the period 6-8 May 1995 and 19-20 August

¹³² ‘The Commemoration Game’ *Focus* November 9 1993 in Eph. C. VE-Day *Imperial War Museums*

¹³³ Ibid

1995'.¹³⁴ The VE-Day themes were described as being 'Thanksgiving for the beginning of the peace', 'International reconciliation and the coming together of Europe' and 'youth and the advantages gained by succeeding generations from victory in the Second World War'.¹³⁵ These themes reflected the celebratory tones of the original VE-Day celebrations with an added political agenda to foster international friendship and assert the status of Britain in Europe. The VJ-Day themes were more sombre and reflected the wishes of the Far East prisoners of war who felt VJ-Day had been overlooked in previous anniversary years. The government outlined the event as being in 'celebration of the end of the war' and to give 'thanksgiving and commemoration for the sacrifices of the wartime generation'.¹³⁶

The coverage of the two commemorative events portrayed veterans in very different ways in keeping with the themes set out by the government. While veterans hold a special and important role in the events dedicated to VE-Day, the tone of the ceremony of peace is highly political, featuring 100,000 dignitaries, royalty and a dedication to creating a 'better world' for the children of Europe during a ceremony in Hyde Park.¹³⁷ European friendship is central to the event, with a focus on nations joining together in remembrance and to pledging peace. Interviews with veterans emphasise emotion and memories of trauma in keeping with other commemorations of this period. One veteran notes, 'I didn't expect to come out of the war, everyday since I came out is a bonus' and he describes how

¹³⁴ 'Press Release – The nation gives thanks: Government programme to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II' Eph C. VE Day K95/2279 *Imperial War Museums*

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ 'VE 50', BBC1, May 08 1995, television broadcast.

he still sees his ‘friends who died in dreams’.¹³⁸ Other veterans interviewed discuss themes relating to the peace pledge of the commemorations. A veteran describes ‘we that came back, we are the lucky ones...it is a pleasure to be here today...all worthwhile, let’s hope our kids and grandchildren don’t have to face [war]’.¹³⁹ The use of veteran interviews to illustrate the themes of the event, serves to show how veterans were being mobilised as important figures in the legacy of the war.

The events showed the government giving veterans ample respect and opportunity to be involved in the commemoration, military traditions and orchestrated royal family appearances show a continuation of tradition reflecting annual commemorations and the original VE-Day celebrations.¹⁴⁰ Despite this, the vast coverage given to the events and the representation of veterans as heroic old soldiers, patriotic and nostalgic highlights the cultural shift towards veterans being praised and respected in British culture. The *Daily Mail* featured special edition ‘pull-outs’ during the celebrations which featured images of veterans sharing their memories with the younger generation and recalling the war with comrades. The images portray veterans in keeping with Remembrance Day ideas of the veteran as a proud, bemedalled, patriotic old soldier.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ ‘Press release’ Eph C. VE Day K95/2279 *Imperial War Museums*

¹⁴¹ ‘VE-Day: The nation celebrates – Souvenir pull-out’ ‘Queen of All Our Hearts’ *Daily Mirror* 8 May 1995 in Eph C. VE Day, K95/867 *Imperial War Museums* and ‘VE-Day: The nation celebrates - We meet again’ ‘Queen of All Our Hearts’ May 9 1995, *Daily Mirror* in Eph C. VE Day, K95/867 *Imperial War Museums*



Figures 7 and 8 – Two images showing veterans during the VE-Day 1994 celebrations - VE-Day: The nation celebrates – Souvenir pull-out’ ‘Queen of All Our Hearts’ *Daily Mirror* 8 May 1995, in Eph C. VE Day, K95/867 Imperial War Museums

The VJ-Day commemorations on the other hand, specifically aimed to introduce the forgotten veterans of who had fought in the Far East. The coverage of the events emphasises the age of the veterans and reflects the developments in PTSD. The BBC coverage began with the narrator explaining the aims and outline of the event:

This has been a year of remembrance...but tonight is the final fact to commemorate the final end to world war two, VJ Day perhaps the last great act of commemoration for most of those old soldiers who fought their way to victory. In the next few hours, we shall be bringing the nation together to honour them, to remember those who gave their lives and to celebrate that victory. Many were here yesterday...10,000 old soldiers of an army largely forgotten as it battled against the might of Japan but now

proudly marching, the cheers of a nation which has finally recognised the debt we owe them'.¹⁴²

The veterans are described in a patriotic way, as 'proud and marching' which is reminiscent of Remembrance Day services shown in the previous chapter. This echoes the ways in which veterans and the dead were honoured traditionally in modern British culture, using the rituals of remembrance seen during Remembrance Day to specifically commemorate VJ-Day. Despite this, there is a clear dedication to pay tribute to those taken prisoner in the Far East.¹⁴³ Holding a specific event for VJ-Day emphasises the government acknowledging the growing importance of the wishes of veterans and the importance of veterans' own agency in campaigning to be recognised.

Other 'forgotten' events

Large-scale commemorations of Monte Cassino and the Italian Campaign, were similarly ignored in British post-war commemorative culture. During the war, the Italian campaign was side-lined in favour of the Normandy Landings. As Connolly suggests, 'the process of forgetting began even while the operations were still under way'.¹⁴⁴ The un-recorded claim allegedly made by Nancy Astor that those in Italy were 'D-Day dodgers' had been circulated at the time which implied that those in Italy were not as heroic as those conquering the Normandy

¹⁴² 'VJ Day 1995' *Youtube* Uploaded by User : ben v.d. Biggelaar
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keNFiuVaY7M> accessed 04 February 2019

¹⁴³ 'Programme of VJ-Day Events' in Eph C. VE Day K95/2279 *Imperial War Museums*

¹⁴⁴ Mark Connolly, 255

beaches.¹⁴⁵ Later articles suggest that public forgetting of ‘non-D-Day’ offensives such as the Italian campaign caused real ‘anger’.¹⁴⁶ From 1945 to 1970, government records show little active attempts to commemorate Monte Cassino or the Battle of Anzio. While plans were made by Italian POWs to commemorate, a letter from the Ministry of Defence to the Foreign Office states, ‘we are not proposing to initiate anything ourselves’ and the only events taking place would be if ‘regiments might have decided to organise something on their own’.¹⁴⁷ It is evident that there was an indifference to form a large-scale commemoration for the Italian Campaign, perhaps as a result of its lack of dominance in the public imagination during the war itself.

While VJ-Day is now an established part of the anniversary commemorative calendar, other ‘forgotten’ events have never been able to be brought into public consciousness and the veterans of those campaigns have been forgotten. This is certainly the case for the veterans of Monte Cassino, who told the press of their dismay of the lack of public awareness of the battle during the 65th anniversary commemorations in Italy. Newspaper articles relating to the anniversary describe that:

¹⁴⁵ See ‘Forgotten Veterans Salute Their Dead’ May 14 1994 *The Times* and Nick Squires, ‘Monte Cassino Veterans Angry at D-Day Dodger Label’ *Daily Telegraph* 19 May 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/10841035/Monte-Cassino-veterans-anger-at-D-Day-dodger-label.html> accessed 01/02/2017

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Letter from G. F. L. Gilbert (Ministry of Defence) to J. M. Hollis (Foreign Office) 11 April 1964 surrounding the plans to commemorate Monte Cassino in FO 371/111618 ‘Polish Commemoration of the Battle of Monte Cassino: Invitation...’ 1954

‘Old soldiers gathered beneath the craggy mountain redoubt of Monte Cassino in Italy on Friday to commemorate one of the forgotten battles of the Second World War.

Sixty five years on, the dwindling band of British and Allied survivors of the campaign are calling for their sacrifices, and those of the 4,600 Allied soldiers who died in the battle, to finally be recognised. "It should be much better known," said Nigel Wilkinson, vice chairman of the London Irish Rifles Regimental Association...When I came to Italy a few years ago I told a young English woman that I was going to Cassino and she said 'Oh, I didn't know you were a gambler'", said Joe Reynolds, 88, of Portsmouth, who was an engineer attached to the Parachute Regiment. "She'd never heard of this place. The whole Italy campaign was forgotten. But just like the Desert Rats in the North African campaign, we're proud to be called D-Day Dodgers."'.¹⁴⁸

Evidently, veterans are deeply unhappy with the lack of publicity given to the events they experienced. Newspaper articles attempted to readdress this, by sharing stories from veterans and highlighting their heroic experiences. Despite these pleas from veterans and their supporters, Monte Cassino still appears to be a marginalised event of the Second World War. Prince Harry was invited to attend the event, presumably in a bid to generate awareness of the campaign:

¹⁴⁸ ‘Soldiers gather at Monte Cassino to remember “forgotten battle”’ 22 May 2009 *Daily Telegraph* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/5370120/Soldiers-gather-at-Monte-Cassino-to-remember-forgotten-battle.html> accessed 28 March 2019

‘Even after 70 years, it still rankles. As Prince Harry walked solemnly between rows of cream-coloured headstones in the Commonwealth war cemetery beneath Monte Cassino, veterans of the campaign recounted their lingering anger at being unfairly labelled “the D-Day Dodgers”’.¹⁴⁹

‘after meeting British veterans who had travelled to Italy for the occasion, he said: "At the end of the day this has always been referred to as the forgotten campaign – to me it makes no sense at all. Those guys in there are as important as everybody else."’.¹⁵⁰

The comments from Prince Harry clearly attempted to spur a public awareness of Monte Cassino and give some added publicity to the events that are rarely given ample media coverage. Perhaps due to these efforts in 2014, the government and media may choose a larger scale commemoration in 2024. The case of Monte Cassino highlights that even though some forgotten campaigns have readdressed the favouritism from the media and government in choosing only to honour certain campaigns, there are still groups of veterans whose wartime experiences have not been commemorated in this way.

Conclusion

¹⁴⁹ Nick Squires, ‘Monte Cassino veterans anger at D-Day Dodger label’ *Daily Telegraph* 19 May 2014 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/10841035/Monte-Cassino-veterans-anger-at-D-Day-dodger-label.html> accessed 28 March 2019

¹⁵⁰ Lizzy Davies, ‘Prince Harry marks 70th anniversary of Monte Cassino capture’ *The Guardian* 19 May 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/19/prince-harry-marks-monte-cassino-battle-commemorations> accessed 28 March 2019

This chapter has highlighted the fluctuating nature of anniversary commemorations and the competing voices in the construction of the legacy of the war, which have made some veterans visible while others have been forgotten. In the post-war decades, veterans were acknowledged by the government and press if they had served in 'signal' moments. Yet, as shown in D-Day commemorations, in the 1960s, veterans were secondary to the political agenda. As veterans have aged and commemorations continue to be politicised, these anniversaries have become hijacked by politicians and the media. The Battle of Britain has always generated political and press interest, with 'the few' gaining unprecedented cultural status. The case of El Alamein highlights a unique image of the veteran which was tied to the figure of Montgomery. Veterans gained greater agency in running their own reunions after the death of their leader, but the events never regained the media coverage they had previously received, highlighting how the prominence of wartime leaders could shape how veterans were imagined. The commemoration of VE-Day and VJ-Day shows the importance of veteran agency in campaigning to be heard and the further growing politicisation of anniversary events. The continuing lack of attention awarded to events such as Monte Cassino, highlight the ongoing inequalities present in the image of the veteran. Veterans have clearly been portrayed in a variety of ways and while some are central to the memory of the Second World War, others are invisible in popular culture.

It is clear that the way veterans have been portrayed in anniversary commemorations is highly politicised. As Jay Winter suggests, 'commemoration cannot escape its political framework. State-sponsored commemoration is a

politically sanctioned and politically funded rite of remembering in public, adjusted to a publicly or politically approved narrative'.¹⁵¹ Ultimately, the portrayal of Second World War veterans has been shaped and narrated by political forces. The lack of recognition surrounding low-key commemorations must also be noted and raises questions about the hidden views and activities of veterans themselves which have not been part of large scale commemorations. These veteran led activities will be further explored in the second section of this thesis.

¹⁵¹ Jay Winter, 'The Generation of Memory Reflections on the "Memory Boom" in Contemporary Historical Studies' *Canadian Military History* Vol. 10, No. 3 (2001): 57-66

Chapter 3

Political Representations

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which Second World War veterans have been represented in a political context, both as citizens in British society, and as figures used by political parties or groups to promote subsequent conflicts or government campaigns. It argues that until the 1980s, veterans were marginalised in political narratives of the war and treated as part of a larger group of civilians. Practical politics surrounding housing, pensions and finding employment, situated the veteran as part of a larger group of citizens who fought in a 'People's War'. The veteran became tied into a narrative surrounding the post-war social reforms and the vote for the Attlee government, which similarly emphasised the efforts of the British public.

After a lull period during the 1960s and 1970s, the build-up and rhetoric surrounding the Falklands conflict represented the moment when applied politics surrounding ex-servicemen and women were largely replaced by the use of the figure of the veteran in narratives surrounding the legacy of the Second World War. Since the 1980s, veterans have been used and referred to in rhetoric surrounding contemporary conflicts, political campaigns and in connection to the legacy of the welfare state and National Health Service (NHS). Veterans can be viewed as political symbols who, along with the memory of the war itself, have been remobilised as a result of the explosion of memory and in the construction of British national identity. Their use as political figures also impacted upon their

treatment in more recent reforms to pensions and a greater acknowledgement of the needs of veterans as they have aged. Charting the ways in which veterans have been conceptualised and imagined in political contexts, highlights the narratives surrounding this generation which have helped to create a sense of national identity based upon a misuse of British history, which has been shaped by an adherence to political ideology.

Political representations can be viewed as part of ‘identity politics’ which shape and frame how people, both as individuals and as nations, view themselves and are appealed to by groups like the government.¹ According to Calhoun, this features ‘politics either starting from or aimed at the claimed identities of their protagonists’.² The veteran can be seen as both a symbol which is part of constructed narratives of nationhood and a receiver of political narratives and policies which have been aimed at them as people who experienced the conflict. In this chapter, exploring the origins and development of the uses of the veteran as part of the legacy of the war can help to strengthen the understanding of why and how they have been discussed and imagined in a political context and the dominant representations of this generation that these efforts have created.

Ideas surrounding national identity have been cultivated in political culture by the production of symbols and indicators of nationhood, including the Second World War and its veterans. Hobsbawm and Ranger note that nations create ‘invented traditions’ which involve ‘formalisation and ritualisation, characterised by

¹ Craig Calhoun, 19

² Ibid

reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition'.³ Similarly, writers such as Anderson describe nations as 'imagined' communities.⁴ Smith describes that 'what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular *living past* has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias. It is from these elements of myth, memory, symbol, and tradition that modern national identities are reconstituted in each generation'.⁵ The Second World War and the post-war social reforms have provided symbols to those cultivating narratives of nationhood.

Scholars such as Colley stress that the origins of Britishness, which stems from the 1700s, has impacted upon international relations and how politicians have constructed a national identity.⁶ On the other hand, others emphasise the remaking of national identity after 1945. This chapter correlates with the views of David Edgerton, who argues that 'the British nation was created: it emerged out of the British Empire, and out of a cosmopolitan economy, after the Second World War. Leaving behind empire went hand in hand with the development of a peculiar kind of nationalism which entailed the rejection of imperial citizenship and imperialism'.⁷ This nationalism, he argues, was 'mostly written by the centre-left, especially those from the 1960s, tended to tell the story of the nation in terms

³ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 1

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities – New Edition* (London: Verso, 1996), 6-7

⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), kindle Locations 110-112 kindle edition

⁶ Linda Colley, *Acts of Union and Disunion* (London: Profile Books, 2014)

⁷ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), Kindle Locations 346-349 kindle edition

of the rise of the welfare state.⁸ Other key concepts deployed in national histories were such notions as appeasement, consensus, Keynesianism, post-war settlement, people's war, decline, welfare state, affluence, permissiveness, reconstruction and indeed neo-liberalism'.⁹ Veterans have been used as tools as part of a nationalism that has used the conflict, the legacy of the welfare state and the relationship between Britain and Europe, to tell the story of the British nation to win votes, secure military campaigns or help to cement a certain political agenda.

Press reports, political speeches, legislation, Hansard reports, public information films, political journals and discussions surrounding political matters in publications such as the British Legion journal, will all be utilised to gain an understanding of how Second World War veterans have been perceived and represented in a political context. This chapter does not intend to give a history of veteran pension reforms or to focus on how the Second World War broadly has been imagined in political contexts. Rather, the findings of this chapter will chart the changing significance of the Second World War veteran in British political rhetoric and culture.

Post-war decades

It can be argued that in the post-war years up until the 1980s, veterans were marginalised, both in the political use of the legacy of the war, and in the

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

narratives surrounding policy making which focused on the nation as a whole. Their identity as veterans was not appealed to by politicians in favour of the rhetoric of ‘the People’s War’, which emphasised the efforts and the needs of ordinary civilians. As Rose has discussed, during the war itself ‘Britain was depicted by numerous social commentators as engaging in a war being fought by and for a country imagined as a unified land of “ordinary people”’.¹⁰ She notes that ‘these characterisations made “the common man” central to the nation at war, celebrated diversity, implicitly advocated tolerance, and recognised Britain as a class – and gender divided society but denied that it mattered to national unity – to the image of the British as essentially one people’.¹¹ This image would permeate the post-war narratives surrounding the conflict.

Alongside civilians, an ideal masculinity was projected during the war ‘comprised of elements both from the interwar construction of an “anti-heroic” masculinity and those long associated with the soldier-hero – traits most clearly exemplified by combat soldiers’.¹² However, as Rose has shown, ‘its successful enactment...depended upon being visibly a member of the fighting forces’.¹³ The dominant masculine image of the soldier was to the detriment of those in reserved occupations, as Robb, Pattinson and McIvor have explored.¹⁴ They describe that ‘during the Second World War, the man in uniform was held in high esteem. To be a combatant was to be deemed manly’.¹⁵ By contrast, the man who was not defending his country on the battlefield, at sea or in the air was largely invisible

¹⁰ Sonya O. Rose, 3

¹¹ Sonya O. Rose, 6

¹² Sonya O. Rose, 153

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Juliette Pattinson, Arthur McIvor and Linsey Robb, *Men in Reserve: British Civilian Masculinity in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), kindle Locations 251-253, kindle edition.

¹⁵ Ibid

culturally, and, by implication, considered less of a man'.¹⁶ Evidently, during the war masculinity was centred upon armed service, leaving some groups marginalised both in the narrative of national identity and in notions of masculinity. As Rose suggests, 'representations of national identity in wartime either subsume or deny the significance of other identities'.¹⁷ In the case of the Second World War, the national and masculine ideals which created notions of national identity were the narratives of the 'People's War' and the soldier hero, at the detriment of other groups such as men in reserved occupations.

This chapter builds on this idea of marginalisation, but argues that in contrast to the important wartime place of the soldier, in the post-war period, the veteran was actually marginalised in favour of the continuation of policies and a national image which reflected the 'People's War' narrative. While the 'pleasure-culture of war' dominated British culture in the post-war period and stressed the heroic military efforts of the Second World War soldier, veterans were imagined as part of a nation of civilians in the practical policies being set in place to ensure both they, and the civilian population, gained the welfare, housing and healthcare reforms promised as part of the Beveridge report.¹⁸ Veterans were given little preferential treatment and classified largely as part of a wider group of citizens, all equally deserving of reforms which would benefit the whole of society. Finding employment, securing pensions and housing were all key ways in which returning ex-servicemen and women were discussed in a political context. Yet, these failed

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Sonya O. Rose, 9

¹⁸ Graham Dawson has described his own memories of the 'pleasure-culture of war' which were a feature of the 1950s and 1960s and fuelled by toys and films. See Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes – British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), kindle edition, kindle locations 5711-11649

to address veteran-specific issues such as assimilating back into civilian life from armed service or dealing with traumatic wartime experiences. The government presented former soldiers as people easily assimilated into civilian life who formed part of a wider group of citizens who had voted for social reform.

Government information films and British newsreels highlight how the armed service man and woman was perceived as part of the civilian community upon returning home. This transformation appears to have been used in political films and in British culture more broadly, to reintroduce veterans into civilian life as part of the wider population, and highlight the advice and support available. Upon demobilisation, veterans were issued with ‘civvies’ suits, and a ‘lump sum, payable in instalments through the post office, which varied according to rank and length of service’.¹⁹ Government information films use the symbol of civilian clothes to illustrate the transformation from armed service to non-combatant life. In the Ministry of Information film titled *Resettlement Advice Centre*, a soldier is greeted by the narrator with ‘welcome back civilian’, which denotes that returning soldiers were automatically categorised as civilians upon their demobilisation.²⁰ The soldier describes the housing and job worries he has, stating that ‘there ain’t half gonna be some problems for me when I get home...I still don’t know what I get for my bit in this war’ and the narrator replies ‘in civvy street now...there’s the resettlement advice service...its run by the Ministry of Labour, they’ll discuss your problems in private, and it doesn’t matter who you are or what your problem is, they can advise you...it’s free and it’s *your* service’.²¹ The concerns of the

¹⁹ ‘Civvies for the ex-service men’ *The Manchester Guardian* October 04 1944 and Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over: Social History of Britain, 1945-51* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1985), 23

²⁰ ‘Trailer - Resettlement Advice Centre’ 1946 *British Pathé* Film ID: 1487.12

²¹ *Ibid*

former soldier are shown as easily rectified. In the film, the soldier is transformed into the civilian in an instant by replacing his uniform with a civilian suit. The film makes no mention of the man as a soldier or his wartime experiences and it serves to show him in his transformation into one of the civilian population. Similar images were depicted of servicewomen in newsreels showing the clothing coupons given to ex-WRENS. The film shows a woman transform from sailor to civilian through buying a 'civvy' outfit. It describes 'So our ex sailor girl steps out feeling pretty good and all ready to face civvy street.'²² In this depiction of demobilisation, clothing is all that is needed to transform a WREN into a civilian. These images highlight how returning service personnel were perceived. While during the war, their endeavours were singled out and those in uniform were depicted as heroic, once the war came to an end, veterans were shown as easily demobilised and no different from the rest of the civilian population in British culture and political language.

Veterans were discussed in political narratives in the post-war period with reference to practical politics which impacted the entire civilian population. Housing reforms highlight how the government was reluctant to grant veterans preferential treatment in certain areas. Bevan (Minister of Health) was quoted in 1946 as stating 'I do not subscribe to the view that ex-Service men must be given complete priority as ex-service men' and while the local authorities can treat veterans as needing 'special consideration', the 'criterion must be the overriding need of the applicant and not the category to which he belongs'.²³ Comments such

²² 'Service Into Civvies' 23 July 1945 *British Pathé* Film ID: 1383.04

²³ 'Housing needs of ex-service men – No overriding priority' 25 October 1946, *Daily Mirror*.

as this emphasise how veterans were not given preferential treatment or treated any differently to other citizens in the plans for housing reforms.



Figure 9 - Harold MacMillan demonstrating life in a 'people's house' in 'A Focus of Interest at the Ideal Home Exhibition: Types of "The People's House"', Mar 15 1952, *Illustrated London News*

Government house building schemes like the 'People's House' emphasise how some new housing proposals even played on the People's War narrative. The term was coined by Harold MacMillan, the Minister for Housing and Local Government in 1952. The scheme was described as creating 'the kind of house that the Minister would like the authorities to build during 1952' and 'the object is to get more homes from a limited supply of materials, labour and capital, and to reduce the capital costs and rent'.²⁴ The Conservative government's use of the term 'People's House' emphasised that houses were being built to aid the whole nation, rather than for veterans specifically. A newsreel showing the first 'People's House', stresses how the new home benefitted wives as much as

²⁴ 'A Focus of Interest at the Ideal Home Exhibition: Types of "The People's House"', Mar 15 1952, *Illustrated London News*, 453

husbands.²⁵ The footage shows the amenities that would help housewives, including showing a hatch for the dining space which 'saves the housewife' carrying trays.²⁶ The terminology and the description of the new houses is in contrast to the rhetoric used by Lloyd George after the Great War which promised a land fit for heroes and famously referred to the building of 'homes fit for heroes'.²⁷ Yet as Reece notes, the building of houses was far slower than anticipated and 'by 1923 there was a greater shortage of houses than at the end of the war'.²⁸ Perhaps because of the failure of the housing scheme of the 1920s, the government wanted to move away from similar slogans which made promises to ex-servicemen specifically. Similarly, the 'People's House' scheme reflected the aim to aid the entire civilian population, and played on the Conservative evoking of the People's War narrative. In the housing reforms, veterans were clearly marginalised in favour of reforms which aided and referenced the needs of the whole population.

The government aimed to make assimilation back into civilian life easy for veterans by creating specific policies to help them find employment. When looking for work, special measures were put in place to aid ex-servicemen. *The Reinstatement in Civil Employment (Procedure) Regulations (1944)* made by the

²⁵ BBC Archive, '#OnThisDay 1952: Newsreel's Margaret Hubble gave viewers a tour of the first "People's House" to cost less than £1,000', Twitter video, 2:21, posted by "@BBCArchive," Jan 25, 2019, accessed Jan 25, 2019, <https://twitter.com/BBCArchive/status/1088847259436019712>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Peter Reece, kindle edition, kindle location 2573 of 5031

²⁸ Ibid

Minister of Labour gave veterans the entitlement to gain their previous job back upon returning home.²⁹

Public information films offer an insight into how the government conceived the employment aims and needs of returning veterans. *Cotton Come Back*, made by the Central Office of Information and sponsored by the Board of Trade and Ministry of Labour, was a fictional film promoting post-war industries. It shows a returning veteran fearful of being unable to find work. In the first scene his girlfriend asks whether the Lancashire industrial town has changed, he replies 'I don't suppose I'll find much has when I come out looking for a job'³⁰ The veteran is referring to his concerns about the future of the cotton industry and his fear of a lack of jobs. The concerns of a working-class family are also taken into consideration in the film and the community attend a discussion at the town hall with mill owners about the future of the industry.³¹ While the veteran asks 'what have we got to come back to', civilians are also shown asking questions about the future of the industry, including those who lost their jobs during the Great Depression.³² The film tries to promote the revitalisation and modernisation of the cotton industry and the veteran is depicted as having particular concerns as part of a community.³³ It shows cotton factory bosses persuade the community to give cotton another chance and the veteran is shown as the future of the cotton industry alongside other younger members of the community and is given hope of

²⁹ 'The Restatement in Civil Employment (Procedure) Regulations', 1944 *Legislation Gov* accessed 23/03/2018 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/sro/1944/880/made>

³⁰ 'Cotton Come Back' (1946) *BFI In View* accessed 06/03/2018 <https://www.bfi.org.uk/inview/title/6293>

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*

employment after being demobilised.³⁴ The film and the reforms show the government drive to ensure veterans gained employment and presents them as wishing to move on from their wartime experiences and help to revive the nation and find work. Yet, as with housing issues, veterans are shown as part of the civilian community, who all have their own concerns surrounding post-war work.

Veterans who were disabled appear to have been treated differently to the majority of veterans who were described as part of a wider group of citizens upon their return home. The *Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944* specifically created measures to ensure those who were disabled could secure employment. Industrial training and rehabilitation training facilities, a disabled persons register and a disabled persons quota, all ensured that those wounded by war or in other capacities were able to gain special treatment in order to gain work. The Act even specified that in cases where there were a shortage of opportunities for the number of disabled persons seeking them, preference would be given to veterans.³⁵

These measures suggest that the government was dedicated to helping disabled veterans specifically secure employment and gave them preferential treatment in the employment schemes. The introduction of the organisation Remploy as part of the Act, further highlights the dedication from the government to assist disabled veterans. The Remploy scheme was set up in April 1945 and enabled the severely

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ 'Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944' *Legislation.gov*
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/7-8/10/enacted> accessed 09 Feb 2019

disabled to gain employment in purpose built factories.³⁶ The scheme gave disabled veterans a special status, and a level of support which singled them out in society along with other disabled members of the community. It cannot be overlooked that the government set out special measures to aid the employment of disabled veterans. Unlike non-disabled veterans, the *Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944* and Remploy factories ensured that those disabled by war would be acknowledged as having served and given extra support to the rest of the veteran population.

Similarly aiding those who were disabled by war and their families, were a range of new laws which reformed pensions as a result of pressure from the British Legion. Writers of the British Legion journal in 1948, outlined the difference in attitude surrounding pensions and provisions for veterans since the Great War, noting how ‘some of us remember when we got half wages if we were maimed and off work, as indeed the Minister of Pensions remembers’.³⁷ For the veterans of the Great War, charitable organisations were the main source of support for returning veterans and they ‘received little or no governmental assistance’.³⁸ Therefore, during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, organisations such as the British Legion and the government endeavoured to ensure that veterans were better treated upon their return home. In 1941, an article in *The Times* declared ‘every step must be taken to assure that adequate preparation is made for their absorption into civilian life at the end of the war’.³⁹ Newspaper

³⁶ ‘Remploy has 60-year history’ 22 May 2007 *BBC News* accessed 07/07/2019 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6680067.stm>

³⁷ ‘British Legion Journal’ Vol 48. No. 2, (February 1948), *Imperial War Museums* E.80 / 258 *Imperial War Museums*

³⁸ Peter Reece, kindle location, 1717

³⁹ ‘Service men after the war – British Legion plans’ *The Times* 31 January 1941

articles and the government actions highlight the level of debate surrounding pensions, and the clear importance placed upon them by the government and veteran organisations. The British Legion called for change to war pensions during the war, calling pensions ‘a disgrace and a shame to the country’.⁴⁰ They asserted that they would be adopting a “virile and militant policy” towards the Ministry of Pensions in order to gain ‘better pensions’.⁴¹ The government responded with a reassessment and the *Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act of 1943*. The document set out an appeal and tribunal system for veterans to appeal against being denied pensions.⁴² The law was expanded in 1947, to allow the dependants of deceased veterans to appeal for pensions, specifically if the veteran had a health condition which had been made worse by wartime service.⁴³ Similarly, reforms were made to the types of conditions perceived as worthy of pensions. The loss of the SS Athenia, which was sunk at the start of the war, prompted changes in attitudes towards mental trauma and the allocation of war pensions for neurosis.⁴⁴ As Jones *et al* note, ‘the Ministry found it impossible to exclude soldiers traumatised by the experience of battle if it could be shown that there was no predisposing condition’.⁴⁵ Provision of pensions was also extended by the changes in attitude that ‘it was difficult to prove that unexplained symptoms had not been caused or aggravated by military service’.⁴⁶ The reports highlight the role that the British Legion and veterans themselves had in fighting for their pension rights.

⁴⁰ ‘British Legion says pensions are a disgrace’ *Daily Mirror* 12 February 1940

⁴¹ ‘Pensions for war disabled – British Legion call for better pensions’ *The Times* 03 June 1940

⁴² ‘Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act, 1943’ *Legislation Gov* accessed 20/03/2018
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/6-7/39/contents>

⁴³ ‘The pensions appeal Tribunals Act (Modification) order 1947’ *Legislation Gov* accessed 20/03/2018
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukso/1947/1143/contents/made>

⁴⁴ ‘Ex-merchant seaman wins pension appeal’ *Manchester Guardian* 18 October 1946

⁴⁵ Edgar Jones, Ian Palmer and Simon Wessley, ‘War pensions 1900-1945’: changing models of psychological understanding’ *British Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 180, (2002): 377

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

Despite the push for further changes, the additions made to pensions during this period do emphasise a dedication from the government and bodies such as the British Legion to ensure pensions were adequately provided.

When compared to the aftermath of the Great War, veterans of the Second World War benefitted from a more providing government in the acknowledgement of their employment and pension needs. Nevertheless, news of complaints surrounding the demobilisation process highlight some of the frustrations felt by the returning soldiers. One article encapsulates the tedium of the demobilisation process and the ‘demob dumps’ that were ‘the “Belsens” of the nearly demobbed – grim air locks between soldiering and civvy street, calculated, you’d think, to drive any nonsense out of the time-served soldiers head that life ahead is any picnic’.⁴⁷ The article continues, ‘the feeling of reaction and frustration is insidious and real... Why not get T. Atkins’ documentation over and send him on leave until his number is called? Would it be any dearer on the country? On the contrary. He could look for a house, he could look for a job’.⁴⁸ This highlights the frustration and lack of ease felt by veterans about the demobilisation process which was clearly tedious at times. Government policies and newsreels do not appear to show these emotions and present returning to civilian life as straightforward.

The Mary Ferguson ‘Help Yourself by Asking Us’ columns in the *Daily Mirror* also stresses some of the concerns facing returning veterans. As Allport shows, the publication considered itself ‘the paper of the forces’ and openly presented

⁴⁷ Stanley Harris, ‘Those Demob Dumps’ *Daily Mirror* 1 May 1946

⁴⁸ Ibid

some of the issues readers were facing as the war was coming to an end.⁴⁹ Topics include letters from ex-servicemen who felt unable to assimilate into civilian life and wished to go back to the armed forces. It outlines how they could go about returning to the forces:

Servicemen have been writing to me recently asking If they can get back into the Army, RAF and the Navy although they are already out on release leave. They are finding too many complications tied up with a civvy suit and a bowler hat. Some can get back into the Services with no trouble at all—others, who left the decision too late, will have to re-enlist and lose all benefits of previous service.⁵⁰

Clearly, not all returning soldiers were keen to go back to civilian life because of the difficulties they faced once home. Other returning soldiers had gained new skills and experiences during the war, which led some to want to change careers upon returning home. Despite schemes like the *Resettlement Advice Service* and the legislation which aided veterans to go back to pre-war jobs, the realities of settling back into previous roles or attempting to changing career appear less straight forward than representations show. Another Mary Ferguson *Help Yourself by Asking US* column states that ‘soldiers back at the old job are “bored to tears”’. That is what many of them tell me’.⁵¹ The article describes a number of examples of former soldiers who wanted to change careers, including one man interested in becoming a diamond polisher:

⁴⁹ Alan Allport, kindle location, 610

⁵⁰ Mary Ferguson, ‘You Can Go Back – Help Yourself by Asking US’, *Daily Mirror* 20 March 1946

⁵¹ Mary Ferguson, ‘They Are Lucky In their Loyal Wives – Help Yourself by Asking US *Daily Mirror*, 20 March 1946

‘I am an Ex-serviceman aged 25. I find I cannot settle down in my own trade. I am a copyholder in the reading department of a publishing house. While in the Army I was trained as a gun fitter, and now I feel I must do something practical and use my hands...can I get training to become a diamond polisher and cutter?’⁵²

The advice given is by the secretary of the *Diamond Management Association* who notes that ‘the young ex-soldier might get a place as a trainee at a diamond cutting firm, but the money they would pay him would not keep him’.⁵³ Mary Ferguson adds that while he may be able to gain training ‘Disabled men get a better chance. They are being trained as diamond polishers and cutters through the Government’s *Disablement Resettlement Scheme*’.⁵⁴ This letter and response suggest that some veterans wanted to change careers but they did not necessarily have the information or opportunity to do so. The response from Ferguson is notably discouraging and shows how disabled veterans were treated differently by the government and this made opportunities for them more accessible than for non-disabled veterans.

Similarly, an ‘ex airman’ who worked as an ‘aero engine fitter’, wanted to retrain as a motor mechanic and was told by Ferguson, ‘he was turned down because an aero engine fitter has *NOT* got the right experience for working with motors of heavy buses. If he is determined to be a motor mechanic in a big transport depot he could work towards that end by going into the workshop as a beginner’.⁵⁵ The article shows more of the difficulties present for veterans attempting to change

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

careers and the blunt realities of lack of experience or opportunity. It appears to have been harder to change roles without experience or the right circumstances to be accepted on training schemes. Interestingly, despite Mary Ferguson's willingness to respond to the disgruntled views of veterans, there is a lack of sympathy in the direct tone used in response to some of the letters and in the article titles. Specifically titles such as 'They Are Lucky In their Loyal Wives', hint that veterans should get on with post-war life and avoid complaining or upheaval to their families.⁵⁶ It seems that both the government and the press largely saw soldiers return to civilian life as something that ought to be straight forward and they should be able to ease back into previous roles without complaint.

Despite clear reforms to support returning soldiers, the political and cultural tendency to marginalise the specific needs of veterans and present them as part of a larger group of citizens fails to showcase the complexities of the demobilised veteran experience in the post-war world. As Allport has also discovered, 'even some of the most fortunate and ultimately well-adjusted of ex-servicemen later acknowledged that their return to civilian life in 1945 was difficult...the years immediately following the Second World War were a period filled with tension, anxiety and anger'.⁵⁷ These contemporary portrayals correspond with how veterans were encouraged to 'not express emotion, and soon after the war...encouraged to forget about their experiences'.⁵⁸ This attitude to veterans is in keeping with the argument of this chapter which suggests that in the post-war

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Alan Allport, kindle location, 4272

⁵⁸ Nigel Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 148

years, veterans as a specific group became disregarded in favour of the image and needs of the British civilian population group, in which ex-servicemen became assimilated. Government policies and representations of returning veterans in political culture do not express the hardships facing veterans at this stage of their life.

The contrast between how Britain's veterans were treated compared to their American counterparts, further highlights how the British government marginalised returning soldiers in favour of policies which aided and reflected the whole nation. In 1944, Roosevelt created the *Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944*, also known as the GI Bill. The *Manchester Evening News* described the new US policies as 'an attempt to face up to the post-war problem so far as the ex-serviceman is concerned' by helping 'GI Joe' with housing loans, university education and unemployment support.⁵⁹ While the GI Bill emphasised how special schemes were set up for the veteran exclusively, no large scale policy was set up aimed at veterans specifically in Britain. The American GI Bill served to place US Second World War veterans as special and different to the rest of the civilian community. Unlike Britain, which had endured widespread civilian bombardment, American civilians had largely been unharmed unless they had taken up roles in the armed service. These key differences explain how and why veterans in America were treated differently with specific reforms designed for them.

⁵⁹ Harold Butcher, 'The way back for GI Joe' *Manchester Evening News* May 14 1945

While the GI Bill does not seem to have been discussed in depth in British newspapers, some veterans in the post-war period criticised British reforms, particularly when related to the ways in which veterans were treated in America and Canada. Robert England wrote in 1950, how ‘the bombing of civilians had blurred the distinction between servicemen and civilians’ so that there is ‘less distinction between the treatment of the veteran and non-veteran’.⁶⁰ He rightly noted that the reforms and pensions aimed to aid the ‘whole society’ rather than favour veterans specifically.⁶¹ A veteran himself, England suggested that Canadian and American support for veterans presented a far more thorough and veteran specific set of post-war reforms.⁶² As one review of the book noted, ‘in the United Kingdom the compensation and rehabilitation programme for veterans has been on a more restrained scale and has indeed become partially merged in the revolutionary social planning of the Labour party’.⁶³ Evidently, even during the post-war period, contemporaries began to compare the ways in which veterans were treated in differing nations. The comparisons further emphasise how the British government marginalised veterans in the post-war period, viewing them as part of a wider community of a population which had all endured warfare.

Like the practical politics which aimed to serve the entire population after the war, the emphasis was mostly on praising the nation as a whole as the catalyst for change in the rhetoric surrounding the post-war social reforms. Attlee’s speeches convey the idea that the welfare state and NHS resulted from the people’s hard work during the war and could be sustained through their continued effort. In a

⁶⁰ Robert England, 4-6

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Hughes, Sam H. S., ‘Twenty Million War Veterans (Review) *The Canadian Historical Review*, Volume 31, No. 4, (1950): 421-422

speech recorded by *British Pathé*, Attlee appeals to the nation stating, 'I am talking to you all today because I am asking you to help to make this country more prosperous...we want to begin to enjoy the things we've had to wait for, for so long, we deserve them...let us all join together now in one more great effort, for this time for victory over scarcity. We showed the world what we could do during the war, lets show it again now, let's pull together for prosperity'.⁶⁴ Attlee suggests that by enduring further post-war shortages, the nation would be able to rebuild itself and enable a better future in the form of the social reforms and greater success. He clearly places all those who helped the war effort as central figures in the realisation of successful reconstruction and in the creation of a better future. In his bid to win the general election in 1951, Attlee also drew upon the narrative of the social reforms as originating with the people of Britain. He noted, 'I am proud of our achievement. There is an immense amount more to do. Remember that we are a great crusading body, armed with a fervent spirit for the reign of righteousness on earth'.⁶⁵ Attlee presents the people of Britain, as creators of the social reforms and as a united and determined nation. As Noakes suggests, speeches such as these reflect how 'Labour politicians building a new welfare state in the 1940s looked back to the war as a time when Britain had been fighting for a new future, as much as against Fascism'.⁶⁶ These speeches link to the 'People's War' narrative of the nation as a whole joining together to vote for change. Unlike the conservative narrative, they 'corresponded more closely to popular feeling and the needs of the war effort than the traditional Churchillian variety' and the 'belief that men or women fighting for their country were entitled

⁶⁴ 'Mr Attlee calls to the nation' 1946 *British Pathé* Film ID: 1378.10

⁶⁵ Clement Attlee, 'Leader's speech, Scarborough 1951' *British Political Speech* <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=161> accessed 20 June 2018

⁶⁶ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, 4

to a fair share of the fruits of victory was in accord with natural justice'.⁶⁷ These narratives would go on to shape the legacy of the welfare state and NHS and mould how veterans would be represented in relation to these reforms.

Despite not being central to Attlee's narrative, the idea that those who fought being important in enabling the Attlee government gain power, was popular with the conservatives and would later shape how this generation would be discussed in relation to the legacy of the welfare state.⁶⁸ For the Conservative Party, blame was placed on organisations such as the Army Education Corps and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), for giving servicemen and women socialist ideas. ABCA focused on providing lectures, pamphlets and discussion groups which would enable soldiers to gain an understanding of current affairs and military and political matters. A film issued to an American audience as a training device, highlighted the ways in which the British government aimed to educate their soldiers during the war through ABCA. It quotes Oliver Cromwell's idea that 'the citizen soldier must know what he is fighting for and love what he knows'.⁶⁹ The film suggests that ABCA can draw upon this idea, and give them 'knowledge of the facts' by 'instructing the soldier on current affairs and on the progress of the war' and to 'help the soldier come to well-balanced views of his own'.⁷⁰ The film presents soldiers as politically active and keen to resolve issues that the Labour Party would later champion. A soldier notes, 'this is our country and if there is injustice, inequality it's our fault for allowing it' another states,

⁶⁷ Paul Addison, *Now the War is Over: Social History of Britain, 1945-51*, 12

⁶⁸ Penelope Summerfield, 'Education and Policies in the British armed forces in the Second World War' *International Review of Social History* Vol. 26, No. 2 (1981), 133-158

⁶⁹ 'THE BRITISH AND CURRENT AFFAIRS - ABCA 23690' *Youtube* Uploaded by User: Periscope Film on 20 December 2012

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

‘why not write to your MP about it’ and the other soldier replies, ‘yes that’s just it, we’ve got a parliament it’s up to us to say who goes there and to make sure they do the job when they get there, there’s no use bellyaching and doing nothing about it’.⁷¹ Clearly, even during the conflict itself, organisations such as ABCA were representing soldiers as having the interest and ability to make a difference about their future by understanding current affairs and politics. Addison notes that the Army Education Corps and later ABCA ‘had a mildly left-wing reputation’.⁷² Rose similarly highlights that the organisation was seen as a real threat by the Conservative government. They banned the discussion of the Beveridge report in the ABCA pamphlets, and Churchill himself attempted to halt the movement in fear of politicising soldiers and undermining the authority of officers.⁷³ The idea of Army education as giving the soldiers of the Second World War socialist ideas, would be the narrative that would later help to shape leftist images of the legacy of the welfare state, with the ex-serviceman as central figures as implementers of the post-war reforms.

The suggestion that all British soldiers gravitated towards the radical reforms of Clement Attlee and the Labour government, stands in contrast to the figures surrounding voting patterns and the views of some of the veterans who voted in 1945. Summerfield shows that voting patterns were not as the rhetoric implies, as ‘by no means all servicemen voted’.⁷⁴ She describes that ‘64% put their names on

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 146-147

⁷³ Sonya O. Rose, 94 and Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945*, 151

⁷⁴ Penelope Summerfield, ‘Education and Policies in the British armed forces in the Second World War’, 133-158

a special Service Register in November 1944, and 37% (just over half of those who registered) actually voted by post or proxy in July 1945, a total of 1,701,000'.⁷⁵ Summerfield suggests that the impact had by veterans on the overall Labour victory was small.⁷⁶ Similarly, the views of some veterans themselves go against the narrative that all soldiers who did vote were inclined to vote for Attlee. Spike Milligan, the comedian and writer, describes the differing political views between himself and his comrades during the conflict in his war memoirs. While some of his comrades felt that 'Churchill was going gaga' and unsuitable for the role of Prime Minister in 1945, others felt '[Churchill]'s in his prime. Attlee has the personality of an overlauded vest'.⁷⁷ Milligan describes that when he discovered Attlee had won the election he thought, 'after having that wonderful man Churchill, we now have someone who looks like an insurance clerk'.⁷⁸ While intentionally humorous, these comments suggest that not all who voted in 1945 took Attlee seriously as a leader, due to his personality when compared to the charismatic Winston Churchill who had been their wartime hero. These comments further suggest that while some soldiers believed in the Attlee government, others such as Milligan viewed Churchill as a true leader who had seen the war to victory. While this only represents one view of the 1945 election, Milligan and his comrades' attitudes suggest that not all veterans were willing to vote against their wartime leader. As Fielding notes:

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Spike Milligan, *Goodbye Soldier* [Reissued 2012 edition] (London: Penguin books, 2012), 132-135

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

‘during the summer of 1944 it was discovered that many members of the home-based forces had not registered to vote. It seems that left to their own devices about three-quarters of soldiers would have failed to fill in the appropriate form. This was evidence less of political apathy and more of inbred cynicism. Many distrusted the world of politics and politicians to such an extent they felt voting would make no difference to their lives’.⁷⁹

Despite the differing views amongst veterans and the lack of real impact of the number votes generated by servicemen, the idea of the service vote in favour of Attlee would permeate into later government rhetoric surrounding the Second World War generation.

As discussed in detail in Chapter One, there was a clear lull in political representations of the war in rhetoric and culture in the 1960s and 1970s, and an indication that ‘the war would have trouble functioning as symbol of British unity and shared identity’ during this period of ‘public knowledge of wartime atrocities’.⁸⁰ In keeping with the trends seen in commemorative anniversary events and the lull in interest in remembrance, dominant political references Second World War veterans are more difficult to trace in the 1960s and 1970s.

The 1980s can be viewed as a turning point, when politicians began to refer to and utilise the figure of the veteran as part of the mobilisation of the legacy of the war. Rather than continue to disregard veterans and the military memory of the war,

⁷⁹ Steven Fielding, ‘What Did ‘The People’ Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election’ *The Historical Journal* Vol. 35 No. 3 (1992), 628

⁸⁰ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* 4-5

they were used as a tool to champion conservative ideas surrounding the nation and to foster support for the Falklands.

Before the Falklands conflict, Margaret Thatcher had already evoked the legacy of the war in numerous speeches and at engagements. She highlighted her feelings towards those who had fought during the Second World War during the 1979 Festival of Remembrance: ‘the values you stress—service, loyalty and a true patriotism—are not and never will be old fashioned; our country has never needed them more’.⁸¹ This comment suggests that Second World War veterans, along with those from other wars, are figures of the ideals of Britishness. The conservative claim over the memory of the war was further solidified, after the hijacking of the ‘scruffy’ attire of Labour leader Michael Foot during the 1981 Remembrance Sunday service. Foot was described by a Labour MP as looking ‘as if he was taking part in a demo rather than a solemn act of respect’ and it was alleged that ‘he showed gross discourtesy’.⁸² While Foot stressed that he ‘meant no respect’ in his casual attire, conservative MP John Carlisle ‘tabled a commons motion attacking Mr. Foot’s dress at the ceremony’.⁸³ These harsh criticisms over Foot’s attire from his own party and from the opposition helped to cement the conservatives as holding values which aligned with the memory of war, patriotism, militarism and ensuring Britain’s place in the world. Letwin describes how Thatcherism had “‘taken on” as its two greatest enemies socialism and the “cultural revolution of the 1960s”...these two phenomena are, to the Thatcherite way of thinking, the great agents of dependency, the causes of Britain’s decadence

⁸¹ ‘Festival of Remembrance Speech’ 10 November 1979 *Thatcher Foundation* accessed 01 July 2019, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104166>

⁸² ‘“Scruffy” Foot Rapped’ *Daily Mirror* 09 November 1981

⁸³ ‘Foot: I meant no disrespect’ *Liverpool Echo* 09 November 1981

and decline'.⁸⁴ The Second World War and military memory provided Thatcher with a tool to present certain values and ideas of Britishness and to generate support for the Falklands conflict which went against the perceived values of the opposition.

In the 1980s, veterans were presented as predecessors to the Task Force entering the Falklands conflict. Upon reclaiming the Falklands in June 1982, Thatcher described those in the Task Force as the successors of those who fought in the Second World War. At a Conservative rally in July, Thatcher noted, 'the lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history. This generation can match their fathers and grandfathers in ability, in courage, and in resolution. We have not changed. When the demands of war and the dangers to our own people call us to arms—then we British are as we have always been: competent, courageous and resolute'.⁸⁵ In this speech, Thatcher describes the new generation of soldiers as successors to those who fought in previous conflicts. The 'fathers' and 'grandfathers' are most certainly veterans of the Second World War. The narrative of a nation of courageous and resolute armed services, echoes the Churchillian narrative of the war seen in the speeches of the wartime leader. Thatcher's adoration of the wartime generation and later descriptions of them as the predecessors to the heroes of the Falklands, shows how the veterans of the Second World War were being discussed in political culture as heroes and figures of past military greatness. Monaghan explains that this narrative was engineered to stand

⁸⁴ Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (Hammersmith: Fontana, 1992), 45

⁸⁵ 'Speech to Conservative Rally at Cheltenham' 03 July 1982 *Thatcher Foundation* accessed 01 July 2019
<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104989>

‘alongside earlier transcendent moments of national identity such as the rout of the Spanish Armada, Trafalgar and Waterloo, and most notably, that other triumph over Fascism, the Second World War’.⁸⁶

The media also adopted these narratives and presented Second World War veterans as predecessors to the 1982 Task Force. Events featuring veterans of the Second World War became opportunities for the media and dignitaries to draw comparisons between the soldier heroes of the past and present. Prince Charles attended the fortieth anniversary of the Bruneval Raid. On his visit to the commemorative event in Normandy, Prince Charles stated: ‘when this event was planned little did any of us know that both 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the Parachute Regiment would be involved in a conflict 8000 miles away in the South Atlantic, covering themselves in glory, and living up to those legendary traditions prized by their predecessors 40 years ago’.⁸⁷ These comments suggest that those who fought in the Second World War set the standards of heroism and military prowess that are echoed in the regiments participating in the Falklands conflict. Similarly, in a report from *The Times* highlighting the Church of England’s approval of the conflict, an event is referenced which features veterans of the Second World War. It is noted that ‘in Liverpool Cathedral, the large congregation of servicemen and ex-servicemen took part in the annual commemoration of the Battle of the Atlantic of the Second World War followed by a march past’.⁸⁸ A reference is then made to the nature of the Falklands conflict as a ‘just war’.⁸⁹ These

⁸⁶ ‘Dov S. Zakheim, ‘Mrs Thatcher’s War: The Rise and Fall of an Ideologue’ in *The Political Legacy of Margaret Thatcher* ed. Stanislao Pugliese, (London: Politico’s Publishing, 2003), 190

⁸⁷ ‘Task Force Praised by Price’ June 21 1982, *The Guardian*.

⁸⁸ Clifford Longley (Religious Affairs Correspondent) ‘The churches: armed force is justified’ May 03 1982 *The Times*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*

references to the Second World War and the subtle comparisons being made by members of the church, showcase the varied ways in which comparisons and references to veterans and the Second World War were being made to justify and explain the Falklands conflict in the press.

This invoking of the Second World War and its veterans can be shown as a way in which the conflict was made justifiable by the government and media. Eric Hobsbawm tried to make sense of the nationalistic tones echoed during and after the conflict in 1983. He highlighted that ‘this upsurge of feeling had nothing to do with the Falklands as such’ but ‘everything to do with the history of this country since 1945’.⁹⁰ He describes the Falklands conflict as a symbol of the nation clutching onto the memory of British power, at a time when the nation was continuing to decline as an economic power and coming to terms with the loss of Empire.⁹¹ Hobsbawm viewed it as ‘a kind of war which existed in order to produce victory parades’ which is why ‘all the symbolically powerful resources of war and Empire were mobilised on a miniature scale’.⁹² Veterans were one such resource, and along with the memory of the Second World War itself, became a hallmark of Britain’s past military and world success in government rhetoric and political culture.

For high profile veterans and those within the government, experiences of the Second World War were raised by the men themselves as markers of comparison and to give them authority to comment the Falklands. Lucy Noakes has noted that

⁹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Falklands Fallout’ *Marxism Today*, (January 1983), 14

⁹¹ *Ibid*

⁹² Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Falklands Fallout’ 15

this allowed members of parliament to identify themselves as ‘old soldiers’ with expert military experience and knowledge.⁹³

Prominent Liberal, Frank Byers, was one such veteran who made numerous comparisons between the Falklands conflict and his experiences and military tactics of the Second World War. Byers states that:

‘I have been involved in three invasions. Any combined operation has its attendant risks, but I think that our commentators would be wise to remind themselves of the Second World War slogan, "Careless talk costs lives". As many of your Lordships will know, an integral part of our successful landing in Normandy and our managing the difficult task of establishing the beach-head was our ability to maintain, largely through the Canadian Army in Kent, the deception that in reality the main invasion was to take place in the Pas de Calais. If our newspapers and radio at that time had embarked on the sort of speculation we have read and heard in the last few weeks, we should never have kept Hitler, the German High Command and Rommel guessing for those precious few days when they did not know where to commit their reserves. Of course we must have a free press and a free media, but there is a strong case for our so-called commentators and experts who are airing ideas to count 10 before they do so’.⁹⁴

Byers was clearly concerned about the level of military tactics being leaked in the press. He used his authority as a veteran of the Second World War to explain his

⁹³ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, 112-114, 123

⁹⁴ Lord Byers quoted in ‘The Falkland Islands’ HL Deb 20 May 1982 vol 430 cc803-70

worries. The stating of his own involvement in wartime invasions, serves to show his standing to discuss such matters. There is a contrast between the Second World War and the management of the press in keeping military operations secret, with the ways in which information surrounding the Falklands invasion is being freely distributed. This presents the Second World War as a marker of how military operations and the press *should* be conducted and controlled, and further emphasises how the war is viewed as a symbol of military prowess. According to his Oxford DNB entry, Byers was enlisted in the Royal Artillery and became ‘lieutenant-colonel on the staff of the Eighth Army’.⁹⁵ Due to his wartime achievements ‘he was appointed OBE in 1944, mentioned three times in dispatches, awarded the Croix de Guerre with palms, and was created a chevalier of the Légion d’honneur’.⁹⁶ As a member of parliament and decorated veteran, Byers clearly saw his wartime experiences as valuable to the discussion of the Falklands, and presented himself having the authority to comment on the developments of the conflict, both because of his status in parliament and his Second World War achievements.

High profile veterans were also described in the press as being able to offer advice and insight into the Falklands due to their involvement in prestigious events of the Second World War. Their experiences in the Second World War were described as giving them seniority and authority, and such leaders were shown as heroic and suitable commentators to the of the Falklands conflict. An article in *The Times* states that Sir Arthur Harris, Marshal of the RAF, ‘gave his seal of approval to the

⁹⁵ ‘Byers, (Charles) Frank, Baron Byers’ 19 May 2011 *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* accessed 20 June 2018 <https://doi-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/30889>

⁹⁶ *Ibid*

military action taken by the Falklands task force'.⁹⁷ The article notes that the veteran commander directed aircraft such as 'Lancaster bombers and Spitfires' and he referred to the young men flying Harriers and Vulcan bombers over the Falklands as "the same breed" as those he used to command'.⁹⁸ The article clearly presents Arthur Harris as a suitable authority figure to comment on the Falklands conflict, because of his leadership and involvement in the Second World War. The mention of his leadership of certain types of aircraft used in the Battle of Britain and in bombing raids further emphasises how the war is perceived as a marker of influence. As Houghton has noted, Harris holds a complex place in the legacy of the Second World War and both his leadership and Bomber Command's 'wartime role has proved somewhat difficult to fully locate within the "finest hour" mythology'.⁹⁹ Notably, 'the early 1990s saw old controversies surrounding the wartime actions of Bomber Command revive and descend to new depths of ferocity'.¹⁰⁰ Yet, in 1982, Harris' words are suggested to offer encouragement to the Task Force. The article presents the comparison between the Task Force to the Battle of Britain and Bomber Command pilots as complimentary, and suggests that Harris was a figure of wisdom and authority.

Following their retirement, the boom in memory, the ageing of Second World War veterans and a heightened interest in the legacy of the war as a political marker of national identity, Second World War veterans gained greater

⁹⁷ "'Bomber" Harris approves of runway action' May 03 1982 *The Times*.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Frances Houghton, 'The 'Missing Chapter': Bomber Command Aircrew Memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s' Kindle location, 4778. Kindle edition.

¹⁰⁰ Frances Houghton, 'The 'Missing Chapter': Bomber Command Aircrew Memoirs in the 1990s and 2000s', kindle location, 4807

governmental support and recognition. In the 1980s and 1990s, politicians started to create reforms to flatter them as voters and acknowledge them as they approached old age. With many of this generation of veterans retiring in the 1980s and 1990s, pressure was building from the British Legion to provide greater support to them as they reached old age. As one article published in the *Guardian* in 1982 highlights, ‘age and retirement are bringing a steadily increasing number of problems for the Ministry of Defence and for the other agencies concerned with the welfare of Second World War veterans’.¹⁰¹ It notes how ‘injuries for which 40 years have been little more than minor irritants are causing major problems as veterans become older’ and ‘with retirement also come psychological problems, particularly for former prisoners of war’.¹⁰² The press report clearly outlines the rise in ill health amongst this generation of veterans. It shows a growing awareness that Second World War ex-servicemen and women were beginning to decline and would require extra support.

This period also saw a growing awareness of incidents of war trauma and illness as a result of the aftermath of the Vietnam war in America and the Gulf War in Britain.¹⁰³ As Simon Wessley writing for *The Times* in 1993 noted, ‘the enduring psychological difficulties faced by some veterans of the Vietnam war that led American psychiatrists to identify Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).’¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Anne McHardy, ‘Second World War veterans’ problems reach peak’ *The Guardian* 28 June 1982

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ See Martin Fletcher, ‘Doctors Confirm Gulf War Illness’ *The Times* 02 May 1994 and Simon Wessley, ‘The Stress of Peace Keeping – Will soldiers returning from Bosnia need psychiatric help?’ *The Times* May 18 1993

¹⁰⁴ Simon Wessley, ‘The Stress of Peace Keeping – Will soldiers returning from Bosnia need psychiatric help?’ *The Times* May 18 1993

Evidently, in the 1980s and 1990s, the ageing of Second World War veterans and the mounting awareness of PTSD was creating a new need for greater support for this generation of ex-servicemen and women.

Discussions about the need to take care of veterans also coincided with the major commemorative anniversaries of the Second World War of the 1990s, which spurred new debates about whether veterans were being adequately treated by the government.¹⁰⁵ A Normandy veteran, G. P. Quinn, wrote in a letter to the *Daily Record* in 1994 that he felt it was ‘scandalous that the foot soldiers of the D-Day Landings...should have to fork out between three and four hundred pounds to get to the 50th anniversary of Normandy, while the many hangers-on will be going for free...surely the veterans...deserve better from Her Majesty’s Government – or are they truly skint?’.¹⁰⁶ Letters such as this highlight how anniversaries were creating new debates about the governments treatment of veterans in social and commemorative contexts. Similarly, the press reporting during commemorative occasions noted how veterans and the British Legion were determined to gain greater support from the government. An article published in *The Times* during the build-up to the 50th anniversary of D-Day noted that, ‘Britain may be one of the few Allied nations without a Minister for Veterans but, as this week’s dispute over the D-Day commemorations has shown, the British Legion is a powerful voice’.¹⁰⁷ A British Legion parliamentary representative and Labour Co-operative

¹⁰⁵ See Alan Hamilton, ‘Old soldiers refuse to fade away’ 21 April 1994 *The Times*. and ‘You Said It’ *Daily Record* 14 February 1994

¹⁰⁶ ‘You Said It’ *Daily Record* 14 February 1994

¹⁰⁷ Alan Hamilton, ‘Old soldiers refuse to fade away’ *The Times* 21 April 1994

politician, Alf Morris, stated that ‘the Legion are an extremely dedicated bunch of people who are not without parliamentary clout. But for them to be more effective, the Government needs to be much better organised in dealing with veterans’ affairs’.¹⁰⁸ Morris clearly saw a specific government department as a solution to enabling the work of the British Legion to be better managed and for more veteran specific services to be readily available. Similarly, Earl Haig, a veteran himself and chairman of the British Legion raised his concerns and those of the organisation to the government in 1997. He explained that:

Due to the difficulties of old age which add to the effects of war disabilities, there is an avalanche of new cases for the appeal tribunals to deal with...All this work is greatly facilitated by the good relationship which exists between the Royal British Legion and the Department of Social Security... The Royal British Legion has signalled for some time the need to establish a special veterans' unit within a government department, under one Minister with responsibility for ex-service matters who would oversee the resettlement operation. The unit would act as a focus for policy-making and as an advice centre to help people to make the right approaches...Given the increasing numbers of Second World War people who need help, there is a strong case for a government department to help the ever-ageing, ex-service community to deal with officialdom. Those who are close to ex-service organisations would obviously turn to them for help, but many are not necessarily connected with the Legion, or regimental or other associations. It is those people who have a myriad of problems ranging from disability to

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

housing resettlement who would benefit considerably from having one agency to which they could speak which would at least understand their problems...It is my view that a veterans' unit within a government department would be able to co-ordinate ex-service affairs and to focus support in directions where there is a real need...¹⁰⁹

The discussion raised with the government to form a specific veterans' department and a Minister for Veterans was evidently in response to the concerns of the British Legion and the aging of the Second World War generation of veterans. Representatives such as Earl Haig and politicians recognised the need for a bespoke department that addressed their needs directly. Lord Howe (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence) responded that while the government was already dedicated to the needs of veterans, particularly in the War Pensions Agency, the idea for a specific department would be considered. Howe stressed the government support for veterans, noting the contrasts between what the commemorative events achieved and the aims of these reforms. He notes that D-Day, VE-Day and VJ-Day commemorations 'were visible demonstrations of the appreciation of the whole nation, albeit that they centred on the events of the Second World War'.¹¹⁰ Howe notes that 'those commemorative events were, by their nature, transitory affairs. In contrast, the welfare of the ex-Service community, and of their dependants, is a permanent concern of the Government'.¹¹¹ The debates showcase a shift in attitude towards the government reassessing the needs of veterans, specifically the Second World

¹⁰⁹ Earl Haig quoted in 'Ex-servicemen's Welfare', HL Deb 16 January 1997 vol 577 cc340-56

¹¹⁰ Lord Howe quoted in 'Ex-servicemen's Welfare', HL Deb 16 January 1997 vol 577 cc340-56

¹¹¹ Ibid

War generation, as they entered old age. The change in attitude towards trauma, the rise in interest in memory and commemoration and the British government dedications to aid veterans all influenced new policies which benefitted the Second World War generation.

The reforms made to The War Pensions Agency, highlight how the government implemented reforms to provide greater support to veterans. Alongside a continuing political interest in the Second World War and changes in understanding of trauma and the effects of war, more recent reforms could be attributed to the planning and creation of the military covenant of 2000 which is a ‘contract that is supposed to exist between servicemen and women and the civilians on whose behalf they are willing to die’ and is described as ‘an informal understanding, rather than a legally-enforceable deal, but it is nevertheless treated with great seriousness within the services’.¹¹² The Veterans Agency took over the same duties as the War Pensions Agency in 1994 and the remit and scope of the organisation clearly became broader, seeking to help veterans beyond the claiming of pensions. A 2003 report notes, ‘in 2001 the Government appointed a Minister for Veterans' Affairs within the Ministry of Defence, and launched the Veterans' Initiative intended to improve the support given to Service personnel throughout their lives by better co-ordination across government of veterans' policy and support’.¹¹³ The reshuffle clearly implemented the requests made by the British Legion in hiring the first Minister for Veterans in 2001 and creating

¹¹² Andrew Sparrow, ‘What is the Military Covenant?’ *The Guardian* 4 March 2008

¹¹³ National Audit Office, ‘Improving Service Delivery – The Veterans Agency by the Comptroller and the Auditor General’, HC 52228, March 2003, 15

the Veterans Agency as a part of the Ministry of Defence, with 291 members of dedicated staff in 2002.¹¹⁴ Evidently, these changes represent a clear effort from the government to recognise the social and financial needs of all veterans, specifically those aging ex-servicemen and women of the Second World War. Despite some re-branding, the organisation appears to undertake the same commitments and supports pension applications and issues of veteran welfare in the UK.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the introduction of the veteran's lapel badge, symbolises yet another way in which the government aim to acknowledge the ex-service community.¹¹⁶ The badge represents another way in which veterans have become more recognised and singled out by the government as a social group which requires specific support. While recent research highlights the need ongoing reforms to the aid given to younger generations of ex-servicemen and women, the 1980s onwards saw the government begin to respond to the needs of the aging Second World War veteran population and acknowledge the ongoing impact of war.¹¹⁷ Veterans are depicted in this context as deserving members of society who need greater support.

The ageing of Second World War veterans alongside their growing perceived importance in society has influenced both a rise in veteran centred practical politics, but also in how they have been depicted and utilised by politicians and campaigners. In recent decades, politicians and the media have begun to use the

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, 'Veterans Agency rebranded to "Veterans UK"' <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk> accessed 10 May 2018

¹¹⁶ International Affairs and Defence Section - Claire Taylor and Louisa Brooke-Holland, 'Medal Campaigns' 27 July 2012, *House of Commons Library* accessed 16 October 2017 researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02880/SN02880.pdf

¹¹⁷ See research being undertaken by scholars at the 'Observatory for Veteran Affairs' <https://www.omva.co.uk/members> accessed May 15 2018.

veteran as an important tool to illustrate the past. Personal testimony ‘constitutes the dominant genre of “modern memory” of war’ and has roots in the oral history movement of the 1960s and the continued emphasis on the lives of ordinary people in history.¹¹⁸ As shown in the previous chapter, the media reporting of commemorative culture has adopted personal testimony as part of the coverage of the events.

Political parties, filmmakers with a political agenda and party officials have similarly drawn on the use of personal testimonies of veterans to encourage emotional connections between the public and the political messages related to memories of veterans. The use of the aged war veteran as providing an insight into the past can also be attributed to the life cycle and how the elderly have been viewed throughout history. Both the turn to witness testimony along with the boom in memory as well as their age has resulted in Second World War veterans being used to create an emotional response to voters to certain campaigns, including the labour party narratives surrounding the threat to the NHS and welfare state and during the 2016 European Referendum.

As the post-war consensus has allegedly broken down since the 1980s, and government cuts have made the future of the welfare state and NHS less certain, labour politicians and left wing activists have mobilised Second World War veterans and the generation who experienced war as the founders and champions of the original aims of the reforms.¹¹⁹ There have been vast changes to the NHS

¹¹⁸ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 49

¹¹⁹ See Robert Page, *Revisiting the Welfare State*, (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2007) Rodney Lowe, ‘The Second World War, Consensus, and the Foundation of the Welfare State’ *Twentieth Century British History* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1990): 152-182, Paul Addison, *The Road to*

and welfare system in the 2010s, including the new ‘bedroom tax’, the introduction of universal credit, financial cuts and outsourcing taking place in the NHS.¹²⁰ These changes have sparked new political uses of the legacy of the 1945 election, as the social reforms of the post-war period are perceived to be coming under threat.

Unlike Attlee’s lack of direct reference to the concept of a service vote in his speeches, as veterans have become important and scarce figures, the myth of them voting for change alongside the British people has been mobilised by filmmakers and politicians. One example of the ways in which veterans have been used to champion the reforms of the late 1940s is in political cultural films such as Ken Loach’s documentary *Spirit of ’45* made in 2013. It clearly represents the Second World War generation as soldiers who were consciously voting for the social reforms in 1945. The film merges interviews with politicians and activists with veterans and the men and women who remember the Great Depression, the war and the post-war reforms. It presents veterans and British civilians as founders of the reforms and suggests that they now in crisis by the Conservative government, being sparked by Thatcher in the 1980s, and calls for the older generation to educate young people on the meaning of 1945.¹²¹

Second World War veterans are depicted mostly as soldiers coming home from war. They are represented through the voice of actors and in archival footage. An

1945, Henry Pelling, ‘The 1945 General Election Reconsidered’ *The Historical Journal* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1981): 399-414

¹²⁰ See Randeep Ramesh, ‘Welfare reform: “most radical shake-up for 60 years”’, *The Guardian* 11 February 2011

¹²¹ *The Spirit of ’45*, directed by Ken Loach (Dogwoof, 2013), film.

actor playing a returning soldier describes upon returning home, ‘there is one question, what about the future, will we, the people who have won the war drive home our victory against fascism, defeat our pre-war enemies of poverty and unemployment?’.¹²² It is unknown where this quote was sourced, or whether it was Loach’s fictional interpretation of how a returning soldier may have felt. It suggests that returning soldiers were concerned that the veteran unemployment of the interwar period would happen again. It echoes the rhetoric of Attlee in his call to the nation to continue fighting against poverty and unemployment after his appointment as Prime Minister. Loach has clearly adapted the original narrative of the Labour party as presenting the people as involved and active in fighting for change in the post-war world. Similarly, an activist speaker notes, ‘the experience of war taught people that when the state needs you to be organised collectively, in fact they’ll force you into the army to be organised collectively, and you can be incredibly powerful and you can defeat fascism, and they came back imbued with that spirit of saying anything is possible’.¹²³ This narrative clearly presents the generation that fought during the Second World War as consciously aware of their collective power and the issues facing them upon their return from war. While it is unclear how many of those interviewed are veterans, the narrative presented in Loach’s film suggests that the service vote was a real and conscious factor in the creation of the post-war reforms.

Interestingly, Loach’s film uses the footage of the ABCA promotional film to illustrate that the soldiers of the Second World War were aware and politically

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

active via Army education and this enabled their choice to vote for Attlee.¹²⁴

While the ABCA is not discussed in depth, using the footage from the promotional film examined above presents soldiers as politically educated and pro-active in voting for Labour. The film also features an archival clip of Maurice Petherick, a conservative M.P. who was against the education of soldiers, reading a statement he made: ‘I am more and more suspicious of the way in which the lecturing to and the education of the forces racket is run, I maintain most strongly that any of these subjects which tend towards politics, even if the lecturers are Tories, are wrong...do something about it, unless you want to have the creatures coming back all pansy pink’.¹²⁵ Using such a quote presents the conservative view as crudely against the mass education of the army. Showing this footage of Petherick highlights how Loach is aligning the film’s message with the idea that right wing politicians were suspicious of what education may do to shape political views. The film suggests that being educated did have an influence in enabling soldiers to take control of their future. Critics of the film, including Fielding, have called Loach’s film ‘the Myth of ’45, for it peddles a fantasy, albeit one that provides comfort during these hard times for some on the left’.¹²⁶ The film is clearly aimed to provide support for the Labour party, and uses the figure of the Second World War ex-servicemen, alongside those that were part of the civilian population, as champions of the reforms which were created by the Attlee government.

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Maurice Petherick quoted in *The Spirit of ’45*, directed by Ken Loach (Dogwoof, 2013), film.

¹²⁶ Steven Fielding, ‘Ken Loach’s Spirit of ’45 is a fantasy’ *The Guardian* 08 March 2013

With huge changes taking place to welfare and healthcare under the Conservative government from 2010 onwards, the Labour party itself has drawn upon the 1945 election and the myth of the service vote in their political campaigns. One Second World War veteran in particular, Harry Leslie Smith, has been readily used as a figurehead in the party campaigns, and continues to be evoked, even following his death in November 2018 by Jeremy Corbyn and labour campaigners.¹²⁷ Harry Leslie Smith was born in Barnsley in 1923 and witnessed terrible poverty during the Great Depression.¹²⁸ He enlisted into the RAF in 1941 and served in Germany after the war where he met his wife and witnessed the plight of refugees.¹²⁹ Smith's sense of self and use of the internet will be the topic of Chapter Seven of this thesis, which serves to highlight how he used the narrative of the service vote and the role of ordinary people in creating the welfare state and NHS to form a unique identity, using his cultural currency as a Second World War veteran, alongside his childhood memories of poverty, to participate in political activism using the internet.

¹²⁷ Harry Leslie Smith, 'My generation's hard fought lessons are being forgotten' 10 May 2017, *The European* <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/my-generation-s-hard-fought-lessons-are-being-forgotten-1-5008755> accessed 21 October 2018

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Ibid



Figure 10 - Harry Leslie Smith featured in the January 2019 Labour Party promotional video -The Labour Party, 'This is what our country could be with a Labour government, watch and share', Twitter video, 3:40, posted by "@UK Labour" Jan 16, 2019, accessed Jan 25, 2019, <https://twitter.com/UKLabour/status/1085584734959403008>

After Smith's death in November 2018, his legacy as a veteran activist and champion of the welfare state and NHS was mobilised by the Labour party and other political campaigners. The Labour Party used the image of Harry Leslie Smith in his RAF uniform in the 2019 Political Party Broadcast video which was shown on television and shared via the internet. A framed image of Smith in his Second World War army uniform is displayed in a scene depicting a family home as Corbyn declares 'we'll end the privatisation of the NHS and fix the broken care system'.¹³⁰ The subtle use of Harry Leslie Smith, whose views aligned with the pledges to preserve the NHS, serves to show the perceived emotive power of Second World War veterans to voters and suggests a link between the values that they fought for and those which are under threat. Like Loach's film, the 2019

¹³⁰ The Labour Party, 'This is what our country could be with a Labour government, watch and share', Twitter video, 3:40, posted by "@UK Labour" Jan 16, 2019, accessed Jan 25, 2019, <https://twitter.com/UKLabour/status/1085584734959403008>

Labour Party broadcast connects the actions of ordinary men and women who served during the conflict with the social reforms of the late 1940s.

Similarly, an event held in memory of Smith at the Conway Hall in London on February 12th 2019, demonstrates how the views of one veteran could be used to symbolise the perceived actions of a generation by Labour politicians and activists to encourage voters and suggest a continuity between past and present Labour values. Organised by Smith's publisher *Icon Books*, the memorial event was distinctly political and featured an array of speakers. The political campaigner and journalist Owen Jones, and the *Unite* Union leader, Len McClusky, gave speeches alongside filmmakers and Smith's only surviving son John Smith. The special event was hosted by the Associate Editor of the *Daily Mirror*, Kevin McGuire, Harry Leslie Smith is described as 'admired and respected' in his 'fight for social injustice'.¹³¹ A speech made by Jeremy Corbyn is telling of how the life and experiences of Harry Leslie Smith have been woven into a narrative surrounding the Second World War generation and present Labour concerns surrounding the welfare state, the NHS, refugees and warfare:

'It is wonderful that we are here in Conway Hall to celebrate the life of Harry Leslie Smith because this hall is the place where we all come to when we need to commemorate somebody who's fallen, or we need to launch a campaign to drive out an injustice...this hall is a place that has special meaning for many, many people in all aspects of the Labour

¹³¹ 'Remembering a Rebel' *Youtube* Uploaded by User: UniteTheUnion on 12 February 2019 accessed 13 February 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ7jEDNKgn4>

movement...The lovely words that he [John Smith] wrote to me to say that he will carry on his dad's work...well you won't be alone because we're all going to carry on Harry Leslie's work...

... He was... a giant of our movement, he could capture people's attention and appeal to all generations. Because his was a real life experience, the son of a miner, growing up in the Great Depression, caring for an ill sister and defeating fascism. That is what turned Harry into a socialist...in 1945 at the end of the Second World War all those young men and women that took off their uniforms and put on their working clothes wanted to build a country that was decent, that was fair that was just. Every newspaper, particularly by the way the *Daily Mail*, predicted that the Tories would win the 1945 election by a landslide led by Winston Churchill, *how* wrong they were in measuring the feelings of ordinary people, and by the way they've got it wrong a few more times since then as well [cheers from the crowd]. That election resulted in a Labour government committed to social change, committed to building houses, committed to building the National Health Service...that was achieved by people like Harry who gave their all to ensure that we had a national health service'...¹³²

Corbyn's speech tells a narrative about the Second World War and its legacy, aligning Smith's experiences to those of his generation. The story of Smith's life emphasises living through poverty, experiences of witnessing hardship in post-war Germany and the wave of change in Britain brought about by the 1945

¹³² Ibid

election as voted for by Smith and his contemporaries. These representations highlight how the myth of the service vote in the creation of the welfare state has been mobilised by politicians and activists and embodied in the figure of the Second World War veteran. Smith is used in Corbyn's speech as a representative of his generation who are all shown as politically active and all voted for change in 1945. The symbolism of replacing the uniform with civilian clothes reflects Attlee's speeches and the public information films. Yet, the narrative distinctly suggests that it was those in the armed services specifically who voted for Attlee. Corbyn rallies his own anti-conservative views and a dedication to preserving the welfare state and NHS by honouring Smith's life and mobilising the narrative of the service vote. These examples highlight how veterans have been used as figures representing the creation of the post-war social reforms and have been mobilised by current Labour politicians to attack perceived threats to the NHS and welfare state.

Whilst left-wing interpretations of the Second World War generation have continued to mobilise narratives surrounding the welfare state, the NHS and the service vote, veterans have also been discussed in relation to Britain's place in Europe in a variety of ways. The 2016 referendum surrounding Britain's relationship to the rest of Europe, known as 'Brexit', saw Second World War veterans being used by political organisations and parties on both sides of the argument. In the build up to the European referendum on June 23rd 2016, Second World War veterans were specifically mobilised due to their age and cultural currency. Those seeking to leave Europe drew upon veterans who described their reasons for fighting during the Second World War as being for British freedom

and autonomy. The narratives drew on ideas of the war as central to a distinct sense of national identity. On the other hand, pro-European campaigners emphasised the desire for peace, and how Europe could protect the world from more conflict. Veterans were used on all sides of the Brexit campaign, being shown as wise and symbolic figures whose exemplary service and sacrifice gave them a cultural currency to persuade the British public.

The press and political organisations wishing to leave the EU, utilised the image and views of elderly veterans who championed narratives about British independence and fears surrounding dictatorship from European chiefs in Brussels. An article from the *Sunday Express* sponsored by the *Veterans for Britain* group, described one veteran's reasons for voting leave. The article noted, 'Colin Ashford, 97, survived the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940 and is now part of the Veterans for Britain group supporting Brexit'.¹³³ He is quoted stating, 'the main reason I give for supporting the Leave campaign is that when we entered the Second World War we believed that we were fighting to retain our democracy and freedom which we had known in pre-war days...gradually all that has been eroded by the European Union with all the petty regulations and mindless bureaucracy...I feel that the politicians post Second World War have betrayed all the men who fought for Britain and our independence'.¹³⁴ These comments align with the narrative that the war was fought for freedom and represents a time when Britain stood alone. As Weight notes, the Second World War, 'honed the island identity of the British'.¹³⁵ The narrative of Britain as a distinct, island nation able to stand

¹³³ "“Politicians have betrayed men who fought for Britain” war hero, 97, on why UK must leave' *The Sunday Express* 12 June 2016

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Richard Weight, *Patriots* (London, Macmillan, 2002), kindle location, 1933, kindle edition.

alone against fascism was clearly mobilised amongst those wishing to leave the European union. The article stresses Mr Ashford's participation in Dunkirk, as this perhaps gives his views extra impetus, with June 1940 being the period when Britain was perceived as standing alone. His comments also align with the rhetoric of the Second World War generation as the founders of the welfare state. Mr Ashford is quoted as feeling the reforms they fought for as being under threat, 'just think how much it is costing us weekly and yet the same time our health service is in crisis for want of money'.¹³⁶ The idea that Europe is attempting to become a dominant force with a mass army, like the Nazi regime is also inferred, suggesting that Europe presents a threat to peace. Ashford is quoted as stating: 'It worries me that they want to have a single EU army. I don't think that is very good at all. If any trouble arises they won't do anything'.¹³⁷ These arguments borrow from a variety of narratives surrounding British national identity and the war and place the veteran as an authority figure due to his wartime credentials and advanced age. Speaking in support of *Veterans for Britain*, a pro-leave organisation set up in 2016, the veteran is used to bolster their aims of putting forward 'the Defence and Security arguments for the UK to vote leave'.¹³⁸ The organisation adheres to a far-right interpretation of Europe and aligns with the ideas of British independence stressed by parties such as UKIP.¹³⁹ While veterans interviewed are not as radical as some of the UKIP member attitudes to immigration and EU law, they are used by political organisations and the press to sway the public towards these issues.

¹³⁶ "'Politicians have betrayed men who fought for Britain" war hero, 97, on why UK must leave' *The Sunday Express* 12 June 2016

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ 'Aims' *Veterans for Britain* <http://veteransforbritain.uk/about/aims/> accessed 24 June 2018

¹³⁹ See Richard Hayton, 'The UK Independence Party and the Politics of Englishness' *Political Studies Review*, Vol 14, No. 3 (2016): 400-410

Those fighting to remain in Europe were imagined in surprisingly similar ways to those wishing to leave, but instead championed a narrative of peacekeeping and anti-war sentiment to support their argument. During the Brexit campaign, activist veterans such as Harry Leslie Smith voiced his opinions along with RAF veteran, David Meylen and ex-Royal Marine, Patrick Churchill, in a video used as part of David Cameron's speech at 'the British Museum in which he said Britain is "stronger, safer and better off" inside the EU'.¹⁴⁰ Veterans describe that leaving the EU would hinder what men fought and died for 'to establish a peaceful and prosperous union'.¹⁴¹ Another veteran describes that 'we would be going backwards not forwards in what we set out to cure after the terrible tragedies of the Second World War'.¹⁴² Harry Leslie Smith declares that staying in Europe 'reflects the values that my generation fought for in Europe during the Second World War'.¹⁴³ These comments suggest that veterans believe that they fought for peace and the creation of a European body of nations championed by Winston Churchill after the war.¹⁴⁴ The use of veterans in this way attempts to strengthen the idea that remaining in Europe would allow future generations to ensure peace. David Cameron made a speech next to the graves of the war dead and described how 'isolationism has never served this country well. Whenever we turn our back

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Joyner, 'EU referendum: Second World War veterans say Brexit threatens peace and stability they fought for' *International Business Times* 09 May 2016 and 'Veterans give their views on Brexit' *Youtube* Uploaded by: Open Britain 08 May 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvKiRYIDslQ> accessed 25 June 2018

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Ibid

¹⁴³ Caroline Mortimer, 'EU referendum: Second World War veterans come out against Brexit' *Independent* 9 May 2016, and 'Veterans give their views on Brexit' *Youtube* Uploaded by: Open Britain 08 May 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvKiRYIDslQ> accessed 25 June 2018

¹⁴⁴ Winston Churchill 'Speaking in Zurich 19th September 1946' *The Churchill Foundation* <http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/astonish.html> accessed 24 June 2018

on Europe, sooner or later we come to regret it. We have always had to go back in, and always at much higher cost'.¹⁴⁵ These comments are the antithesis of the leave narrative, which drew upon the idea of Britain as stronger as an island nation.

Veterans were clearly used to champion an alternative argument, but were similarly imagined as wise figures who have the experience and age to comment on the past and the future of Britain. As with those campaigning to remain, the veterans' credentials are described along with their age as badges of authority akin to how veterans were utilised as commentators during the Falklands conflict.¹⁴⁶ Accompanying videos on which many of the articles are based, depict veterans in extremely predictable ways, reflecting the core image of a veteran generated by commemorative culture as discussed in previous chapters. A video promoting people to vote remain from the *International Business Times* shows some veterans bemedalled, with family photos in the background and with archival footage depicting wartime campaigns.¹⁴⁷ These images are strikingly similar to those shown during annual and anniversary commemorations, which have provided a mediatised template for how a veteran is depicted in British culture.¹⁴⁸ Showing veterans in this way, suggests that the creators of the campaign video wish to make their views accessible and convincing to audiences who would be familiar with the image of the veteran from commemorative culture.

¹⁴⁵ Oliver Wright, 'David Cameron invokes UK war dead as he makes the case for the EU as the guardian of peace' *Independent* 08 May 2016

¹⁴⁶ Caroline Mortimer, 'EU referendum: Second World War veterans come out against Brexit' *Independent* 9 May 2016, and 'Veterans give their views on Brexit' *Youtube* Uploaded by: Open Britain 08 May 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvKiRYIDslQ> accessed 25 June 2018

¹⁴⁷ Alfred Joyner, 'EU referendum: Second World War veterans say Brexit threatens peace and stability they fought for' *International Business Times* 09 May 2016

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*

Estelle Shirbon has described the use of the war and veterans in the referendum campaigns plainly in *Reuters*, noting that the ‘EU debate brings out Britain’s World War Two fixation’.¹⁴⁹ It seems in this context, the use of veterans in the Brexit campaign was less about Europe and the campaign itself and more connected with the questioning of British national identity. It highlighted that every argument could be linked to the events of the Second World War because it stands as the central event in British national identity. Veterans therefore, provided the ideal cultural currency to try to persuade people to vote in various ways based on certain narratives about the meaning and the memory of the war.

Conclusion

The political representation of Second World War veterans has evolved greatly since 1945. Upon demobilisation, veterans were marginalised by the government and became discussed as part of a wider group of civilians who were seen as being easily assimilated back into civilian life. These policies and narratives surrounding veterans failed to reflect the issues specifically facing those returning from the armed forces, including finding employment, being demobilised successfully and dealing with trauma. Unlike American policies which directly aided veterans, British housing, work, healthcare and welfare reforms aimed to help the whole nation that had endured war. The narratives surrounding the

¹⁴⁹ Estelle Shirbon, ‘Brexit debate brings out Britain's World War Two fixation’ *Reuters* 03 June 2016, accessed 21 June 2018 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-worldwartwo/brexit-debate-brings-out-britains-world-war-two-fixation-idUKKCN0YP1XO>

election of the Attlee government suggested that it was the British people, including those in the armed services, who enabled the welfare reforms to emerge.

The 1980s saw a major shift in how veterans were discussed and imagined politically, as the Falklands conflict led to a reimagining of British national identity and its place in the world. Veterans were perceived as predecessors of the Task Force and represented as heroes. Alongside the ageing of the Second World War generation and the boom in memory, the Falklands conflict caused veterans to be given extra support in the creation of the Minister for Veterans and the veterans badge. The growing media and political interest in veterans has resulted in them being used as figureheads in political campaigns relating to the legacy of the welfare state and NHS and in Britain's decision over its place in Europe. The evolution from veterans being a marginalised group, to being central to government campaigns, highlights how the place of this generation has become preferential over time.

Section Two – Identity

Introduction

This section aims to examine the ways in which Second World War veterans perceive themselves and their wartime experiences. The previous three chapters highlighted the limited and selective ways in which this generation have been portrayed in commemorative and political culture. Largely ignored in the post-war decades in the political sphere, the veterans were selectively portrayed either as one dimensional heroes in certain anniversary commemorations, or as the silent, proud and marching successors to the Armistice Day rituals in the annual remembrance calendar. They have, in more recent decades, become symbols of heroism in the narrative of British national identity in political and commemorative rhetoric surrounding Britain's wartime achievements, figureheads of the traditions of commemoration established after the Great War and the perceived founding fathers of the welfare state and the post-1945 social reforms. At times, younger generations have juxtaposed their own values upon this generation in popular culture. While these representations are important to understanding the public image of this generation of veterans, they do not always allow for all those who served to be heard. This is exemplified in the cases of those forgotten or marginalised in the anniversary event calendar. How do this generation perceive themselves and the importance of their wartime service? Do their attitudes correlate with the cultural images constructed of them? This section aims to explore how Second World War veterans view themselves in relation to their wartime experiences chiefly via the exploration of their personal and group

identity. Using evidence collected from ten interviews with veterans, alongside the voices of veterans found in written ephemera and media sources, it argues that that this generation is more diverse and complex than the representations allow. There appears to be a spectrum of identities present amongst the veterans examined. While some adopt identities based upon many of the identifiable tropes of the cultural idea of the veteran, others have forged alternative identities which contrast with the dominant idea of the Second World War veteran. This section will also uncover some of the activities which have shaped veterans' own sense of self but are absent from the prevailing cultural representations, such as their participation in veterans associations.

While representations of veterans in British society and culture are limited in failing to show the diversity of the veteran experience, they are still connected to how veterans create identities. Woodward has shown how identity and representation are interlinked. She notes that 'representation as a cultural process establishes individual and collective identities, and symbolic systems provide possible answers to the questions: who am I?; what could I be?; who do I want to be?'.¹ When studying the perceived identity of veterans, the influence of the dominant images of veteranhood must be noted. While some do not identify themselves as veterans, others take on a role which is reflective of the constructed narratives including in choosing to participate in remembrance events or in adopting an identity which correlated to political rhetoric surrounding their generation.

¹ Kathryn Woodward, 'Concepts of Identity and Difference' in *Identity and Difference* ed., Kathryn Woodward, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1994), 14

Identity itself is an intricate term, stemming from the Latin from *idem* meaning ‘the same’.² The self has been perceived as ‘reflexive’ by social scientists as it can ‘categorise, classify or name itself in relation to other social categories or classifications’.³ Jenkins highlights how identity is ‘something active’ which rests on comparisons ‘between persons or things: *similarity*, on one hand, and *difference*, on the other.’⁴ ‘Social identity’ is utilised by Jenkins to describe identity as something which is ‘always to some extent shared, always to some extent negotiable’ which is ‘never a final or settled matter’.⁵ This suggests that identity is a social process, connected to representation and to comparison with others. This concept can be adopted to examine the ways in which ex-servicemen understand themselves in relation to the legacy of the war. Influenced by representations and by participation in veteran groups, these men and women gain concepts of their place in society, how they connect to one another, how they define themselves as a result of their sense of identity. It is these things which will be examined in the study of oral testimonies with veterans and in the analysis of British Legion documents and veteran association documents which allow veterans to describe themselves as individuals and in groups.

While self-identity is social and influenced by cultural markers, it must be acknowledged as an individualistic and complex process. As Giddens argues, ‘individuals cannot rest content with an identity that is simply handed down,

² Richard Jenkins, 3

³ Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, ‘Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory’ in *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (2000): 224-237

⁴ Richard Jenkins, 4

⁵ *Ibid*

inherited or built as a traditional status. A person's identity has in a large part to be discovered, constructed, actively sustained'.⁶ This theory of identity construction is significant to the relationship between the representations of veterans and the complex reality of these individuals and their sense of themselves. Applying Giddins' view, veterans create their own sense of themselves and therefore, the representations and cultural images cannot be taken as entirely representative of this generation. However, these images help to shape how veterans view themselves as markers, and narratives with which they can forge their own role. As Handler describes, a common way that scholars measure identity is to examine 'the ways in which human persons are imagined to assimilate elements of collective identities into their unique personal identities'.⁷ Scholars who have examined identity, have also noted how it can drive people to assume a particular role or social function. As Stets and Burke note, 'in identity theory the core of identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance'.⁸ This helps to explain why some take on social roles based around their veteran status.

Gerontology scholars have highlighted that 'older adults, like most groups of individuals, are incredibly diverse'.⁹ While some actively connect to a sense of identity based on being a veteran, others prefer not to share their memories, and

⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 82

⁷ Richard Handler, 'Is "Identity" a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?' in *Commemorations – The Politics of National Identity* ed. John R. Gillis, (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28

⁸ Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 225

⁹ Nancy Brossoie, 'Social Gerontology' in *Gerontology for the Health Care Professional* ed. Regula H. Robnett; Walter C. Chop, (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Learning, 2015), 37

focus on other aspects of their lives. This section highlights how for some, assuming a sense of identity built upon being a Second World War veteran helps them to find meaning in later life, gain a sense of purpose in meeting with others, attend events outside of the home and retain a sense of self identity. Thompson noted in 1992 (when many of those entering old age were Second World War veterans), ‘to succeed, older men and women have to be able to draw on their full resources, built up over a lifetime. They have to fight against the stereotypes of dependence to maintain their own sense of independent purpose and meaning in life. Denial of old age is defiance of a spoiled identity.’¹⁰ Group organisations such as the British Legion branches and clubs and veterans associations have offered this generation purpose and a social group in later life. Assuming the identity a veteran also inadvertently perhaps means that these men and women are connecting to an image which is the opposite of the common stereotypes of the elderly. This section aims to highlight the limitations of the dominant images of veterans and of assumptions of the elderly, given the variety of experiences discovered.

Oral History Methodology

Oral history interviews specifically allow for an analysis of the individual experience and can be used to uncover the complex nature of veteran identity and connections between the dominant images of the Second World War generation and their own attitudes. As Samuel and Thompson note, through oral history ‘the individuality of each life story ceases to be an awkward impediment to

¹⁰ Paul Thompson, ‘I don’t feel old’ Subjective Ageing and the Search for Meaning in Later Life’ in *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 12 (1992), 27

generalisation, and becomes instead a vital document of the construction of consciousness emphasising both the variety of experience in any social group, and also how each individual story draws on a common culture'.¹¹ Conducting interviews also enables scholars to 'give a voice to underprivileged minorities'.¹² While Second World War veterans may not be viewed in this guise, the place of the veteran as a figure and in relation to the memory of the war has been largely overlooked by historians. Exploring their cultural image alongside their own sense of themselves will highlight what it means to be a veteran. An in-depth analysis of a number of oral history interviews with veterans, can facilitate discussion about how members of this generation perceive themselves, how they construct their own sense of identity and curate their own sense of social role.

Moving beyond the traditional idea of oral history as a way in which to simply 'acquire information that would otherwise not have existed', this study adopts the idea that interviews can be used to understand veteran identity and societal role and to explore the connections between public representations and individual memories.¹³ Drawing upon the methods of Samuel and Thompson, Portelli, Passerini and Thomson, this study will critically analyse and compare the narratives of a select group of elderly veterans, in order to gain a deeper insight into the complexity of this social group.¹⁴ Rather than take a quantitative approach, this thesis explores a small range of case studies in depth.

¹¹ Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, ed., *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990), 2

¹² Ibid

¹³ Donald A. Ritchie, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12

¹⁴ Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, ed., *The Myths We Live By*, Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories – Living With the Legend, New Edition* and Allesandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York: 1991)

Samuel and Thompson note that modern oral historians should ‘notice the silences in memory, the conscious or unconscious repressions’ and ‘observe how the language and grammar in which people tell their stories reflect unconscious assumptions’ and ‘what is forgotten may be as important as what is remembered’.¹⁵ Similarly, scholars such as Portelli recognised that oral history ‘tells us less about the *events* than about their *meaning*’ and it enables scholars to note the subjective.¹⁶ These methods are crucial when analysing the transcribed interviews with war veterans. Rather than ask about wartime experiences, this study aims to uncover how Second World War veterans construct meaning in being veterans, how they value their wartime experiences in relation to their post-war lives, the topics they emphasise and those they do not in relation to their role and the memory of the war.

Thomson noted in his own study surrounding Anzac Great War veterans, that a ‘careful rereading of my initial life-story interviews had revealed suggestive material about how each man had constructed and related a particular sense of his life and his identity. They showed that life-story interview could be read in that way, and not just for information about the soldiers’ experience’.¹⁷ He also decided to explore the ‘key interaction’ between ‘public and private memories’.¹⁸ These discoveries sparked an alternative way in which to read veteran testimonies, focusing upon how veterans perceive themselves and how their attitudes have

¹⁵ Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, 7

¹⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, 50

¹⁷ Alistair Thomson, 337

¹⁸ Alistair Thomson, 338

been shaped by the dominant cultural narratives of the events they lived through. This study will draw upon this model by asking how veterans view their own identity and assert their own social role as Second World War ex-servicemen and women. This approach has never been explored in relation to this generation of veterans in a British context, and will enable a greater understanding of the diversity of the war veteran experience and the relationships between dominant images of the veteran and their own attitudes.

The section draws upon oral history interviews conducted with ten Second World War veterans. It must be noted that these interviews only provide a small snapshot of the surviving veteran community. Nevertheless, those interviewed include a diverse mix of ages and wartime experience. While some of the veterans were in their early 20s in 1939, others joined the war closer to its end. The interviewees were sourced in a variety of ways. Ron Goldstein's activities online had come to my attention when exploring the BBC People's War website, and I became fascinated by the scale of online content he had produced. Having heard of other veterans using the internet, including the late Peter Oakley, I knew that interviewing Goldstein would present an opportunity to explore veteran identity from the perspective of those that engage with internet.¹⁹ I attempted to meet and interview Harry Leslie Smith who also forms a case study in Chapter 7, but his ill health and residence in Canada meant that this opportunity never materialised.

¹⁹ Victor M. Gonzalez and Sri H. Kurniawan, 'On new media for intergenerational communication: The case of Geriatric1927' Presented at the 2008 IEEE International Symposium on Technology and Society (ISTAS 08), Fredericton, Canada 25-28 June.

Harold May was well known by a colleague for his involvement in the Magic Circle and he agreed to be interviewed because of this connection.

I came into contact with the York Normandy Veterans following a conference I helped to organise titled *Bringing Conflict Home*. The veterans were invited to attend a wine reception at the York Army Museum. I got to know Nick Beilby, an honorary member of the association, who helps to transport and assist the remaining veterans at the conference. and he offered to kindly take me to visit each of the veterans. Beilby acts as a chaperone, friend and gatekeeper for the York Normandy Veterans, and as it was noted in a recent article in the *York Press*, he is ‘now central to everything that the veterans and their families are involved in, from arranging their monthly meeting at Huntington WMC to the annual visit to Normandy each June, including, last month, the 75th anniversary celebrations’.²⁰ This must be acknowledged, as Beilby was present during each of the interviews. Nevertheless, he did not influence the questions I asked or actively participate in the interviews. Occasionally, he would help to prompt veterans if they were struggling, and sometimes the veterans would mention him during the interviews, but this was limited and did not impact the questions I posed.

The final three interviewees for this project were sourced after they (or their relatives) responded to an advertisement placed in *Who Do You Think You Are?* Magazine. I was working at the magazine during a placement, and given the opportunity to advertise for interviewees in a nationwide and popular history

²⁰ Mike Laycock, ‘Normandy veterans back Nick Beilby for York Community Pride award’ 06 August 2019, *York Press*.

related publication. While Pat Evans and James Mason's children contacted me on their parents' behalf, Jack Millin contacted me himself.

The interviews were semistructured, as this approach enabled veterans to discuss questions in an organic way and to discover the topics that were important to them. As Brinkmann describes, 'compared to structured interviews, semistructured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee'.²¹ Unlike unstructured interviews, those which still include questions enable the researcher to tailor the conversation to 'issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project'.²²

Questions asked in this thesis were tailored to each veteran. Initially, the thesis aimed to explore how far veterans identified as heroes and aimed to include a chapter on the fictional representation of this generation. Upon interviewing a number of veterans, it appeared that heroism did not seem a strong focus and many veterans could not recall the ways in which they remembered how their generation had been represented in fiction. However, it was noticed that medals were often referred to when describing how or why veterans connect to their memories. A number of the chapters in this section therefore arose from the findings of the interviews conducted, specifically those surrounding medals, silence and the importance of group identities.

²¹ Svend Brinkmann, 'Unstructured and semistructured interviewing' in ed. Patricia Leavy, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286

²² *Ibid*

Chapter Four acts as a starting point to introducing the range of attitudes present amongst veterans towards their wartime experiences and to being a veteran. The material object of the war medal can act as a tangible marker of identity. The discussion of medals proved to be a common reference point when veterans were interviewed and when they discussed why they connect to their wartime experiences, or the reasons why some have remained silent and themes relating to veteran status and group identity. Medals have been overlooked in the study of the image and identity of war veterans, but the choices veterans' have made surrounding the collection and wearing of war medals can illustrate how they relate to their veteran status. While some choose to wear their medals and adopt a traditional identity based on the images of patriotism and pride, others have not collected their medals or have chosen not to wear them, which illustrates their attitudes towards their wartime experiences.

Chapter Five further interrogates the idea of not engaging with being a veteran in more depth by exploring the concept of silence. It asks how and why certain veterans have remained silent about their experiences and reveals a variety of different attitudes to veteranhood. It shows that staying silent is not always permanent or an act of complete quietness. Veterans vary in the types of silence they adopt, and while some silences have been broken, others show a disinterest in sharing their wartime experiences and suggest that some identify with other aspects of their lives. This chapter uncovers the range of reasons why some remained silent about their experiences and how others have broken their silence in various ways.

Chapter Six shows the ways in which veterans have engaged in forming group identities as part of veterans associations and British Legion branches and clubs. It highlights the preference from this generation towards social interaction and forming connections based on the varied arenas and campaigns in which they served. Low key acts of public commemoration and hidden aspects of the role of the veteran are also uncovered, that are often absent in representations of this generation.

Finally, Chapter Seven examines the case of two veterans who have used the internet to forge distinctive self-identities. Ron Goldstein and Harry Leslie Smith have created two very different interpretations of what it means to be a veteran, but their activities further highlight the sheer diversity of the veteran experience. Exploring the activities of two veterans in depth, enables a deeper understanding of how individuals connect to their wartime experiences and the differing reasons behind sharing their memories and views.

Taken together, these chapters challenge the dominant idea of what it means to be a Second World War veteran and show the variety of identity formation amongst this generation.

Chapter 4

Second World War Veterans and the Symbol of the Medal

This chapter will explore the symbolic place of war medals in the construction of individual and group identity, and in the perceived social function of Second World War veterans. Historians and archaeologists have stressed the importance of the material object as a marker of identity. Medals, like other artefacts, 'are a means by which we give form to, and come to an understanding of, ourselves, others, or abstractions such as the nation or the modern'.¹ In his research surrounding her Grandfather's connections to his own Distinguished Flying Cross medal, Jody Joy describes that they 'can act to store meanings and associations' and can 'consolidate personal relationships in particular ways'.² Joy's research highlights how medals supposedly have a 'pre-programmed meaning of pride and achievement', but they can have far more complex significances.³ This section will concur that medals hold specific meanings, which can impact upon how those who wear them are perceived and view themselves. Yet, their significance goes beyond these connotations. These objects can help to define and describe how individuals perceive themselves and their social role. Identity can be viewed as 'both imposed by others and self-imposed' and can be examined both at individual and a group level.⁴ How this sense of identity is described and performed in relation to the tangible object of the medal will be the focus of this

¹Daniel Miller, 397

² Jody Joy, 'Biography of a Medal – people and the things they value' in *Materiel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth Century Conflict* ed. Colleen M. Beck William Gray Johnson and John Scho field, (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 132

³ Jody Joy, 133

⁴ Carolyn L. White and Mary C. Beaudry, 'Artefacts and Personal Identity' in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology* ed., David Gaimster, and Teresita Majewski, (New York: Springer, 2009), 210

chapter. Drawing upon interviews with Second World War veterans, archival evidence relating to the York Normandy Veterans Association and published material relating to veterans and their medals in the press, this chapter will analyse the significance of medals to the self-perception of Second World War identity and in the construction of their own social role.

This chapter will argue that medals facilitate a reciprocal process, in which the cultural symbolism of campaign medals creates a public response that can in turn create a sense of purpose and identity amongst veterans. Medals can also be viewed as important signifiers of veteran identity on an individual level, acting as a descriptor when recounting when and how they began to engage in recalling their memories and identifying as veterans. Similarly, medals are also a key aspect of veterans associations and the fostering of a group identity and social status. The struggle for commemorative and gallantry medals is also tied to veterans' wishing for recognition and respect, particularly later in life as shown in the struggle for the York Normandy Veteran's Association to gain the French Legion of Honour medal. These special awards will be shown to reaffirm veterans' own sense of achievement and role as surviving ex-servicemen. This chapter will showcase how medal can be viewed as hugely important tangible symbols that help Second World War veterans to foster and describe a sense of identity and social role. They highlight how individuals and groups describe the complexity of their role and provide symbols with which they can be identified and given respect.

Three types of medals are discussed in this chapter, campaign medals, gallantry awards and commemorative medals. The National Archives describes that

campaign medals (also known as ‘war medals’) ‘were awarded to members of the armed services and eligible civilians, for taking part in a campaign or for service in time of war’.⁵ As Peter Duckers describes: ‘ a campaign medal is an award conferred by the government simply for “being there” – given to all those present in a specific area for a designated length of time and awarded regardless of rank, status or distinction’.⁶ When referring to veterans who have received or wear their medals, it is campaign medals that are being discussed. After the Second World War, campaign medals included those relating to particular battles and those awarded to those serving at home or abroad. Campaign medals included: the 1939-1945 Star, Pacific Star, Atlantic Star, Africa Star, Italy Star, Burma Star, Air Crew Europe Star, France and Germany Star, the War Medal 1939-1945 (awarded to all fulltime personnel who had served 28 days) and the Defence Medal (awarded to those who served at home or abroad).⁷

⁵ ‘British military campaign and service medals’ *The National Archives* accessed 01/07/2019 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-military-campaign-and-service-medals/>

⁶ Peter Duckers, *British Military Medals: A Guide for the Collector and Family Historian* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2009), 2

⁷ Ministry of Defence, ‘British armed forces medals – Service Personnel and Veterans Agency and MoD Medal Office’ 1 April 2007 accessed 02/07/2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/28389/Medals_Booklet.pdf



Figure 11 - Illustration showing all Second World War campaign medals by Service Personnel and Veterans Agency and MoD Medal Office - Ministry of Defence, 'British armed forces medals – Service Personnel and Veterans Agency and MoD Medal Office' 1 April 2007 accessed 02/07/2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/28389/Medals_Booklet.pdf

Gallantry medals are special awards that are issued for bravery or exceptional achievement. Notable British gallantry medals include the Victoria Cross and the Military Cross, awarded for bravery in military service and the British Empire Medal, which praises civilian contributions to society. Notable international awards include the Legion d'honneur (Legion of Honour) which was 'issued by the French Government to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Normandy Landings'.⁸ In the context of this chapter, the awarding of the Legion d'honneur to D-Day veterans, illustrates how veterans perceive their own status and the ways in which these special awards are telling of places and locations important to them.

Commemorative medals are also discussed in this chapter when tracing the administration of the Dunkirk Medal, created by the Town of Dunkirk and

⁸ Ministry of Defence, 'Medals: campaigns, descriptions and eligibility' 12 December 2012 accessed 02/07/2019 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/medals-campaigns-descriptions-and-eligibility>

awarded to British veterans from 1970 onwards.⁹ Commemorative medals are unofficial awards which can still hold considerable value, despite not being recognised by governments as an ‘official’.¹⁰ For some Dunkirk veterans, being awarded this long awaited medal acted as a catalyst for them to want to reminisce and recall their memories with other veterans.

Medals hold a rich and symbolic cultural legacy. They have long been discussed in the press and in British culture as objects which evoke pride, recognition and monetary value. An article in the *Observer* from 1848, stressed the importance of the production of the General Service Medal for the veterans of the Peninsular War. It is described that the medal would ‘adorn the breasts of veterans, and descend as a proud heir-loom to their families’.¹¹ A description of the long-awaited medal emphasised the beauty and importance of the object, noting the ribbon, design and the special process taken to create the medals.¹² Clearly, before the First World War, medals had cultural significance as important and symbolic items. Nevertheless, as Richardson notes, the medals of the First World War have acquired a broader ‘cultural status’ which marked a ‘sea change’ in ‘what campaign medals’ stood for, and served to alter how medals were perceived and valued.¹³ First World War medals transformed ‘from worthless and discarded

⁹ ‘The Dunkirk Medal’ *Imperial War Museums* accessed 04 July 2019
<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30011354>

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ ‘The War Medal’ *Observer* 30 October 1848

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Matthew Richardson, ‘Medals, Memory and Meaning: Symbolism and Cultural Significance of Great War Medals’ in *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War* ed. Nicholas J. Saunders and Paul Cornish, (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 105

objects to venerated and prized possessions'.¹⁴ Stories of those salvaging medals and ephemera thrown away, highlight the rate at which medals were being discarded by veterans themselves and their relatives in the 1960s and 1970s. Former dustbin men such as Bob Smethhurst noted in the BBC documentary *Hidden Histories – WWI's Forgotten Photographs*, that he salvaged many items 'from a military medal to photographs'.¹⁵ Yet, by the 1980s, an interest in the remaining veterans of the First World War and a growing desire to commemorate and remember the conflict, resulted in an upsurge in the collecting and preserving of medals.¹⁶ These changes in attitude towards medals and the cultural importance attached to them, highlights the long-standing importance of war medals to the legacy of conflict and to the image of the veteran.

Second World War medals also hold symbolic meaning and have gained a similar cultural significance. A survey of the annual and anniversary commemorative media coverage since 1945, in Chapter One and Two, highlighted the extent to which medals are a dominant feature in the images of Second World War veterans. The previous section of this project emphasised the limited depictions of this generation of veterans which promoted a narrative of national pride and showed veterans as mostly anonymous, bemedalled, blazered and marching during annual and anniversary commemorations. Yet, these depictions have helped to foster a powerful image of the ex-serviceman in which medals are a symbolic and important factor in them gaining recognition in public. The fiftieth

¹⁴ Matthew Richardson, 116

¹⁵ 'Dustman saves 5,000 rare First World War photos from rubbish dumps' *Daily Telegraph* March 24 2014

¹⁶ Matthew Richardson, 116

anniversary coverage of VE-Day for instance, emphasised the importance of medals as signifiers of veterans' status and pride. An article from the *Daily Mail* describes the 'medals spread over the chests of the vets like breastplates on ancient knights' and emphasised how in total, the veterans pictured had 'thirty medals between them'.¹⁷ This presents the medals as symbolic relics which signify the veterans' status and act as badges of honour. Similarly, in recent decades, coinciding with the retiring of veterans and the growing interest in the commemoration of the conflict, stories of veterans claiming or re-claiming medals have become commonplace.¹⁸ These representations promote a specific image and status of the veteran as being tied into owning and proudly wearing medals.

Both the extensive use of images of bemedalled veterans and this patriotic and recurring narrative in both anniversary and annual commemorations, have most certainly caused a reciprocal process in which veterans are approached by the public when wearing medals and this forms their own sense of their role and status. When asked 'do you view yourself as a veteran?', George Meredith and his partner Elsie Johnson replied, 'No, not really, it just sort of comes and goes. The only time really I think I'm a veteran is when I'm dressed up. [Elsie: when you're in your medals...] Then I know I am!'.¹⁹ Evidently, medals gave Meredith a sense of veteran identity and an anchor to his wartime memories when wearing his accolades. This sense of identity based on wearing medals could in part be linked to the cultural currency the accolades hold and the reactions veterans receive when wearing them outside. Meredith and his partner Elsie discussed the

¹⁷ 'As Memories Fade, the Final Roll Call' *Daily Mail* 8 May 1995

¹⁸ For example see: 'War medals served up - 70 years late: Second World War army cook finally receives honours at the age of 95' *Daily Mail* May 8 2015

¹⁹ Appendix 3

reactions he has received when wearing his blazer and medals in the street: ‘if no one knows who you are, I mean you’re just a common bloke, a common old man...’.²⁰ He and Elsie then described an occasion when they were returning from an event and were recognised because George was wearing his medals: ‘the kids come up and chased [us] down the bloody road...shouting and telling somebody else and of course they were running down the road wanting to talk to us and so I had to stop [Elsie: Impersonating children “he has got all his medals on”], and spoke to them like...[Elsie: They were asking what you got your medals for...].’²¹ Elsie Johnson noted that it ‘draws them [in] yes it does. I notice when he’s got his on and we go out. One young [man] came up and shook hands with you...’.²² Clearly, for veterans and their families, wearing medals can create a response from the public given the cultural meaning and importance of them to the image of the veteran. George Meredith’s comments suggest that without the medals, no one would know his status as a Second World War veteran and he himself would be ‘ordinary’. This exchangeable way in which medals can cause a reaction from the public clearly help to shape how veterans see themselves.

The connection between the cultural importance of the medal and the status of the veteran is so intertwined, that it can even create feelings from veterans that they *should* be approached and recognised when wearing them. Ken Cooke believes veterans are not always treated with respect and recognition. He noted that ‘I don’t think they are recognised as they should be, not really... I mean we go on parade and I mean we go to something... and a lot of people just walk past and

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

we're there with our medals on and all that you know, and people just [walked past]...they don't recognise us sort of thing, why I don't know'.²³ Evidently, Mr Cooke associates respect with being recognised when wearing medals. This further emphasises the importance of the medal as a signifier of veteran identity and the ways in which the dominant images of veterans have filtered to define how ex-servicemen view themselves and expect to be viewed.

The veterans badge can also be seen as an extension of the process by which veterans are recognised by members of the public and gain a sense of identity. Launched in 2004 by the Minister for Veterans, the British Legion describe that the badge was created 'to raise the profile of veterans by assisting the wider public to recognise them'.²⁴ Government documents highlight how it was intended as a more informal way that through dress, veterans could be recognised. A 2012 report from the International Affairs and Defence section of the government, outlines that it 'was considered an appropriate way for veterans, including former National Servicemen, to demonstrate that they had served their country as members of the Armed Forces'.²⁵ The document describes that 'the lapel badge was considered to be a more discreet and adaptable for daily wear than a medal. Such has been the success of the project that over 700,000 had been issued to date [July 2012]'.²⁶ The report confirms that the badge was designed as an extension of the war medal, so that veterans could still be recognised in informal settings. Ron

²³ Appendix 4

²⁴ 'Veterans' Label Badge' *British Legion Support* accessed 16 October 2017
http://support.britishlegion.org.uk/app/answers/detail/a_id/529/~veterans-lapel-badge

²⁵ International Affairs and Defence Section - Claire Taylor and Louisa Brooke-Holland, 'Medal Campaigns' 27 July 2012, *House of Commons Library* accessed 16 October 2017
researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02880/SN02880.pdf

²⁶ Ibid

Goldstein enjoys sharing his written memories and wears his veterans badge everywhere he goes to foster a sense of awareness of his advanced age. He described how, 'I always wear a veteran's badge, because I think I look reasonably young for my age...to let people know where I am coming from if you like'.²⁷ He has gained similar reactions from wearing his badge to those that others have received when wearing their medals. He noted, 'the other day...I was shopping in my local Sainsbury...and a shopper asked "is that a veteran's badge"...I always keep a small little folder with photographs of myself from my Army days, I find it simpler...rather than listen to my war stories... I keep a little folder with pictures...And he was calling over the staff "hey come and have a look at this"...it was genuinely funny, it was quite amusing'.²⁸ Mr Goldstein clearly enjoys sharing his memories with those outside of his family and the veteran's badge facilitates a similar process of recognition that medals also provide. The badge can be viewed as a further way in which tangible items have provided in giving veterans status and recognition even during informal settings. These badges provide on a smaller scale, the same reciprocal process which enable veterans to be recognised in public.

The strong cultural meanings attached to medals and more recently, the veteran's badge, have evidently filtered into how veterans are treated and identified in the real world. Medals are the main way in which these men and women can assume their identity in public and stand out as identifiable veterans of the Second World War. This give-and-take cultural meaning of the medal correlates with the idea

²⁷ Appendix 1

²⁸ Ibid

that objects can serve to culturally define their owners and impact both how they are perceived and how they view and define themselves. As Miller notes, ‘our cultural identity is not merely embodied but literally “objectified”’.²⁹ The cultural representations of veterans cannot be simply negative in promoting a limited portrait of this generation, as discussed in the previous section. They must also be acknowledged for facilitating veterans to assume a recognisable social role and identity which is grounded on the wearing of medals.

Medals can also be viewed as tangible and personal descriptors of veteranhood on an individual level. During the interviews conducted with surviving veterans for this thesis, it was striking to note the ways in which medals were used to describe when and why a person chose to join an association or recall their memories. The medals can be viewed as objects which help veterans to describe their sense of identity and help to define the transition to assuming an active role as a veteran. As Richardson notes, medals can act ‘as a barometer for the feelings and attitudes of the men to whom they had been awarded’.³⁰ While some proudly wear medals, for others they were ‘languished forgotten in a drawer...put to the back of the mind along with memories of a war that many ex-servicemen wanted to forget’.³¹ These same feelings surrounding medals can be shown to be present in the veterans of the Second World War. They highlight how for some ex-servicemen, both attitudes towards medals can take place during one lifetime. Many veterans interviewed for this project openly describe a transition, from a disinterest in

²⁹ Miller draws upon the ideas of Bourdieu of objectification in Daniel Miller, ‘Artefacts and the Meaning of Thing’, 399

³⁰ Matthew Richardson, 112

³¹ Ibid

recalling or actively engaging in remembering their wartime experiences, to joining associations and talking to others of their memories later in life.

The period between leaving the armed forces after the war and actively choosing to recall memories or join an association is often described using the symbol of an individual's war medals. Ken Smith was asked about whether he had spoken of his memories of war before joining the Normandy Veterans Association. He stated, 'when my medals came from the government 73 years ago I put them in the drawer and they've stopped there for nearly 60 years then I got involved with the Normandy Veterans Association and I started thinking about it more'.³²

Evidently, the act of placing the medals into a drawer and not engaging with them, helped Ken Smith to focus on his post-war life. It was only upon his decision to join a veteran group, that he spoke about the war and started to wear his medals. Pat Evans, a female veteran of the WAAF, similarly described how her medals have stayed in the drawer since they arrived in the post after the war. When asked about wearing them she noted, 'No, they are in the box that they came in...it would almost... I don't know...look like showing off, well here now, supposing I went shopping with medals on my coat, I think I'd be laughed at...'.³³

Mrs Evans' lack of interest in getting involved in commemorative activities is symbolised in her decision to leave her medals unworn and unused in her home. While she enjoyed the social aspects of RAF and WAAF reunion events, her

³² Appendix 6

³³ Appendix 9

choice to not attend commemorative events and her modesty surrounding her wartime experiences, is described in her choice not to wear her medals.



Figure 12 – Ken Smith wearing his campaign medals and Legion d'honneur – photograph taken by the author.

Similarly, newspaper articles in the decades following the conflict also highlight this indifference to wearing or even choosing to keep war medals, in the decades following the war, when many were focused on families and careers. An article from 1964 in the *Daily Mirror* features an interview with a Second World War veteran who had decided to sell his war medals. It states that Clifford Bradshaw believes that ““what happened in the war counts nothing to me now” ...“I had forgotten about them”... “I'm not hard up. But I sent them to Sotheby's because a quid or two for the kids is better than medals that collect dust and don't bring back particularly good memories””.³⁴ Comments such as this highlight the indifferent attitude that some veterans had towards their medals. The choice to sell or to not claim their accolades represented their thoughts about their wartime service.

Many wanted to forget painful memories by physically having no reminder of

³⁴ ‘A Quid or Two for the Kids is Better than Medals that Collect Dust’ *Daily Mirror* April 16 1964

them. Allport's research on the demobilisation of the Second World War generation, also highlights that medal wearing could even ignite a negative response from the civilian population in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. He notes that 'for a soldier wearing his medals and a glorious tan, invariably seemed to annoy civilians'.³⁵ As with discussing wartime memories, casual medal wearing was evidently not particularly welcomed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The decision to not apply for medals or to place medals out of sight into a drawer, was symbolic of the suppressing of wartime memories or the focus on civilian life and family. This lack of interest in medals throughout the 1960s and 1970s, coincided with the rise in anti-war feeling and a lack of interest in commemoration as shown in Chapter One. Disregarding medals generally at this time was not uncommon, as Richardson notes, the 1960s and 1970s saw Great War medals literally 'being thrown out with the trash'.³⁶ Evidently, the climate of the decades following the war and the personal lack of interest experienced by some veterans was symbolised in what they chose to do with their war medals.

While many chose to claim medals during the aftermath of the conflict, others waited until retirement or beyond to claim their medals. A major difference between First and Second World War medals lies in their distribution. While all veterans of the Great War were awarded their campaign medals, without having to apply for them, Second World War veterans could only receive them upon request.³⁷ As a newspaper article from 1948 in the *Manchester Guardian* notes,

³⁵ Alan Allport, kindle location, 2114

³⁶ Matthew Richardson, 113

³⁷ See First World War and Second World War medal distribution plans described in the press: '1,800 miles of ribbon – 14 Million War Medals Distributed' *Manchester Guardian* 19 April 1923, and 'War Medals Ready for Issue – For All but the Navy' *Manchester Guardian* 01 June 1948

‘most of those qualified to receive awards will have to claim them; only serving members of the Regular Army and the Army Women’s Service will receive them without claim’ and ‘cards for making claims will be available in most post offices’.³⁸ This is an important factor when exploring the role of medals and veteran identity, as reminiscences of choosing to request service medals and at which time in an ex-serviceman’s life, is telling of a person’s connection to their wartime service. George Meredith only applied for his medals when instructed to by the veterans association he joined. Meredith describes that the first time he went to the Lincoln Normandy Veterans Association, the Chair ‘said “have you got any medals” and I said “no, I haven’t got any medals” ...He said “well you should have some”...I said “Well I ain’t got none”, so I had to write away to the [War Office] and ask them if I was entitled to any...and a week later I got a box with about five medals in it’.³⁹ Until the desire to return to France emerged for George Meredith, he had not been interested in receiving or wearing medals. Likewise, James Mason, a veteran of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, had little interest in joining associations or attending commemorative events until retirement. Before his retirement, Mr Mason had not collected his medals. He describes that ‘I didn’t...just feel like it’.⁴⁰ He notes, ‘I got the medals and then started parading...I could have paraded without them but it makes people know if you’ve got medals, you’ve actually taken part you see’.⁴¹ He describes that ‘It wasn’t until I was getting on a bit really’ until he started to think about comrades he had lost and chose to march.⁴² Medals are clearly used as a powerful descriptor to narrate

³⁸ ‘War Medals Ready for Issue – For All but the Navy’ *Manchester Guardian* June 1 1948

³⁹ Appendix 3

⁴⁰ Appendix 10

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

when and how ex-servicemen began to identify as active veterans and why they chose to begin actively getting involved with commemorative or veteran's association activities.

An article in the *Daily Mirror* from 1964, emphasises how widespread the decision not to claim medals was during the decades following the war. It highlights that 'more than 195.000 World War II medals lie at the War Office'⁴³ Yet, by 1978 there was a huge change in attitude towards the claiming of Second World War medals. The *Guardian* reported that 'because of the recent upsurge in interest there is now – 33 years after the end of the Second World War – a two year waiting list for soldiers who want to obtain the medals awarded for war service'.⁴⁴ The article notes that 'the reason for the extra ordinary rush in applications seems to be summed up in one word – grandchildren'.⁴⁵ A Second World War veteran discussed in the article described how 'he had never applied for his medals after the last war because his marriage had broken up' but after being settled and re-married, 'his grandchildren began to grow up and ask him about the war and he thought he was entitled to have them'.⁴⁶ Although none of the veterans interviewed for this project acknowledged the influence of their grandchildren in their decision to collect their medals, the newspaper article suggests that intergenerational connections and the aging of veterans was a major influence.

⁴³ 'A Quid or Two for the Kids is Better than Medals that Collect Dust' *Daily Mirror* April 16 1964

⁴⁴ 'Old Soldiers Lead the Charge to Claim War Medals' *The Guardian* November 15 1978,

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

One of the veterans interviewed for this project named Jack Millin, notes the importance of the medal as a perceived heirloom. As a computer literate veteran and the President Chairman of the local Air Crew Association in Manchester, he prints 'application forms' for his fellow veterans 'because they haven't applied for them' and tells them 'it's not you that wants them, but your grandchildren will'.⁴⁷ This acknowledgement of the medals as a personally significant heirloom echoes the article published in 1978. It further highlights the importance of ageing in veteran's wishing to acknowledge their wartime experiences and their belief that medals are personal artefacts which symbolise these memories which can be passed down the generations. It reflects what Dan Todman describes in his work on First World War veterans, that as their grandchildren became interested, the veterans' own willingness to recall their memories got stronger. Todman notes, that 'in the 1960s in particular, an interaction took place between those who had fought and their grandchildren in a context that stimulated acts of memory'⁴⁸ The newspaper article suggests that a similar memory recalling process was taking place between the Second World War generation and their grandchildren and prompting them to collect their medals as symbols of their desire to remember their experiences. As with the descriptions given by the veteran interviewees, those collecting their medals in 1978, evidently connected the symbolism of their medals with a desire to engage with their wartime experiences, whether by sharing their memories with grandchildren or visiting the graves of comrades as part of associations.

⁴⁷ Appendix 8

⁴⁸ Dan Todman, 225

The decision to not claim or choosing to claim for war medals symbolises this personal desire to engage in the identity of a veteran and to recall wartime memories. Medals can clearly be seen as a way in which veterans describe their sense of personal veteran identity. The symbolism of keeping medals out of sight, selling them, or having no interest in collecting them, is tied to the lack of interest in sharing memories or engaging in veteran activities. The choice to apply for medals and wearing them is also a descriptor identified in the veterans interviewed in this project to note when they began identifying as a veteran and engaging in their wartime past. The use of medals as a descriptor found in the interviews with veterans aligns with the idea that the elderly in particular, use personal items to define themselves in later life. As Kroger and Adair ‘during late adulthood, loss of spouse, friends, a social context, abilities, and a life era may give cherished personal objects a special role in helping to signify and anchor an individual’s sense of personal identity’.⁴⁹ The veterans interviewed for this project are all in their nineties and readily use the object of the medal to describe themselves and their transition to engaging in veteran activities.

Medals also appear to be deeply connected to forging and maintaining a sense of group identity amongst veterans associations and groups. The Lincoln Normandy Veterans Association’s insistence that George Meredith claim for his medals, highlights their symbolism present in veterans associations.⁵⁰ Wearing and parading with medals is a major part of the work of veteran groups. This strengthens how the insistence on wearing them, may foster a sense of group role

⁴⁹ Jane Kroger and Vivienne Adair, ‘Symbolic Meanings of Valued Personal Objects in Identity Transitions of Late Adulthood’ in *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, Vol. 8, No.1 (2008): 6

⁵⁰ Appendix 3

as well as personal veteran identity. As Joy notes, ‘not even an object as strictly contextualized as a war medal is innately meaningful: it must be performed in action to acquire meaning and only becomes meaningful when it is socially constituted in a particular way’.⁵¹ The active use of medals as worn by veterans in commemorative parades and formal events can serve to strengthen a sense of group identity and social role and make their medals more meaningful to both the public and to the veterans themselves.

The awarding of special accolades years after the Second World War, caused a renewed interest in certain wartime events and triggered some veterans to want to reunite and think about their wartime memories. This was visible in the press reports and articles produced following the awarding of the Dunkirk commemorative medal in 1970. Those who had been evacuated along with those who helped rescue the BEF from the beaches, had initially been assured an award from the British government. Even as the evacuation was taking place, there were calls to award those who rescued the troops from the beaches with a medal. An article in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* stated: ‘the men of the Merchant service and the fishing fleets – all who volunteered to go across the channel to help the evacuation of the B.E.F – should be awarded a distinctive Dunkirk Medal. They deserve it. They earned it...“there goes a Dunkirk rescuer” will be an identification of honour for all the years to come’.⁵² Evidently, even as the evacuation was still taking place, there were calls for medals to be produced to honour those that took part in the event. Rumours also started to circulate that

⁵¹ Jody Joy, 133

⁵² ‘Give them a Dunkirk Medal’ *Aberdeen Press and Journal* 04 June 1940

soldiers who were rescued would soon be awarded a medal in line with Great War accolades such as the Mons Star. In October 1940 the *Daily Record* reported:

‘the Treasury Committee on honours, medals and decorations in time of war are understood to be considering the striking of a “Dunkirk Medal” to be awarded to all men who took part in the historical evacuation. The medal will most likely be on the lines of the Mons Star and compare with the decoration worn by the Old Contemptibles...Before making their decision, the Committee have to bear in mind the hazards faced by other men in the evacuation or Norway and in later small withdrawals from further down the coast of France...’.⁵³

Even in 1940, the prospect of creating a medal for those who endured the Dunkirk evacuation was seen as a rightful act. This highlights the perceived importance of Dunkirk, which would continue to be acknowledged by the media and government in post-war commemorative events as noted in Chapter Two of this thesis. Despite discussions from the British government to award Dunkirk veterans and rescuers a special award, no medal was ever produced to solely honour the evacuation. It was the Town of Dunkirk who created an unofficial commemorative accolade. The *Imperial War Museums* note that as an unofficial commemorative medal it ‘cannot be worn directly with official British medals’.⁵⁴ Despite this, the award clearly meant a great deal to some of the veterans who

⁵³ ‘Dunkirk Medal May be Struck’ 29 October 1940 *Daily Record* and ‘A Dunkirk Medal?’ *Yorkshire Evening Post* 29 October 1940

⁵⁴ ‘The Dunkirk Medal’ *Imperial War Museums* accessed 04 July 2019 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30011354>

received it and promoted some to want to reminisce and connect with other veterans.

In the early 1970s, a number of newspaper articles shared the news of the new commemorative medal, noting how ‘members of the Army, Navy and R.A.F, auxiliary services, merchant seamen and volunteers are eligible, and next of kin of men who died during the battle or afterwards can apply’.⁵⁵ The influx in interest in the medal reported by local newspapers, highlights how many veterans were clearly keen to obtain the award.⁵⁶ The *Lichfield Mercury* was shocked by the interest it received in the new medal: ‘hardly expecting the response we received to the story on the Dunkirk medal last week, we omitted to give the address to where applications should be sent. But by mid-day Friday we had been inundated with requests’.⁵⁷ Veterans were advised to claim for the medal by writing to the Dunkirk Veterans Association Headquarters in Leeds or to the Mayor of Dunkirk directly.⁵⁸ Applying for the accolade also appeared caused an increased interest in veterans wishing to learn more about the Dunkirk Veterans Association as well as the medal. L. A. Jackson of the Cheshire branch of the association, wrote in the *Cheshire Observer*: ‘I wish to thank you and your readers for the interest in the “Dunkirk Medal”. There were many queries about the medal and about the Cheshire branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association. All applications have been sent to the general secretary...in view of the amount of work I must ask applicants to exercise a little patience’.⁵⁹ Clearly, the medal generated a lot of interest

⁵⁵ ‘New Medal for Dunkirk Veterans’ *Lichfield Mercury* 29 September 1972

⁵⁶ ‘Dunkirk Medal’ *Birmingham Post* 20 September 1971

⁵⁷ ‘Talking of that medal’ *Lichfield Mercury* 06 October 1972

⁵⁸ ‘Neil Williams - Helping Hand’ *Liverpool Echo* 11 January 1983

⁵⁹ ‘Dunkirk Medal’ *Cheshire Observer* 10 September 1971

amongst veterans wishing to receive it and perhaps prompted some to get involved in the Dunkirk Veterans Association.

The awarding of the commemorative accolade clearly sparked interest for some veterans to reunite and reminisce. One veteran, Mr Ward, wrote to the *Lichfield Mercury*: ‘after reading that we can all apply for the French medal I thought it would be nice if the men of my old regiment could get together at a local hotel and talk over old times...I do see some of them around occasionally and I think they might like the idea of a reunion’.⁶⁰ Hearing about the new medal clearly prompted Mr Ward to reminisce and gave him the inspiration to attempt to contact the men he had served with during the war. In other cases it was the family members of veterans who were inspired to obtain the medal and learn more about their relatives’ experiences. Mr Wayne Parr applied for the medal on behalf of his father and organised a special surprise ceremony for the medal to be awarded. Parr described:

‘About a year ago in the papers I read that a Dunkirk veteran had received a medal from the town’s mayor. So I wrote to the French council who put me in touch with the Dunkirk mayor. He agreed to present the medal to my father. He sent it over, but we kept it a secret thinking it would be something special to receive it from Reading’s mayor...’.⁶¹

⁶⁰ ‘Reunion Plan for Dunkirk Veterans’ *Lichfield Mercury* 06 October 1972

⁶¹ ‘Medal surprise for Dunkirk veteran’ *Reading Evening Post* 04 June 1983

Clearly, hearing about the new medal prompted Wayne Parr to honour his father and his wartime achievements. Parr's father was one of the last to be evacuated from Dunkirk and describes his memories in the rest of the press article.⁶² This example highlights how the introduction of the medal for British veterans could generate new interest from family members and from veterans themselves wishing to recall their experiences.

The Dunkirk medal also appears to have generated press interest more broadly for the Dunkirk Veterans Association, with a number of articles relating to members of the association or to their widows who were awarded the medal.⁶³ One article describes how, Former Vice President of the Ulster Dunkirk Veterans Association and 'motorcycle ace' George Brockerton was an 'unsung hero of the Second World War' and was to be 'honoured 18 years after his death' by receiving the Dunkirk Medal.⁶⁴ It describes that although the medal is 'not officially recognised by British or French governments [as an official medal]', his widow felt he had been honoured by receiving the award.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note how newspapers describe the award almost as a gallantry medal, recalling the heroism and actions of those who received it, despite the medal being a commemorative accolade. The Dunkirk medal clearly generated further attention towards those who had been evacuated from Dunkirk and drew new awareness to veterans. The medal also encouraged family members to reach out to their veteran relatives and triggered others to wish to recall their memories and reunite with other veterans.

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ 'Dunkirk Medal Winner Dies' *Reading Evening Post* 16 July 1974

⁶⁴ '18 Years after death – a hero is recognised' *Belfast Telegraph* 23 April 1983

⁶⁵ Ibid

Gallantry and honorary awards are rare and recognisable decorations, given to soldiers both during and after wartime service. The awarding of gallantry medals illustrates how veterans connect to their status as veterans and to the places and moments that they feel are most significant to their wartime experiences. Douglas Petty regularly visits his former wartime airbase RAF Leeming in Yorkshire, after serving with the Canadian 429 (Bison) Squadron there in 1944 and 1945. Petty initially contacted Leeming ‘about twenty years ago’ when they were creating a new exhibition and were ‘looking for information on wartime activities at Leeming’.⁶⁶ He has since visited numerous times and recalled his joy at being able to talk to young pilots and share his experiences:

‘for at least twenty years I have been going backwards and forwards to Leeming and they are always very pleased to see me and of course now I am probably the only person who’d served there during the war... so they look upon me as part of the station now...I am always invited to go to Leeming...the previous seal was very keen that the young air men and air women on the station got to know the history of the place, so I was often invited back to talk to them to tell them what happened on that station all that time ago. So it was nice, it was nice to be able to do that and nice to be recognised there..⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Appendix 7

⁶⁷ Ibid

When Douglas Petty was awarded the Legion d'Honneur, his choice to hold the ceremony at the airbase where he was trained was telling of his strong connection to the airbase:

'...when I was awarded the Legion d'Honneur...the French ask you how you want it presented, and normally what they like to do is have their representative in North Yorkshire do the presentation, a Frenchman you see, and I think I disappointed them when I said "no thank you, I am going to have it presented at Leeming". So I did, and the station commander, he was the one who presented it to me and they were thrilled to bits because they hadn't had a Legion d'Honneur ever there before...'⁶⁸

Petty's insistence on being awarded the Legion d'Honneur medal by the commander of the RAF base Leeming, rather than by a Frenchman at a ceremony held elsewhere, highlights the loyalty he holds towards his former airbase and how strongly the location is connected to his sense of veteran identity. Clearly, gallantry awards can be telling of a veteran's sense of self and the places that they feel connected to when recalling wartime memories.

⁶⁸ Ibid



Figure 13 - Douglas Petty receiving the Legion of Honour at RAF Leeming. 'France gives highest honour to D-Day veteran' 24 March 2017 *York Press* accessed 02/07/2019
<https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/15177878.france-gives-highest-honour-to-d-day-veteran/>

The struggle for the York Normandy Veterans to gain access to the Legion d'Honneur medal, highlights the ways in which gallantry awards are also tied to veterans' own desire for recognition and as a marker of respect. British Normandy Veterans were awarded the highest French honour in 2014. The award letter from the French Ambassador to the veterans reads, 'we must never forget heroes like you, who came from Britain and the Commonwealth to begin the liberation of Europe by liberating France'... 'we owe our freedom and security to your dedication, because you were ready to risk your life'.⁶⁹ In keeping with the cultural praise and status awarded to veterans, the letter and the medal serve to strengthen the idea that due to age, D-Day veterans in particular have gained a unique and heroic status. Veterans themselves appear to view such awards as markers of respect and have fought to receive such praise. They can be shown to view these awards as symbolic of their own sacrifices. Many feel that they are owed such honours and feel that it is disrespectful if they are not awarded or

⁶⁹ Letter from Sylvie Bermann (French Ambassador of Britain) to Mr Ken Cooke, 9 February 2016. NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

delayed. Ken Smith noted that ‘the award means quite a lot really, it is the highest award that the French can give’.⁷⁰ Yet the York Normandy Veterans stressed ‘we are not getting any younger...two in the group...passed away before they could receive it’.⁷¹ ‘Similarly, Ken Cooke clearly believes that veterans have had to fight for the Legion d’Honneur and that they are a marker of respect which should not have had to be fought to gain. Even after being sent the medal in the post, Cooke felt that the awarding of the medal was not presented with enough respect. He notes that the veterans were ‘supposed to go to London ‘but it all fell through because they had lost our addresses or something’.⁷² He believes that ‘[the government] only put one person this side of the channel to distribute [the medal]’ which caused the lack of ceremony held in London.⁷³ Evidently, the veterans feel pride upon receiving the honour. They also highlight the feeling that the veterans have not gained sufficient respect in having to wait for the awards.

Veterans interviewed for this project, highlight how some believe British veterans are not given enough respect or recognition. This is symbolised in the receiving of honorary medals. Ken Cooke felt that ‘our lot...the air force had a struggle to get any recognition, they got a clasp at the end of it and the Bomber Command, their statue in London that was done by the public who bought that for them...the Burma lads have never had any recognition, the Arctic Convoy people, they had to fight for theirs, the Russians presented them with a medal...the MoD said “you can’t have it”’.⁷⁴ So they had to fight for it, they eventually got it but they had to

⁷⁰ ‘Pride as Medals Arrive to Honour Veterans’ March 16 2016 *York Press*.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Appendix 4

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

fight for it but they shouldn't have done'.⁷⁵ Similarly, Captain Patrick Tootal, quoted in an article surrounding the awarding of the Legion d'Honneur also noted that 'it's good to see the French give our men the kind of recognition we have to fight so hard for here in Britain'.⁷⁶ The attitude that the British government does not value servicemen and women as highly as other nations, is reflective of the dominant attitudes following the conflict, that veterans from other nations were better treated than those in Britain. As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, veterans were marginalised by politicians in the post-war period whilst other nations such as America received veteran specific reforms such as the GI Bill and other important legislation. Similarly, studies exploring how the Far East prisoner of war veterans have had to struggle for an apology and for compensation, further emphasise how Second World War veterans were not always given the respect that they thought they deserved.⁷⁷ The initial treatment of veterans has perhaps shaped this idea that British ex-servicemen are not shown enough respect in their own nation. Jack Millin believes American veterans are seen as 'gold plated' and given memorials and awards that British veterans do not receive.⁷⁸ Comments such as this highlight the attitude of veterans surrounding gallantry and special awards being deserved items which are not gained easily in Britain. They view them as deserving accolades which demonstrate national respect to surviving veterans. As with the idea that veterans should be given respect when wearing campaign medals, the desire and fight to receive honorary awards highlights how

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Michael Glannangel, 'D-Day Veterans Honoured...by the French' *Daily Express* July 20 2014

⁷⁷ See Michael Cunningham, 'Prisoners of the Japanese and the Politics of Apology: A Battle over History and Memory' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 39, No. 4 (2004): 561-574 and Clare Makepeace, 'For "ALL Who were Captured"? The Evolution of National Ex-prisoner of War Associations in Britain after the Second World War'

⁷⁸ Appendix 8

intertwined veterans own sense of status is connected to receiving honorary medals.

Conclusion

Overall, war medals can be viewed as hugely important symbols of Second World War veteran identity. They are dominant cultural signifiers of veteran status which cause a reciprocal process which allows veterans to gain a sense of themselves by the ways in which the public interact with them when wearing medals. On a personal level, medals are used as a descriptor to discuss when and why they began to engage in identifying as a veteran. In the context of veteran groups, medals are perceived as a vital part of group cohesion and identity.

Commemorative awards have the ability to spark press and personal interest in war memories and reunions. Honorary awards reflect the ways in which veterans perceive their status and highlight how they see government respect. The lack of awards given by the British government and the fight for awards and honours, further emphasise the intertwined nature of medals to veterans' own sense of themselves, their social role and the importance of the events they experienced during the war.

Chapter 5

Silence

This chapter will argue that there are multiple forms of silence which can illustrate the complexity of Second World War veterans' connections to their wartime experiences and to their sense of self. The levels of trauma experienced, where they served and their own personal ambitions, all shape how veterans construct a sense of personal identity and how they relate to their experiences. While many veterans align themselves with an identity built upon the legacy of their war memories, some do not engage as readily. It is possible to explore some of the reasons why some veterans do not engage with their memories in public, or forge a sense of themselves based on their experiences of conflict, by examining several types of silence. As Winter notes, 'silence should not be conceived as "the absence of sound", but as "the absence of conventional verbal exchanges" and as "socially constructed space".¹ Silence can be viewed as 'constitutive of a discourse which may or may not indicate a void of structure and intention'.² It is this notion of silence, that can provide an opportunity to further understand the variety of ways in which veterans relate to the legacy of their experiences during the Second World War. Silence can be seen as something which can include non-verbal memory making activities, non-public recollecting and a lack of discussion about the war in certain contexts. It also features the ways in which veterans are prompted to break their silence as a result of retirement or group interaction.

¹ Winter cited in *Beyond Memory – Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance* ed. Alexandre Dessingue, and Jay Winter, (London: Routledge, 2016), 4

² Alexandre Dessingue, and Jay Winter, ed., *Beyond Memory – Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance* (London: Routledge, 2016), 5

This chapter does not intend to provide statistical conclusions of how many veterans of the Second World War have remained silent about their wartime memories. Similarly, it cannot provide definitive answers surrounding the prevalence of silence using the small number of case studies and interviews with a select number of veterans conducted for this thesis. Rather, it does aim to generate a starting point in the discussion of why some ex-servicemen and women of the Second World War choose not to share their memories or align themselves with a dominant sense of veteran identity. It will focus on examples of silence found in the materials collected for this thesis, and bring together observations made by scholars in psychology and memory studies, to highlight the importance of silence in the lives and in the constructions of the self of those who have experienced conflict. This chapter will advocate that there are multiple types of silence. These include silence in the pursuit of a new identity, due to a period in the life cycle, a lack of group connection or a choice not to share memories with family members. It also features other instances of staying silent because of trauma or forced silence. Silence can also include non-verbal forms of memory making. This chapter also seeks to examine how these silences have been broken. Changes in a person's life cycle, group interaction and being prompted by ephemera, are ways in which some veterans have broken their silence and shared their memories. Others hesitate to discuss memories publicly, but still consider themselves as veterans and recollect their experiences in small groups or during specific contexts. This research aims to highlight the nuanced nature of veteran identity and the lack of homogeneity present in the ways in which this generation relate to their wartime experiences.

As a result of these discoveries, this chapter also aims to ask how far Halbwachs' theories of social interaction and memory are applicable to the case of Second World War veterans. Halbwachs argued that 'there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself within the frameworks and participates in this memory which is capable of the act of recognition'.³ Halbwachs suggests that memories can only be recalled in the context of social interaction. These comments could suggest that in making collective memories, 'words, speech, narrative and text seem to be perceived as necessary – if not sufficient'.⁴ This chapter complicates this idea, by noting instances of veterans who participate in non-verbal or written acts of memory making and those who still relate to their wartime experiences in more private ways, but do not always have the ability or willingness to discuss them with others. On the other hand, this study does highlight how for some, interaction with others can help to break silences and discussing their memories of conflict have helped to enable some veterans to share their memories.

Some veterans place little emphasis on the war as a major life event which is central to their sense of identity, so stay largely silent about the war. Instead, they may focus on other aspects of their lives such as family or their careers. This is based on psychological scholarship surrounding how people make sense of their lives by forming narratives about themselves. As Hunt and McHale note, the term narrative in psychology is 'the attempt to develop a coherent past, which involves

³ Lewis A Coser, ed., *Maurice Halbwachs – On Collective Memory* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38-39

⁴ Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, 'Unpacking the Unspoken – Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting' *Social Forces* Vol. 88, No. 3 (2010), 1103

overemphasising the role of some events (memories) and under emphasising others' according to 'current conceptions of themselves' and to make 'sense of our lives'.⁵ This type of selective forgetting has been named 'constitutive to the forming of a new identity', which Connerton notes, 'accrues to those who know how to discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes'.⁶ This form of silence connected to the choosing of a different identity, either linked to a career or some other event, rather than wartime experiences can be seen in the attitudes of Second World War veterans.

Those that identify strongly as Second World War veterans tend to place their wartime experiences as central events in their lives. One veteran interviewed for this project, Ron Goldstein, describes why he identifies as a veteran: 'by the virtue of my past...I have experienced things that other people haven't experienced...I don't know how many millions of others did exactly the same...by virtue of what I did when I was young, I feel I am different'.⁷ He notes: 'alright, I was successful in business...'but 'apart from my war years, I've led, I think, a fairly uninteresting life'.⁸ Goldstein evidently feels that the war represents an important and significant period in his life, which now makes him distinct from others due to longevity. He does not view his career as particularly unusual, despite owning his own business. Due to age and having participated in the war, the veteran has made this central to his sense of self and in the construction of his hobbies and

⁵ Nigel Hunt, and Sue McHale, 'Memory and Meaning: Individual and Social Aspects of Memory Narratives' *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, Vol. 13 (2008), 50

⁶ Paul Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting' *Memory Studies* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), 61-63

⁷ Appendix 1

⁸ Ibid

activities, which include writing his memories down online and attending commemorative events. Although it is not clear if Ron Goldstein has always aligned his sense of self from his wartime memories, he did not write his memories down until the BBC People's War project in 2004.⁹ He then set up a blog and actively began engaging with his memories on a regular basis.¹⁰ This suggests that Goldstein's identity certainly post-retirement, appears to be largely centred around his activities preserving his wartime memories online and attending public commemorative events. Evidently, for some veterans, talking about their wartime experiences has always been important. Nevertheless, as Goldstein retired, he clearly had the time and the opportunity to reflect on his wartime years and has built a clear sense of self and a purpose based upon his experiences during the war. These patterns can also be seen in memoirs written by veterans. As a member of the Coldstream Guards Association and the York Normandy Veterans Association, Dennis Haydock's memoir highlights the importance he places on his wartime experiences as central to his life story and identity. The memoir discusses his childhood and his wartime memories. He notes of post-war life that, 'I have skipped over the years since the late 1950s principally because I had a very mundane job which became rather tedious and because I was rather complacent and nothing much happened'.¹¹ Haydock then moves onto discuss his involvement in the Coldstream Guards Association and his retirement.¹² This suggests that, like Goldstein, Haydock did not emphasise the period in between leaving the forces and retirement as central to his life story. Using Goldstein and Haydock as case studies, their attitudes highlight how some

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ 'Dennis Haydock Remembers', NVA/1/1 *York Explore Archive*, 27

¹² Ibid

veterans perceive their wartime experiences as important to their life story in comparison to their careers. They suggest that their sense of self, particularly outside of the family setting, is connected to their experiences during the Second World War.

On the other hand, Harold May does not rate his wartime experiences as central to his sense of self. When asked if he thinks of himself as a veteran he responded:

‘Not really. I don’t really think of it. Sometimes, I think “well I’m a veteran”...well you wear a veterans badge and then you probably go to a wedding or a funeral somewhere, where the present military are there, you know with their friends...and you think “where did you get all the ribbons from?”...’.¹³

May’s response suggests that he does not readily think about being a veteran or automatically identify himself as a one. He appears to be prompted to think of his own service when seeing others who have served in the military, but this is clearly a rare occurrence. Similarly, despite sharing some wartime memories during the interview unprompted, May does not see the purpose in writing his memories down on paper. May noted after being asked about writing his memoirs: ‘No, no, no, no. I haven’t got the time’ and ‘there are so many thousands of people involved with it, if they all had to do that what a mess it would be...we’d be running out of paper. Some people like to talk about it more than others...some

¹³ Appendix 2

people live in their wartime... which is fine, if they are happy doing that...'.¹⁴

Unlike Goldstein, who views himself as special for having participated in the war and being one of a small number of ex-servicemen still living, May does not see his situation as unusual. He therefore does not see the purpose of writing down his memories, which he views as similar to those of others. May describes that others 'live in their wartime', but he chooses not to, which implies that he has preferred to move on from the war and focus on other things.

May also has alternative interests and activities which shape his sense of self which are distinct from his wartime experiences. He spoke extensively about his career as a regional manager of a large chain of supermarkets, the various homes he owned and his involvement in the magic circle and the Rotary Club.¹⁵ When asked about media participation related to his war memories, he stated that 'I just can't be bothered...I've been on the media... "This is your life" with [a famous magician]'.¹⁶ Evidently, May's hobbies and interests take precedence over engaging in veteran activities. This is further emphasised in his decision not to join a veterans association. May reflected that 'I was once asked if I'd like to join the Eighth Army Veterans, you know...and I said "no, I'm not"...I mean later on I was quite proud to have been in the Eighth Army...but in a veterans organisation you are waiting for the next one to die... 'I don't know what they do... if it's friendship well that's fair enough...if people are feeling lonely and lost and want to talk about it a lot... a lot depends on the individual...'.¹⁷ Clearly, May does not see the appeal in joining veterans associations and has not inquired further into the

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

benefits of participating in such a group. His activities with the magic circle and Rotary Club, perhaps enable him to gain adequate social interaction and friendship without engaging in reminiscence about the war. Although he marches during remembrance parades with the Rotary Club, May's involvement as an active veteran is minimal due to the lack of importance placed on his memories to his sense of self. May clearly places other events as more important to his personal identity and life story rather than focusing on his wartime memories.

This study cannot clarify whether May and Goldstein have always held such polarised views surrounding their sense of self and personal identity and their conflicting views surrounding the importance of the war to their post-war lives. Nevertheless, in later life, it could be argued that there are various degrees of veteran identity, with some who place veteranhood as central to their sense of self, and others who acknowledge their experiences but hold other events as more important to their sense of identity. It is clear that not all ex-servicemen of the Second World War rate their experiences as significant life events. It is evident that some, like Harold May, remain largely silent about their memories simply because they are not central to their conception of themselves. As Hunt and McHale suggest, 'we deliberately choose to emphasize certain memories and try to forget others so that we have coherence in our lives' and we do not always discuss aspects 'that do not fit our current concepts of the self'.¹⁸ For Harold May, his successful career and work with the magic circle and Rotary Club have been hugely important to him throughout his life since his return home from the Second

¹⁸ Nigel Hunt, and Sue McHale, 'Memory and Meaning: Individual and Social Aspects of Memory Narratives', 50

World War. It is these aspects of his life which evidently shape his sense of self, rather than his wartime memories. Silence surrounding veterans' wartime memories can be a signifier of the level of importance placed on wartime experiences to personal identity construction.

Many veterans only broke their silence surrounding their wartime experiences upon retirement, when they joined associations or started to reflect on their early lives. Their reluctance to speak in the early post-war decades, can be viewed as a widespread form of non-engagement with wartime memories. Hunt perceives this as a result of 'the general attitude taken by the military' of "go home and don't talk about your experiences"¹⁹. One veteran interviewed by Burnell *et al.* responded to whether he shared his memories with his family by stating 'No...because...you're told to forget it aren't you?'"²⁰ George Meredith similarly described that he did not speak about the war for the first few decades after returning home because 'if you spoke to anybody just after the war, nobody wanted to know'.²¹ Meredith avoided talking about his memories, as he perceived people as not being interested in them. Jack Millin also stressed how 'I felt a bit like fish out of water[upon coming home]' and 'nobody seemed to want to know' about his experiences.²² These attitudes highlight the perception that relatives and civilians (who had themselves lived through the war on the home front), were not keen to learn about veterans' wartime memories and this prompted many to

¹⁹ Nigel Hunt, and Ian Robbins, 'World War II veterans, social support, and veterans' associations' *Aging & Mental Health* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2001), 175

²⁰ Karen J Burnell, Peter G. Coleman, and Nigel Hunt, 'Coping with traumatic memories: Second World War veterans' experiences of social support in relation to the narrative coherence of war memories', *Ageing & Society*, Vol. 30, No 1, (2010), 71

²¹ Appendix 3

²² Appendix 8

remain silent. Both the interviews conducted for this study, and the research gained by scholars such as Burnell *et al*l, Hunt and Robbins suggest that there was a widespread perception amongst Second World War veterans of a disinterest from relatives and civilians about their wartime experiences in the early post-war decades. This reflects the findings of the first section, particularly seen in Chapter Three, showing how veterans were marginalised by the government and represented as part of the civilian community in the post-war decades.

Evidence of civilian disinterest and a lack of praise towards returning veterans has also been traced in Alan Allport's work. He cites instances which suggest that 'soldiers who returned home at the end of the Second World War expecting a hero's reception wherever they went were going to be in for a rude awakening'.²³ These attitudes present in British society towards returning ex-servicemen, clearly prompted some to remain silent about their experiences until later in life. This correlates with the findings in the previous chapter showing how many veterans expressed a lack of significance to collecting, wearing and displaying their medals in the post-war decades. It was not until years later, usually upon retirement, that their attitudes towards wartime experiences began to shift and silences could be broken.

Alongside a general social attitude which made many remain silent, moving on from the war in post-war life can also be viewed as a common reason for silence surrounding wartime memories. As Morely stresses in his research into Great War veterans during the interwar period, 'a desire to move on should not be

²³ Alan Allport, *Kindle location*, 2096

dismissed’.²⁴ Many Second World War veterans cite a genuine desire to build families and careers in the post-war decades as reasons for their silence and lack of active memory making before retirement. Harold May was clear about his desire to move on with his career and family after the end of the war. May responded when asked whether he reflected upon his memories of conflict when he came home:

‘No. You’re too busy living! Or trying to live...you know, everybody is more or less in the same state that you are...”I don’t want to stay down there I’ve got to get up there [career ladder?] somehow” ...[I knew] I got to get some qualifications so I thought *right* and that started it. So that started my studying, fortunately it all paid off...”²⁵

This shows that May had a clear desire to move on from the war and focus on his career. He was clearly ambitious and emphasised his interest in gaining further qualifications to move up the career ladder as the key focus of his life in the decades following the war. Ken Cooke explained how his normal civilian life naturally resumed after his return home. He states, ‘we just went back into normal life, I mean I came home I had two weeks leave and I went back to my job at Rowntrees’.²⁶ For others, focusing on family life was the priority in the post-war decades. Dennis Haydock noted in his memoir of the enjoyment in the 1950s of ‘bringing up’ his daughter and his focus on work and family life in the decades

²⁴ Joel Morley, ‘Dad ‘never said much’ but. . . Young Men and Great War Veterans in Day-to-Day-Life in Interwar Britain’ *Twentieth Century British History* Vol. 29, No. 2, (2018), 207

²⁵ Appendix 2

²⁶ Appendix 4

before retirement.²⁷ Although family life is not broadly discussed in his memoir, Haydock stresses the importance of moving on and spending time with his wife and daughter in the decades in between leaving the forces and retiring.²⁸ Similarly, Peter Grafton cited a number of veterans who described their desire to return to their civilian lives or start new business ventures. One veteran based in Scunthorpe recalled his decision not to remain in the army: ‘They did offer for me to stay on but it was straight away “No”. I wanted to be out, although, later on, you wonder whether you should have stayed on, for the security, and by then you were just starting to enjoy life, more or less’.²⁹ Despite the routine and security that staying on in the army for a few more years would have offered this particular veteran, he was keen to move on with his life. Similarly, another veteran described ‘I was demobbed January 8th, 1946. I was mad keen on having my own business, in the food trade’.³⁰ Clearly, as he was being demobilised, some ex-servicemen were looking forward to the new ventures that post-war life would offer. These comments suggest that many veterans purposefully or organically began to move forward with family lives and careers upon their return home from the war. For some veterans, silence surrounding wartime memories can be seen as part of this process of focusing on life as a civilian rather than as a soldier, in the decades after the war.

Retirement and ageing are two important factors in the breaking of this early, widespread form of silence expressed by those interviewed for this project. As

²⁷Dennis Haydock Remembers’, NVA/1/1 *York Explore Archive*, 27

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Peter Grafton, ‘28: Back in Civvy Street’ *You, You & You! The People Out of Step with World War II* accessed 21/07/2019 <https://youyouandyourestored.wordpress.com/2014/03/28/28-back-in-civvy-street/>

³⁰ Ibid

Winter notes, many veterans 'go over the ground of their youth' when entering old age as they find the time to reflect upon their lives.³¹ Life cycle and the transition to retirement is central to this process. By the time that Second World War veterans reached retirement, 'twentieth century planned and anticipated retirement from employment' had 'evolved in Britain from being an exceptional experience for a minority of privileged workers to being the commonplace experience of the majority'.³² These developments to the accessibility and nature of retirement meant that 'for a growing number...' during the period when Second World War veterans began to retire (between 1970 and 1990), the end of working life created 'not poverty and economic dependency but instead a new life-course stage of active and well-resourced leisure'.³³ As these men and women retired, they faced new dilemmas surrounding their sense of self. As Thompson noted in 1992, 'older men and women today face quite new problems due to the rise of obligatory retirement. Men can no longer expect... to maintain their self-identity as workers'.³⁴ Many people had to find a new identity and a new sense of purpose outside of their careers or traditional roles, urging some to begin new hobbies and reflect upon their youth. Two veterans of the Second World War interviewed by Hunt and Robbins, noted that upon retirement memories became stronger and they had more time to reflect about the war. They noted, 'you have more time to recollect than you did before' and 'since I've retired I've had more time to

³¹ Jay Winter, 'Thinking About Silence' in *Shadows of War – A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century* ed. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23

³² Paul Johnson, 'Parallel Histories of Retirement in Modern Britain' in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, (London: Routledge, 1998), 211

³³ Paul Johnson, 220

³⁴ Paul Thompson, "'I don't feel old'" Subjective Ageing and the Search for Meaning in Later Life', 28

think'.³⁵ Some ex-servicemen and women joined veterans associations or began to reflect on their early lives with others upon this transition into older age. Dennis Haydock recalls bumping into a fellow Coldstream Guard veteran in the supermarket after retiring which ignited his interest in joining associations and attending overseas commemorations.³⁶ Similarly, upon retiring, veterans such as Ron Goldstein gained access to the internet and has since shared his memories and connected with other veterans using the web.³⁷ Both gained the time to reflect upon their lives and get involved with projects related to their war years. Retirement can be seen as a key moment in the breaking of the silence surrounding wartime memories for many veterans who had more time to reflect upon their lives and participate in new activities related to sharing their wartime memories.

The attitudes towards veterans and the developments in commemorative culture also enabled them to be encouraged to break their silence. The 'memory boom' can be viewed as a contributing factor in the widespread encouraging of veterans to speak about their memories. As Winter describes, 'healing, acknowledgement, recognition, forgiveness' were the 'hallmarks of the memory boom in the 1990s'.³⁸ Similarly, a change in attitude towards trauma and the 'introduction of PTSD in 1980' also aided to enable some to begin discussing their traumatic memories.³⁹ For many of the veterans interviewed for this thesis, the point of

³⁵ Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative', 62

³⁶ Dennis Haydock Remembers', *NVA/1/1 York Explore Archive*, 31

³⁷ Appendix 1

³⁸ Jay Winter, 'Thinking About Silence', 9

³⁹ Nigel Hunt, and Sue McHale, 49

retirement and the coincidental wide increase in interest surrounding the commemoration of war, acted as a catalyst for them to engage with their memories.

While some Second World War veterans clearly began to share their memories upon retirement, others have not sought or been able to find the same opportunities to share their memories. The lack of verbal communication of wartime memories can sometimes be a result of a lack of connection with other veterans. As Winter highlights, 'soldiers frequently speak about their war experiences only to other soldiers'.⁴⁰ If making connections with others who also served proves to be challenging, then many veterans may not choose to speak about their memories. Two veterans interviewed for this project suggest that a lack of verbal communication of wartime experiences may be a result of not having the opportunity to find other veterans to connect with. Pat Evans, a former WAAF Radar Operator, stressed a desire to connect with other veterans to share her wartime memories and to converse with someone with similar life experiences. Earlier in life, she only spoke about the war to others who had been in Radar roles in the RAF. She notes how they would hold reunions and 'reminisce a little bit', and she still enjoys talking on the phone to one remaining RAF friend.⁴¹ She shares her loneliness at not having more people to reminisce with in later life, as there are 'not many of us left' and 'all the rest have gone' with whom she served.⁴² Mrs Evans is clearly selective in who she shares her memories with, and clearly wishes to connect with others who had similar experiences. Her lack

⁴⁰ Jay Winter, 'Thinking About Silence', 6

⁴¹ Appendix 9

⁴² Ibid

of opportunity in later life to speak to others with similar experiences means she chooses to stay largely silent. Mrs Evans' comments suggest that she does not readily discuss her wartime memories because she has no longer got access to a social group comprised of those who were also in the WAAF, the RAF or part of the same generation. Her desire to connect with others emphasises how engaging with memories of the war can be highly variable and sometimes only visible when veterans talk to one another.

James Mason similarly noted a lack of opportunity to connect with other veterans. Being conscripted into the armed services from a mining village, his ability to discuss the war with others has been limited. Mr Mason noted that he did not join the British Legion after the war as 'I just didn't feel... I belonged'.⁴³ His inability to talk about his memories appears to partly be a result of working with many non-veterans. He notes: 'I think because a lot of people were in Reserved Occupations, so apart from Home Guard...you didn't talk about being a soldier.'⁴⁴ Mason describes his reluctance to discuss his memories with those at work, 'they just think you're showing off some people don't they?' and 'I don't think they realised, the people I was working with I don't think they realised how near to being killed as I were...'.⁴⁵ A lack of connection with others who had been through similar experiences, appears to have meant that Mason did not feel able to discuss his memories. It was 'not until very recently' that people have begun to ask him about his experiences.⁴⁶ He noted, 'I get talking to people who are in Heritage Groups that sort of thing, that's when I've talked about it, other than that

⁴³ Appendix 10

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

I haven't talked...'.⁴⁷ Evidently, James Mason did not have the same opportunity to discuss his memories with those who had also served, as he never joined a veterans association or had the opportunity to connect with other veterans locally. This has meant that Mason has chosen not to discuss his experiences freely.

These examples highlight that silence can sometimes be a result of a lack of connection with other veterans. Both James Mason and Pat Evans convey that they are not active in sharing their memories in a verbal sense. They cite a lack of connection with other veterans as a reason for not discussing their wartime memories. Others interviewed for this project who actively engage in veteran activities, have highlighted the casual discussions of wartime experiences that have taken place in veteran groups and in British Legion branches and clubs. Ken Cooke noted how he enjoyed going to British Legion meetings to casually reminisce: 'having a chat, having a drink, meeting different people, telling your stories, telling their stories, [we] used to have a really good laugh about it'.⁴⁸ Cooke clearly benefitted from meeting with other veterans to talk about his memories and found pleasure from these casual discussions. Hunt and Robbins have also stressed the importance of social connections with other veterans and the ability to cope with wartime experiences. Their research highlights the importance of speaking about wartime memories with other veterans, as a way of coping with trauma and to build these events into a clear narrative. Veterans describe how they 'talk the same language' and hold a 'common bond' with which they discuss their traumatic experiences.⁴⁹ The researchers find that 'social

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Appendix 4

⁴⁹ Nigel Hunt, and Ian Robbins, 'World War II veterans, social support, and veterans' associations', 178

support is an important lifelong coping strategy for World War II veterans'.⁵⁰ The examples of those without access to this form of social support, highlight the connections between silence and lack of connection with more public forms of memory making activities such as attending large-scale commemorations or reminiscing with others as part of veteran groups.

These findings raise questions surrounding Halbwachs' theory that it is 'in society' that people 'recall, recognize and localize their memories.'⁵¹ Halbwachs explains that 'the groups of which I am part at any time give me the means to reconstruct [memories].'⁵² This suggests that being part of social groups are the ways in which memories can be shared, recalled and preserved. The attitudes of Pat Evans and James Mason do suggest a strong connection between social interaction with others who had similar experiences and the active sharing of memories. They are both not as active in sharing their experiences in public forms as those who are part of veterans associations or other groups. Yet, despite the interviewees' inability to publicly share their memories in groups, this does not mean memories are forgotten and not recalled altogether. During the interviews conducted for this study, Pat Evans and James Mason spoke of their experiences to the author.⁵³ They also conveyed examples of recalling and preserving memories in non-verbal forms. This complicates Halbwach's theories surrounding individual memories and the recalling of experiences.

⁵⁰ Nigel Hunt, and Ian Robbins, 'World War II veterans, social support, and veterans' associations', 175

⁵¹ Lewis A Coser, 38-39

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ See Appendix 9 and Appendix 10

The sharing of memories can be found in subtle, non-verbal and unconventional forms. Passerini describes that memories can be ‘transmitted without verbalisation, such as those incorporated in gestures, images and objects’.⁵⁴ Winter has termed these types of actions as ‘non-speech acts’ of memory making. He notes that ‘there are performative non-speech acts through which some people tell us about war beyond words’.⁵⁵ James Mason has clearly participated in examples of non-speech acts of memory making, despite his verbal silence with other veterans. Whilst the veteran was unfazed by speaking about his memories when interviewed for this project, he had not talked about the war to anyone in a public setting.⁵⁶ Yet, during the interview he explained how he marches during Remembrance Day each year without speaking to other veterans or engaging in other commemorative activities.⁵⁷ Mason also lent a box of his wartime artefacts including medals to a school, yet he did not directly verbalise or discuss his experiences with school children.⁵⁸ He explained his choice to loan his box of ephemera to a local school:

I’d seen in this local newspaper that this school was interested in the Nazi era in Germany so I thought well “I’ve got some memorabilia” that I’d like to pass onto some whose going to look after it and I thought at the same time, while I am doing that they’d be asking me questions...school kids you know...[but] it didn’t come about [that I could go]...⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Luisa Passerini, 248

⁵⁵ Jay Winter, *War beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 173

⁵⁶ Appendix 10

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

Mason clearly wanted to help preserve the memory of the war and was initially keen to talk to children about his experiencing using the artefacts as prompts. This isolated example highlights the complexity of veteran identity. While James Mason does not actively share his memories in official or traditional ways, such as in joining associations, writing memoirs, attending official commemorative events or speaking to the press, these low key and largely non-verbal acts of memory making show that identifying as a veteran can actually be channelled through non-verbal actions. These activities are personal and largely private, but they do indicate a strong sense of connection for Mason towards his wartime memories and the importance of the war to his later life. This example raises questions of how many veterans engage in non-verbal sharing of memories and how these can be located and analysed. Non-speech acts of memory making highlight that these men and women still have a sense of identity based on veteranhood, despite a lack of verbal communication with others who had seen similar experiences.

James Mason's box of ephemera was also used during the interview conducted for this thesis. The objects were taken out, one by one, and used by Mason himself to navigate the discussion. The items included medals, Nazi relics taken from a house he was billeted at in Germany and ephemera featuring the location of his friend's grave.⁶⁰ These items helped Mason to break his silence and conduct the interview in a way in which he was comfortable. Using the items as prompts, he told anecdotes of his wartime memories and how he related to the legacy of those

⁶⁰ Ibid

experiences.⁶¹ Photograph collections and albums also enable veterans to control the topic of conversation and some use images and clippings as non-verbal communication of memories and has prompts. When Ken Cooke was interviewed in his own home, he used photographs and ephemera to recite his memories. These enabled non-verbal exchanges, especially when viewing newspaper clippings. When asked ‘have you ever written your memories down’, Ken Cooke replied ‘I’ve got some articles... [finds book full of paper clippings]...[shows clipping of locomotive named after him at museum]’.⁶² A similar process can be seen in the interview he conducted three years earlier with Nicholas Beilby, Lauren Bray and Catherine Francis. Cooke goes through the same photo album, showing the clippings and items to prompt him to share the same memories.⁶³ While the responses and questions prompted by the photos and articles are different in each interview, it is clear that Cooke enjoys sharing his memories by using his photo albums.

Ken Smith, similarly used his television interviews as prompts in both the interview conducted for this thesis and in an interview conducted three years earlier too with Nicholas Beilby, Lauren Bray and Catherine Francis.⁶⁴ These examples show how particular collections of objects, photographs or media based sources, can help veterans to break silences surrounding wartime memories. They can also be used as prompts to allow the veterans themselves to control the

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Appendix 4

⁶³ Nicholas Beilby, Lauren Bray and Catherine Francis, ‘Transcript of Interview with Ken Cooke and his wife Joan Cooke’, August 06 2015, NVA 5/1 *York Explore Archive*, 17-18

⁶⁴ See Interview with Ken Smith and Nicholas Beilby, Lauren Bray and Catherine Francis, ‘Transcript of Interview with Ken Smith and his wife Gloria Smith, August 06 2015, NVA 9/2 *York Explore Archive*, 23-24

discussion. Collections such as these can be viewed as a form of ‘material autobiography’, which serve in ‘chronicling the cycle of a life, from the first moment an object strikes a particular personal chord...’.⁶⁵ As Pearce notes, they can help to ‘give shape to our identities and purpose to our lives’ and can be ‘left behind as our monument’.⁶⁶ These collections can be seen as non-verbal examples of memory making, allowing veterans to remember and preserve their memories in non-public and personal ways. As Mieke Bal notes, objects and images can be used to form a narrative.⁶⁷ Some veterans can help to create a coherent narrative of their lives and war experiences by using material items, rather than by verbal communication alone, both on a personal level and when interacting with others. They can also enable them to control interview discussions and prompt the telling of certain events.

These non-speech, alternative forms of memory making highlight how socialising with others and verbal communication are not always necessary to recall wartime experiences or participate in commemorative or memory making activities.

Halbwachs’ theories must therefore be disputed when exploring some of the nuanced, private or non-verbal acts of memory making found in the experiences of Second World War veterans. Simply because memories are not recalled publicly or in social settings, does not mean that veterans do not recall their experiences in more private ways, or that they have forgotten the events of the war. Memory making activities, such as collecting ephemera and photographs or

⁶⁵ Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting – An investigation onto collecting in the European tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 279

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Mieke Bal, ‘Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting’ in *The Cultures of Collecting* ed. John Elsner, and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 98

marching in silence, are still ways in which veterans remember their experiences in personal or private ways.

Discussing memories with family

An inability to discuss memories with family members can also be found in the interviews conducted for this study. The belief that family members would not be interested or would not understand what they had endured, can be viewed as a common reason why some veterans remain silent about their experiences.

Harold May describes how he never talked to his late wife about his memories. Despite 'chatting' to friends and neighbours in a casual way about his wartime memories, Harold May has no living family and never spoke to his late wife about his experiences. He remembers thinking, 'No...[it never entered the situation?] the war is finished, now let's get on with our lives...'.⁶⁸ There is a clear sense that he feels his wife would not have been interested or would not want to hear about the war. These attitudes reflect the findings of Hunt and Robbins. They found that wives commonly provided 'practical' support but they 'do not tend to help veterans reconcile their traumatic recollections'.⁶⁹ They argue that 'it is common for many veterans to never tell their families about what happened. This is an avoidant strategy...if they family doesn't know they can't bring the (potentially traumatising) subject up'.⁷⁰ This could perhaps be one of the reasons why Harold

⁶⁸ Appendix 2

⁶⁹ Nigel Hunt, and Ian Robbins, 'World War II veterans, social support, and veterans' associations', 180

⁷⁰ Ibid

May chose not to discuss the war with his late wife. Oliver and Summers similarly argue that for many Far East prisoners of war, ‘memories were not commonly shared at home’.⁷¹ Silence surrounding the war can clearly be a product of a lack of familial communication and highlights how veterans can be selective surrounding the ways in which they deal with their legacy of their wartime experiences.

Even amongst those who had shared memories with family, meeting with other veterans appears to be the preferred option when choosing who to tell of wartime memories. Ken Cooke and Bert Barritt did talk to family members, but appear to have found it more rewarding discussing it with others who had similar experiences. When asked whether he spoke to people about his memories Bert Barritt responded: ‘Yes I did, oh yes’ but on the question of speaking to family he replied, ‘in the main, other people weren’t interested [laughs]...I don’t think they were...’.⁷² Barritt talked instead of his enjoyment at meeting with other veterans, and was one of the first to join the York Normandy Veterans Association.⁷³ Ken Cooke noted that he did mention the war to his family: ‘yes, you know, gradually stories now and again’.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Cooke highlighted the enjoyment of having a ‘chat and a pint’ with British Legion and York Normandy Veteran comrades about his memories.⁷⁵ Both veterans are long-standing members of the York Normandy Veterans Association, which runs social events and trips to the cemeteries and the battlefields of France. Evidently, in the case of two veterans

⁷¹ Lizzie Oliver, 237

⁷² Appendix 5

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Appendix 4

⁷⁵ Ibid

who are vocal about their memories, they each prefer the comradeship of discussing their memories with fellow veterans rather than family members.

These findings correlate with those of other researchers who have interviewed and explored the lives of veterans. Morley noted instances of silence in the context of the family amongst veterans of the Great War. He interviewed the Second World War generation to learn of their memories of their relatives who had fought in the First World War. He discovered that ‘the “silent veteran” trope is certainly not without foundation; most young men were not regularly regaled with stories by the veterans they interacted with’.⁷⁶ For some veterans of the Second World War, witnessing the silence of their fathers and relatives who had served in the Great War, actually prompted them to keep records and speak of their own wartime experiences. Douglas Petty explained that, ‘I think what prompted me to do something about it [to tell people] and to make sure my records were available both at Leeming and at Elvington...was the fact that my father had been in the First World War’.⁷⁷ Petty’s father ‘hadn’t told anyone about the first world war at all’...’.⁷⁸ As a result of his own father’s silence and discovering his medals and records after his death, Petty noted that: ‘I decided not a case of bragging...I might as well let people know what happened to me and so there is a record of the future...it is silly not to let people know what happened in the past’.⁷⁹ For Douglas Petty, the silence kept by his father actually prompted him to think about preserving and sharing his own memories. Similarly, Bert Barritt shared his sadness of not asking his father about his memories: ‘looking back I am sorry I

⁷⁶ Joel Morley, 206

⁷⁷ Appendix 7

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

didn't talk to my Dad more, I mean now I wish he was alive, I've got lots and lots and lots and lots to ask him, but at that time I was trying to move on but...'.⁸⁰ Perhaps for Barritt too, not asking his father about his memories has prompted him to share his own. He is an active member of the York Normandy Veterans Association and willingly discusses his memories with others. These findings correlate with the work of Morley which highlight how many veterans of the Great War did not speak about their memories. It also suggests that some Second World War veterans have been influenced to break their own silences as a result of their own relatives' lack of willingness to speak about their memories of warfare.

These discoveries surrounding silence of wartime memories and the family, suggest that there are vast differences in how veterans feel about telling their experiences to their relatives. It could be that speaking to other veterans is the preferred option for many veterans, as others have lived through similar experiences. As Hunt and Robbins note, 'ex-comrades are often the only ones that veterans will talk to because they are the only ones who "understand"'.⁸¹ For others, it was the silence of their Great War veteran relatives that have prompted them to discuss and preserve their own memories.

Coping with Traumatic Memories

⁸⁰ Appendix 5

⁸¹ Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative', 62

Experiences of trauma amongst veterans of the Second World War vary depending on where they served, the context of their role and what they experienced. These factors also help to shape how they share their memories and relate to their experiences. Traumatic memories have been seen as those which are unable to be 'integrated into our explicit memory system' and the traumatic event 'itself disrupts the processing of memory, with the effect that memories of the event will enter implicit nonverbal memory'.⁸² They can later emerge 'through reminders, the efforts of which may not be under conscious control'.⁸³ As Hunt and Robbins suggest, veterans use a variety of ways to deal with traumatic memories, some 'use processing' by writing poems or talking about the experiences.⁸⁴ Others 'avoid traumatic recollections' by not talking about them.⁸⁵ Examples of these strategies identified by Hunt and Robbins can be seen in the interviews conducted for this thesis. They concur that veterans respond to trauma in a variety of ways and that silence and fear of igniting upsetting memories, may be a reason why some veterans are not actively involved in memory making activities.

Goldstein's attitude to writing poems about his traumatic memories or dealing with them through using humour, could be an example of coping with trauma by weaving it into a life story and sharing the memories. He notes that 'it was humour that helped us survive, if not how would you live?'.⁸⁶ Goldstein's writing

⁸² Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative', 59

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with Their Memories through Narrative', 60

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Appendix 1

has helped him deal with one particularly traumatic memory and it enabled him to share and make sense of the experience. He explained, 'I've only written one poem. About Adrano, in Sicily...this is the first time I'd seen...in North Africa I hadn't seen any warfare...we passed through this place called Adrano and it had been pulverised, there was very little left of it, and what fascinated me most of all was there was...almost every doorway there was a body...'.⁸⁷ Goldstein's open attitude to sharing all of his memories has perhaps enabled him to be able to talk about the more traumatising experiences: 'I don't think I've buried anything'.⁸⁸ This process of making sense of traumatic memories by writing them down and including them as part of a personal wartime narrative, reflects what Hunt and McHale describe as 'how individuals learn to cope with their memories by cognitively processing emotional content through narrative, attempting to understand their trauma by making it meaningful'.⁸⁹ Ron Goldstein has evidently included some of his most traumatic memories in the narrative of his wartime, which helps him to share them easily and come to terms with what he has experienced.

Perhaps the nature of Goldstein's wartime role, as a Wireless Operator and Driver in the Royal Engineers, also meant that he experienced less severe traumas of killing and direct combat in contrast to those in artillery or combatant roles. This possibly also enabled him to come to terms with the traumas he did witness, as they were less frequent, and could be processed and added to a coherent narrative along with the rest of his wartime experiences.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Nigel Hunt and Sue McHale, 44

Others simply choose to only discuss positive memories. Harold May notes that he is willing to talk about war, but emphasises his dislike of talking about traumatic moments. He notes, 'oh I'll talk about the war, that doesn't bother me in the least...it doesn't upset me or whatever...I just don't talk about the bad bits'.⁹⁰ May also chooses to focus on the positive and the humorous in his account of his wartime experiences published in the Rotary Club of Cleveland 'Personal Experiences of World War Two' book. He chose not to include memories of direct combat and instead talks about the experience of 'joining up', an amusing incident which took place on a farm in Italy, and his memories of visiting Naples.⁹¹ The short account of his wartime experiences emphasises May's focus on the humorous and positive when telling the story of his war. He copes with the traumatic memories he experienced in the Royal Artillery by not discussing them. May's role in the Royal Artillery would have been combat based, which may help to explain his reluctance to share memories of direct fighting and being fired at during battle.

These examples highlight the varied ways in which veterans make sense of their more traumatic memories. While some remain silent about the upsetting aspects of warfare, others try to make sense of them by incorporating them into their life story narrative. This raises questions surrounding whether the level and nature of trauma endured, and the nature of wartime service, can impact upon how veterans navigate and recall their memories.

⁹⁰ Appendix 2

⁹¹ Gamble, Reed and Rotary Club of Cleveland, *Personal Experiences of World War Two* (Middlesbrough: Quoin Publishing Limited, 2009), 82-88

Encouraged and traumatic silence

The case of the Far East prisoners of war, highlights the ways in which traumatic and forced silence can become intertwined. Those who had suffered as POWs were encouraged not to speak by the military, and many remained silent due to these ‘additional barriers’ and the traumas that they had endured.⁹² The warning leaflet issued by ‘Allied Land Forces South East Asia’ showcases the attitudes of the military and the ways in which those being released were encouraged to remain silent. The leaflet notes ‘if you had not been lucky enough to have been recovered and had not died any form of unpleasant death at the hands of the Japanese you would not have wished your family and friends to have been harrowed by lurid details...this is just what will happen if you start talking to all and sundry about your experiences’.⁹³ It urged veterans to ‘spare the feelings of others’ and not speak about their experiences upon returning home.⁹⁴ This direct call to ex-prisoners of war to remain silent, highlights the serious military and government efforts to curb the truth of the experiences endured by POWs at the hands of the Japanese. Passerini gives examples of ‘efforts of authorities to conceal historical events which ‘led to an oblivion on public memory’ leaving many involved to ‘accept and prolong the silence’.⁹⁵ This can be seen in the case of the Far East prisoners of war, both upon their return home by the military and

⁹² ‘Figure 2 – Warning issued by ALFSA Command to newly released POWs copyright Nellis, M., *Freeing the Demons: Memories of Pop. P. 38 IWM (uncatalogued)*’ in Lizzie Oliver, ‘“What our Sons went through”: The Connective Memories of Far Eastern Captivity in the Charles Thrale Exhibition, 1946–1964’ *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 3, (2014), 242

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Luisa Passerini, 243

subsequently in political and commemorative culture. As shown in Chapter Two, commemorative events which could have featured POWs and honour those that died (such as events to commemorate VJ-Day), were side-lined for others such as VE-Day, D-Day and Dunkirk in which many POWs were excluded. The cultural covering up of the events and the initial discouragement to talk, served to initially silence many of those who had endured being held captive.

It can be argued that the forming of veteran groups enabled those who had been Far East prisoners of war to discuss their experiences and break both personal and public silences. As Passerini notes, 'there are always subjects of these processes, subjects whose attitudes are crucial in determining how silence is to be broken: certain forms of oblivion point to a lack of identity or to an effort to cover up some of its components'.⁹⁶ In the case of the Far East prisoners of war, they themselves can be viewed as the subjects. Their cohesion as part of veteran groups presented them with a sense of identity and shared suffering with which to fight for recognition and to break the silence on both a personal and a public level. Makepeace highlights initial examples of a 'readiness to unite' in the creation of initial ex-POW associations such as RBPOWA and later FEPOW.⁹⁷

Newspaper coverage shows the efforts of the Far East prisoners of war to connect and gain compensation and recognition. Articles such as those published around the compensation owed to POWs, can be seen in the immediate aftermath of the

⁹⁶ Luisa Passerini, 245

⁹⁷ Clare Makepeace, 258

war. Articles highlight groups claiming for ‘payment from Japanese frozen assets in Britain of ration money which they did not receive’, and reports that the government will offer compensation can be seen in the 1950s.⁹⁸ Decades later, veterans can be seen campaigning for financial compensation from the Japanese, forming the Japanese Labour Camp Survivors’ Association (JLCSA) as a way of gaining funds ‘as right of justice’.⁹⁹ The PoWs were eventually compensated £10,000 by the British government.¹⁰⁰ These ongoing battles for compensation and recognition highlight the ways in which prisoner of war groups have worked together, broken their silence and gained support from the press and government. As shown in Chapter Two, the efforts of these groups changed how commemorative anniversaries were conducted, with VJ-Day taking a central place in the calendar from the 1990s onwards. Similarly, the friendships formed as part of veteran groups could also clearly be seen to aid veterans in breaking their silence with others, and come to terms with some of their memories. As one ex-prisoner of war noted, ‘the comradeship is great. It is the same with POWs today – when we have our meetings and reunions it is a close-knit group’.¹⁰¹ These articles clearly demonstrate the efforts of veterans themselves to group together and gain ‘public recognition for the way their lives had been damaged by the war’.¹⁰² They also highlight the ways in which these veterans could find ways to possibly cope with these traumatic experiences. This again strengthens the findings of Hunt and Robbins of the importance of social interaction to cope with

⁹⁸ ‘War Prisoners Claim on Japan’ *Manchester Guardian* 12 Feb 1951, and ‘Grant to Far East Prisoners - £15 by Christmas’ *Manchester Guardian* October 27 1952

⁹⁹ Joan Bakewell, ‘Paying for Our Crimes’, *The Guardian* 12 May 1994

¹⁰⁰ Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘10,000 Payout to Japan PoWs’ *Guardian* 08 November 2000

¹⁰¹ ‘Return to the Railway of Death and Comradeship’ *Eastern Daily Press* undated.

¹⁰² Clare Makepeace, 258

traumatic memories of conflict.

The case of the Far East prisoners of war highlights how military and cultural attitudes fostered an initial silence, which also impacted upon the cultural and commemorative legacy of the war. The efforts of the Far East prisoners of war as ‘subjects’ actively breaking the imposed silence on their wartime experiences, shows the ways in which veterans themselves can group together to share their memories and bring their forgotten experiences into public consciousness. In this case, silence was both encouraged by the military and accepted by many of those who had experienced such traumas during the conflict. The sense of identity formed in associations such as the FEPOWs, enabled this silence to be broken through the creation of a shared identity. As their experiences became publicly acknowledged, they could find new levels of support from charities and the government to cope with later life.

Conclusion

Overall, exploring the concept of silence can help to further understand the various ways in which Second World War veterans relate to their wartime experiences and how far they choose to adopt a self-identity which is based on being a veteran. The extent to which a veteran remains silent is a result of a variety of factors. It can be a consequence of where the veteran served, the level of trauma they endured, their relationship with their families and other veterans, and their own personal attitudes to their life story. While some present attitudes to

their experiences and behaviours which reflect the cultural idea of a veteran, such as attending commemorative events, joining associations and talking about their memories to their families, others connect to their careers and choose not to discuss their memories readily. This study presents a complex portrait of what it means to be a Second World War veteran. Memories do not need to be socially constructed to be pertinent to a person's life or to be recalled externally with others. Non-speech acts of memory making and examples of low key activities, highlight the alternative and more personal ways in which veterans relate to their memories. Despite these examples, a desire to discuss memories with other veterans present in the attitudes of some of the interviewees and the support provided by discussing memories in group situations, highlight how meeting with others can help to break silences and make sense of traumatic memories. This chapter emphasises the diversity of the veteran experience and the lack of uniformity present in how veterans see themselves and how they share their memories. Unlike the one dimensional and often constructed images of the veteran present in the commemorative and political representations, these findings suggest a more varied portrait of how this generation view themselves in relation to their wartime memories. It is evident that there is no one identical experience of a Second World War veteran, and each sees their experiences and relates to their memories in different ways.

Chapter 6

Creating a sense of group identity - British Legion branches and clubs and veterans associations

This chapter will explore the ways in which British Legion branches and veterans associations have assisted in the creation of a sense of group identity amongst Second World War veterans. The British Legion offered two types of community for returning ex-servicemen to join, branches and clubs. In the post-war period, there were 'over 5000' branches across the UK which were described as 'implementing the British Legion's job of establishing ex-Service people's rights' and 'the primary unit which deals with all local matters in line with the national policy of the organisation'.¹ Branches upheld the traditions of the British Legion, including fundraising for the Poppy Appeal and attending commemorative events. Clubs were informal spaces in which veterans could reminisce, have a drink, play card games and socialise with one another.²

In the case of the British Legion branches, a ready-made set of rituals were available which allowed the Second World War generation to adopt a pre-existing sense of social identity based on the traditions of service, loyalty and commemorative rituals. Despite some taking on these opportunities in pre-existing branches, Second World War veterans appear to have had less of an interest in tradition and upholding the rituals of the Legion, particularly in the decades before retirement. This research highlights that they were more inclined

¹ 'British Legion - Four Freedoms They Fought For - Work, Homes, Health, Security' Ref 2704/29a *Shropshire Archives* and British Legion - What is it? Ref 2704/25 *Shropshire Archives*

² A Guide for the Management of British Legion Clubs' n.d. Ref: 2704/7 *Shropshire Archives*

to opt for social interaction as part of the British Legion clubs. Rather than view this as a negative, this chapter suggests that social interaction was a way in which some veterans continued to connect to their wartime lives. British Legion clubs helped to foster a sense of group identity by enabling members to continue bonds of comradeship and to socialise with each other.

Veterans associations show how ex-servicemen gained a sense of group identity largely based upon the arena or type of service experienced. Given the huge variety of the Second World War experience, in terms of geographical location and role played, this generation of veterans appear to have preferred to categorise themselves based on these differences, rather than identify as one homogenous group. The associations highlight a greater autonomy for Second World War veterans in choosing to form their own rituals and group traditions. These local networks of veterans show the spirit of comradeship within the groups and community interaction which has been largely invisible in media representations.

Veterans' associations and British Legion branches and clubs can be classified as social groups. Tajfel and Turner define groups as being 'a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their membership in it'.³ These groups are able to 'create and define the individual's place in society', and 'provide their members with an identification of themselves in social

³ Henri Tajfel, and John C. Turner, 'The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour' in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* ed. Stephen Worchel, and William G. Austin, (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 15

terms'.⁴ Exploring veteran's groups allows for an analysis of how ex-service men and women view themselves in a collective setting.

Groups of veterans have been described as 'fictive kinship groups' by Jay Winter.⁵ As discussed in Chapter Two, these are 'small-scale agents...their work is liminal. It occupies the space between individual memory and the national theatre of collective memory choreographed by social and political leaders'.⁶

These groups therefore, can show how veterans themselves remember their wartime experiences collectively, beyond the controlled and limited representations of them shown in the first section of this thesis. As shown in Chapter Two, the activities of veteran groups and veterans' own agency in organising commemorations was often overridden by media and political organisers. The efforts of veteran groups themselves and the meanings they attached to anniversary commemorations, were largely absent from large scale mediated events where veterans are commonly seen in popular culture.

Alongside being overshadowed in commemorative culture, veteran groups have been underexplored by scholars of war and memory. Yet, as Makepeace notes, 'they can show us how a significant number of ex-servicemen retrospectively made sense of their wartime experiences'.⁷ They also provide an ideal opportunity to examine how veterans viewed their sense of identity in relation to the Second World War in a group setting. Exploring identity construction from a group perspective requires an appreciation of the difference between personal and group

⁴ Henri Tajfel, and John C. Turner, 16

⁵ Jay Winter, 'Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', kindle location 1003-1009

⁶ Jay Winter, 'Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', kindle location, 1008

⁷ Clare Makepeace, 254

identity. While personal identity is influenced by society, psychologists understand group identity as ‘social identity’ which ‘refers to the shared social categorical self’.⁸ As Turner *et al* explain, ‘self identity refers to social categorizations of self and others, self-categories that define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories’.⁹ This study draws upon this idea of self-categorisation theory by exploring how veteran groups categorise themselves and build a sense of group identity, in how they describe their purpose and the activities and in the aims of the organisations.

Examples of social categorising in veteran groups can be located in the ephemera of a number of British Legion branches and veterans’ associations. Locating surviving archival material relating to local branches and clubs of the British Legion proved challenging, as many archives only hold sparse records. Nevertheless, the plentiful ephemera and materials of various British Legion branches located in the Suffolk, Shropshire, and Yorkshire localities, can provide case studies which show the commonalities between branches and clubs across Britain. Specifically, the minute books of the Berrington, York and the Halesworth and District branches from 1945 onwards, enable a detailed comparison of the conduct of British Legion groups in various localities. Added to this, Shropshire county handbooks ranging from 1948 to 2000 and other area handbooks, rare magazines published by the Billingham Branch, rule books and pamphlets from various locations, also highlight the ways in which these groups

⁸ John C. Turner, Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, and Craig McGarty, 454

⁹ *Ibid*

were governed and how they sustained a ready-made sense of veteran identity promoted by the British Legion officials. While little material exists surrounding the activities of British Legion clubs, rule books and assessments of some of the clubs in Shropshire, give some indication about what these settings provided for veterans and how their role differed from the branches. This section does not intend to outline the history of the veterans' organisation since 1945, but does aim to explore in depth how certain branches and localities fostered a sense of group identity for Second World War veterans.

The Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association, which began in 1961 and disbanded in 2000, and the York Normandy Veterans Association, created in 1994, (records are available from 2008 to present), can also be analysed as two case studies to examine the ways in which veterans associations create group cohesion and identity. Using two case studies can enable a detailed analysis of the evolving purpose of these organisations from the 1960s to present.¹⁰ Unlike British Legion branches, these organisations were created by Second World War veterans specifically and have been run and governed by members. Firstly, using the archive of the Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association, the creation and evolution of the organisation can be discussed. The organisation archive provides an unusually complete insight into how and why these groups were set up and their purpose as defined by

¹⁰ The researcher had initially intended to analyse the vast array of veterans' association journals available at the Imperial War Museums Duxford, to gain a wide overview of how all associations described and fostered a sense of identity in their journals. However, the archive is closed for refurbishment and the materials were moved into deep storage for the duration. It was therefore decided that an in-depth analysis of a small number of veterans' associations would be conducted instead, drawing upon a wider range of materials such as newspaper clippings related to the branches, branch minutes, newsletters and correspondence.

Second World War veterans themselves. This will highlight the ways in which the organisation worked in relation to other branches, the activities conducted and how the branch evolved as members declined. Secondly, the York Normandy Veterans Association can also be analysed as a case study showing how these groups have evolved as veterans have reached old age. Interviews with members of the York Normandy Veterans Association, will also highlight how veterans themselves view the purpose of their participation in such an organisation. Comparing the two associations will highlight how veterans associations have become more autonomous over time, with greater control over the types of activities they conduct, as members have become fewer and the governance of the associations has declined.

The British Legion Branches and Clubs

The British Legion provided the Second World War generation of veterans with a pre-existing set of rituals and traditions, which had the potential to foster a sense of group identity if they chose to engage in branch activities. As Niall Barr highlights in his book exploring the history of the British Legion from 1921 to 1939, ‘the British ex-service movement was, and is, much more than a collection of social clubs and drinking dens’.¹¹ He emphasises the social, political and philanthropic roots of the British Legion and how it evolved into an body which ‘believed in comradeship and collective action’.¹² The findings of this chapter

¹¹ Barr cites the 1939 Minister of War, Duff Cooper as stating that the Legion “‘is simply a collection of middle aged and elderly men who have been at some time in one of the Services and who meet together with the laudable purpose of wearing their medals and drinking beer’”. Niall Barr, *The Lion and the Poppy – British Veterans, Politics and Society 1921-1939* (London: Praeger Publications, 2005), 1

¹² Niall Barr, 200

concur with this opinion that the British Legion provided far more than a social network. It will show how Second World War veterans were offered both comradeship and a pre-existing set of activities, which they could adopt to gain a ready-made sense of group identity. These were sustained and governed by the Legion officials and existing members. However, this chapter argues that the British Legion social clubs provided a subtler way for those who joined to categorise themselves as veterans, as they could socialise and connect with others who had served in a more informal, social setting, without the regulations and dedication required as part of a branch.

Even before the war ended, local branches were being encouraged to recruit those who had already been discharged from the armed services. The Shropshire County Committee meeting held in 1944 reported that, ‘the membership of the Legion was growing rapidly as the men were being discharged from the Forces – branches were urged to get in touch with such men with the view of getting them to join the Legion’.¹³ On a national level, preparations were being made to welcome the new members in the creation of ephemera which explained the benefits of joining. Promotional leaflets such as ‘Four Freedoms They Fought For - Work, Homes, Health, Security’, depicts a veteran on the front cover, in a demobilisation suit, and explains what joining the Legion can provide for returning ex-servicemen.¹⁴ It describes the British Legion as being ‘more than just an ex-Service-man’s organisation’ which has ‘grown to be an essential part of our social

¹³ ‘British Legion Shropshire Committee Meeting - 24 August 1944’ Ref: 5282/34 *Shropshire Archives*

¹⁴ ‘British Legion - Four Freedoms They Fought For - Work, Homes, Health, Security’ Ref 2704/29a *Shropshire Archives*

structure'.¹⁵ It 'offers members the full social and recreational activities of any club, plus an important factor – Service' and the committees are 'ever ready to deal skilfully and sympathetically with all the troubles that beset those who have spent years in uniform...just honest to goodness understanding which solves perplexing questions on employment, pensions, distress, setting-up new businesses...'.¹⁶ The leaflet has an emphasis on the welfare that the Legion provides and goes on to describe the variety of organisations the British Legion is connected with, to help provide men with employment opportunities, such as the British Legion's Taxi School and the Business Advice Service.¹⁷ It also includes details of the Legion housing scheme, and pledges to fill the 'unavoidable gaps' in healthcare for veterans.¹⁸ In this context, the British Legion is marketed to the new generation of ex-servicemen as a supportive and vital organisation which could make settling back into civilian life easier, and provide them with connections to others who had served. The leaflet clearly aimed to persuade the next generation of ex-servicemen to join branches specifically, and markets the Legion to veterans as an organisation which could serve them. As veterans were newly returning home, the leaflet does not stress the obligations which would be placed on them to help others as members, but emphasises how these returning servicemen could be aided by the organisation and those already in it. It categorises the organisation as a professional and supportive group of veterans, underpinned by the aims, ethos and traditions of the Legion.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

At a local level, county committees and branches began to discuss ways that they could integrate the next generation. The Berrington Branch in Shropshire, discussed adapting to a ‘new method’ in the ‘initiation of new members’.¹⁹ Plans to expand membership were also discussed, with the agreement that a branch register, stamp and address book should be purchased and that a ‘competition’ should be held to welcome ‘the most new members’.²⁰ Similarly, the York branch saw an influx of recruits in 1946, with the chairman declaring ‘in due course they would be able to take part in the work of the branch’.²¹ This suggests that the next generation could look forward to following the same rituals and aims as those running the branch in 1946. One newspaper article published in 1959, tried to entice new members, noting it is ‘the responsibility of every member to promote publicity and to attract new, younger members’ and outlines the ‘wide activities’ available to members including a cricket team and the availability of loans and welfare support.²² Clearly, branches were either welcoming new members, or trying to encourage those who had recently left the armed forces to join. These attempts emphasised the existing ethos and rituals of the branches, and the encouraging of members to continue the work of their predecessors.

County handbooks also highlight how existing members wanted the next generation to take on the same aims as they had done previously. The 1948 handbook features a message from the County Chairman of the Shropshire

¹⁹ Berrington British Legion Branch Committee meeting May 6th 1947 Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*

²⁰ Berrington British Legion Branch Committee meeting July 12 1955 Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*

²¹ York Branch Executive Meeting, November 1945, Ref: RBL/1/1 *York Explore*

²² ‘Wide Activities of the Legion in York’ 2nd February 1959, *York Press in Ref: RBL/1/1 York Explore*

Committee, Alderman the Reverend A. Giles, who declares 'to the Legion of the New Generation we offer the warmest of welcomes, and we ask them to accept the responsibility of the great heritage, the foundations of which were laid by that great soldier, Earl Haig, and which now are yours to shoulder'.²³ Comments such as these emphasise how British Legion branches expected the Second World War generation to continue the work the Legion on a local level, and welcomed these new veterans to adopt and uphold the traditions established by the veterans of the Great War.

What were the traditions which were promoted at branch level, and how did the existing Legion officials define the role of the incoming generation of veterans? The Shropshire County Handbook features a message from the County President, Lt-General Sir Oliver Leese, who states that:

'I am sure that each one of us must do our best to live up to the ideals of the Legion. It is easy to pay lip service to them ; and fondly to image that we are doing our job ; but I do very sincerely assure you that it is only by accepting office in the Legion and by assuming responsibilities of that office, that we can really prove our worth.

My message to you this year, and especially to the younger men and women of World War II and thereafter, is willingly and gladly to accept office yourselves and to strive and endeavour by your work and duty in your Branches, to do your share for your friends and comrades...'.²⁴

²³ 'British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1948' Ref 3566/6/1 *Shropshire Archives*

²⁴ 'British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1955' Ref 3566/6/6 *Shropshire Archives*

Similarly, one year later, the County President stressed, 'I ask all Legionnaires from all Branches to turn up in full force at Legion parades and Meetings and Socials – and especially at Remembrance Day parades – for it is only by the personal attendance of each one of us at these Church Parades that we can show our local friends and supporters that we believe in the Legion and its ideals for God, Queen and Country'.²⁵ Messages such as these categorise the purpose of the veteran as being driven by service, responsibility and attending the commemorative events and parades organised by the Legion.

This message presents a different role to the one shown in ephemera printed as veterans were being demobilised. While the recruitment leaflet emphasised what ex-servicemen could gain from joining the organisation, at a local level, the emphasis is focused upon how these new members could serve the Legion. The identity of the veteran in this context is based on almost a continuation of army life, as parades, loyalty and service are all presented as traits of an ideal British Legion veteran. Clearly, these messages were meant to encourage and rally the younger members of the Legion. As shown in Chapter One of this thesis, the traditions of the British Legion helped to form the most common image of the veteran as bemedalled, proud and marching on Remembrance Day. This image was certainly encouraged in the shared identity and activities of the branches and in the actions members were encouraged to pursue. Written by veterans of the Great War, these messages suggest that the new generation should continue their work.

²⁵ 'Foreword – by our County President' 'British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1956' Ref: 3566/6/5 *Shropshire Archives*

Branch minutes also highlight the perceived purpose of the veteran as part of these groups, and show how these activities promoted a sense of identity at branch level. Events such as standard bearing competitions, the Poppy Appeal, sports teams, annual dinners, dances and other events all made up a strong and continued set of rituals, which upheld the ideals of service and community in the Berrington, York and Halesworth and District Branches.²⁶ A vast array of rules, regulations and guidebooks existed to steer branches towards activities promoted by the Legion officials. Guides helped branches in administering pensions, conducting a Poppy Appeal Campaign, sports team rules and membership categories.²⁷ These were used alongside circulars sent from the Headquarters to inform each locality and branch of upcoming news, activities and accounts.²⁸ All these items can be seen to have encouraged and sustained a certain homogeneity amongst British Legion branches. These booklets also highlight the regulated nature of these activities. In many ways, the group identity which the branches fostered was largely maintained and enforced by the Legion officials. Those who engaged in the activities were adopting a group identity which reflected the most dominant representations of the veteran, as the loyal, bemedalled, marching hero, who continued to serve his nation.

²⁶ The Berrington Branch Minutes book highlights additional activities such as a Ladies Evening, Annual Shoot, Day Trips and an Annual Whist Drive in 'Berrington Branch Minutes' Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*, 'York Branch Minutes, Ref: RBL/1/1 *York Explore* and 'Halesworth and District British Legion Branch Minutes' Ref: 1104/1-2 *Suffolk Record Office*

²⁷ 'Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal – A Guide to Organisers' 1974 Ref 5282/34/4 *Shropshire Archives*, 'Royal British Legion – Pensions Guide' 1981/2, Ref 5282/34/10 *Shropshire Archives*, 'British Legion West Midlands Area Sports – General Competition Rules' March 1970, Ref 5282/34/16 *Shropshire Archives* and 'Membership Categories of the Royal British Legion' 1971, Ref 5282/34/15 *Shropshire Archives*

²⁸ 'British Legion General Circulars' Ref: RBL/9/13 *York Explore*

Nevertheless, the wide range of activities in the various branches, does show a difference in how far Legion aims could be adapted and extended at a local level. This could be seen in activities which were unique to each region, but maintained the image and ideals set up by the Legion. The York Branch held their own Festival of Remembrance in 1952. The *York Evening Press* reported that The President of the branch told those present at a discussion about the event, that ‘the Legion in York was at last “doing its stuff”’ he stated ““I want no cheap rubbish talked about Sunday Entertainment...this is a Festival Service of Remembrance – a real memorial to those that fell””.²⁹ The unique local activities run and publicised in one area show, how despite having to adhere strictly to Legion official protocols, branches did organise their own activities. These activities highlight the low key commemorative events and social activities which were taking place across the country.

Despite these attempts from existing branches to recruit and define the identity of a veteran based on the traditions of the British Legion, it seems that the successors of the Great War generation had different requirements. Some were not so keen to get involved in the British Legion branch traditions in the decades following the end of the war. Unlike the Great War generation, their social and healthcare needs were largely being addressed due to the post-war social reforms, and it can be

²⁹ ‘York Legion Decides on Festival’ April 1st 1955 *York Evening Press* in Ref: RBL/1/1 *York Explore*

argued that they were more interested in the less governed nature of the British Legion social clubs than the strict rules and activities of branches.

As shown in the first chapter of this thesis, the 1960s and 1970s saw a crisis of commemoration, where Second World War veterans were partly blamed for the lack of pro-active interest in the Poppy Appeal and the traditions of Remembrance Day and the Festival of Remembrance. Writers such as Anthony Brown, writing the official history of the British Legion in 1971, highlighted a lack of interest among Second World War veterans in the traditions of remembrance. The book noted how ‘their Fathers joined for a different reason...there was so much to be put right...now they join for another – they want a social life but with a purpose’.³⁰ Brown describes ‘essentially the difference between the soldiers of 1914 and 1939 was a difference in attitude’.³¹ While the Great War generation experienced widespread ‘unemployment, the dole and the scrap heap’ the Second World War generation ‘were not prepared to fight and be killed for nothing’ and ‘would get a square deal as well as honour, a job as well as the thanks of a grateful nation’.³² While Chapter Three highlighted the difficulties and unwelcome reception facing returning ex-servicemen after the Second World War, the successors to the Great War generation did gain more support by the government. These generational differences caused differing attitudes to joining veteran groups. The ideals of the Legion were seen as the way in which an ex-

³⁰ Anthony Brown, 115-116

³¹ Anthony Brown, 40

³² Anthony Brown, 41

serviceman could become a veteran by the Great War generation, and a lack of engagement from the younger generation was met with some hostility.

Rare, local branch magazines highlight how some groups attempted to adapt and change to welcome the younger generation of veterans and achieved success. In the case of the Billingham branch, in Stockton-on-Tees, the creation of a friendly and inclusive magazine suggests that the group was attempting to try new initiatives to appeal to the Second World War generation. The first edition of the 'Legionaire' describes how the branch views the needs of veterans:

'The ex-service man and woman does not of himself demand preferential treatment in anything. The greater his deeds and experiences, the less are his demands. His greatest desire is to attempt to recover lost years, and feel safe from a recurrence of upheaval which caused it. The spirit of true comradeship is one of the few things gained from active service in war time. The Ex-service man can best keep that spirit alive by contact with those who have served and suffered similarly as himself.

The spirit of comradeship – to foster and maintain which, is one of the Legion's main objectives – is the hope of the civilised world...To the Ex-service man and woman not yet in the Legion, we say come in now, and help with the job of establishing a worth-while headquarters in Billingham. To the older Ex-service man, your guidance and advice is

needed to ensure that the enthusiastic and hard working lads of this war, build securely on the foundations already laid'.³³

The Billingham branch clearly acknowledge the upheavals caused by war and how comradeship is important to the identity of being a veteran. Interestingly, while service is acknowledged as the key principle of the Legion, the magazine does not shun the social network which the organisation can provide, noting how the branch aims to provide a 'full and varied social programme'.³⁴ It highlights the desire to move on from conflict into civilian life and places the Second World War generation first, in setting up the Headquarters, taking the lead and providing something different to the branch than simply continuing the work of their predecessors. The Great War generation are described as wise elders, overseeing the work of the new generation. In this context, veterans are categorised differently by the next generation and a sense of identity is built upon shared experience and working together.

The origins of this forward-thinking outlook can be found in the 'introducing our branches official' pages. The chairman of the Billingham branch in 1947 was Douglas Parkin, 'born in Middlesbrough in the year 1929...the youngest ever chairman of Billingham Branch of the British Legion'.³⁵ The biography notes that

³³ 'The "Legionaire" British Legion Billingham Branch, July 1947' Vol 1, No. 1 Ref: P.P.4050.clo.

British Library

³⁴ The "Legionaire" British Legion Billingham Branch, August 1947' Vol 1, No. 2 Ref: P.P.4050.clo.

cLo *British Library*, 3

³⁵ The "Legionaire" British Legion Billingham Branch, August 1947' Vol 1, No. 3 Ref: P.P.4050.clo.

cLo *British Library*, 11

‘regardless of his comparative youth and newness to public work, he has proved himself to be a keen and efficient chairman over the past months, which is no mean task with the great diversion of opinion that is in the branch to-day’.³⁶ It describes that ‘as a married man with one child, there is no doubt he can express the feelings and views of the typical ex-service men of to-day, as well as not forgetting the needs of a last war serving man, and as leader of the Branch it will be of no fault of his if the ex-service man’s view and opinion appertaining to current affairs don’t at last come to mean something in our community’.³⁷

Evidently, by having a Second World War veteran at the helm of the newly formed branch, the idea of the British Legion veteran spoke to the views of the younger generation and their needs. Veterans are described as politically active and keen to support one another. The chairman notes that the branch ‘is not a dead unit of a large organisation, but a very, very active one’ and aims to represent ‘ex-service opinion’ and ‘take a very advice interest in Local affairs on your behalf’.³⁸

While commentators such as Anthony Brown, view the Second World War veteran as being someone who has no need to fight for privileges, the magazine suggests that those in the Billingham branch wished to strive to become the voice of the veteran on political matters.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ ‘The “Legionaire” British Legion Billingham Branch, August 1947’ Vol 1, No. 2 Ref: P.P.4050.clo.
cLo *British Library*, 3

The 'It Really Happened' section features a number of stories taking place in 1940, including anecdotes of wartime service.³⁹ This shows the branch is clearly taking an interest in those who fought in the Second World War and appealing for others to share their stories. The content of the magazine generally, appears to address the younger generation, and gives tips on decorating, DIY, gardening, a children's page, 'the dearth of houses' in Billingham, and articles on the benefits of immigrating to Australia.⁴⁰ Given the life stage of many returning veterans, the magazine appeals to those with young families and those seeking work opportunities. The aims of the publication outlined go beyond advertising the Poppy Appeal and fundraising, and appear to address the needs of a new generation. How successfully the magazine continued to recruit new members or continue to circulate is unclear, as five volumes of the magazine only appear to exist.⁴¹ However, the refreshing way in which this branch categorises veterans, shows how some branches were creating new traditions and addressing the Second World War generation directly.

Yet, other branches do not appear to have been as easily adapted to entice younger members. Account books of the British Legion, reveal the difficulties in recruiting members to branches during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1962 Annual Reports and Accounts stress the 'difficulty in recruiting new members and in getting members to keep paying'.⁴² Similarly, at branch level, the recruitment of

³⁹ The "Legionaire" British Legion Billingham Branch, August 1947' Vol 1, No. 2 Ref: P.P.4050.clo.

British Library, 6

⁴⁰ Ref: P.P.4050.clo. *British Library*

⁴¹ Letter from Billingham Branch to British Museum regarding sending copies of publications Ref: P.P.4050.clo. *British Library*

⁴² 'British Legion Annual Reports & Accounts – 1962-3' R33/(41).9/ *Imperial War Museums*.

new members was a continuing concern. While the Berrington branch did not appear to have a serious lack of members in the 1950s to 1960s, ‘attendances had dropped’ during the eight meetings held in 1970, and the Poppy Appeal funds were lower than usual.⁴³ The branch Chairman reported in 1972, that ‘the committee had held 9 meetings during the year which had been moderately attended, but [although] he could always rely on the faithfuls, we were short of committee members, and since the death of the Treasurer he had to carry out those duties as well’.⁴⁴ A letter was sent to all members in 1972, to urge members to take on one of the seven vacant committee roles as well as the role of Treasurer, and pleads members to ‘please help a good branch to survive’.⁴⁵ These reports and initiatives highlight how as Great War veterans were beginning to decline, their places were not easily being filled by new members of the Second World War generation.

While the messages above show the Shropshire County President encouraging the younger generation to get involved by highlighting the Legion aims in a positive way, later messages and articles featured in handbooks show a more direct tone, emphasising the perceived lack of interest and apathy of the younger Second World War generation of veterans. The 1961 message from the County President described that:

‘The Shropshire British Legion has again had a successful year, but there are still a number of Branches in the county which are not pulling their

⁴³ British Legion Berrington Branch - AGM November 02 1970 Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*

⁴⁴ British Legion Berrington Branch - AGM November 22 1972 Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*

⁴⁵ ‘Dear Member...’ letter November 10th 1972, part of Ref: 3953/1 *Shropshire Archives*

weight. This same situation is, I think, to be found in most parts of the British Isles...personally, I think that it is mainly due to lack of interest and to a feeling of apathy. When the Legion started after the First World War, there was a real incentive for each service man and woman to work for. Pensions were inadequate and many ex-Servicemen were out of work and in financial difficulties. Today, with a welfare state and much better pensions, it is a very different picture...I feel that the Legion is well worthwhile. Everyday there are some ex-Servicemen are in need and who fall on bad days. The British Legion caters for these men with its Branch Service Committees and in its welfare organisations at Area and national Headquarters...But the average Legionnaire does little of this work himself. A limited number of men in each Branch work on the welfare committee, and a few Legionnaires assist with the Poppy Day collections. But there, it seems to me to finish in many Branches.

I do not think we shall now increase our numbers and attract new members to our Branches, just by offering to them the inducement of amusement, entertainment and good company. So much of this is provided today in the improvement in wages, the motor car and the television. In my opinion there is something lacking ; some incentive and some feeling that to join the Legion provides an opportunity to do something worthwhile and not necessarily for oneself'.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ 'Foreword – by our County President' 'British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1961' Ref 3566/6/10 *Shropshire Archives*

This message suggests that Second World War veterans were less keen to uphold the traditions of the British Legion, largely because their needs had been met by the government. Messages such as this highlight the contrast between how the Great War generation viewed the role and identity of veteran groups and their successors who were lacking in interest in the traditions. The Great War generation had built and sustained a sense of veteran identity at group level through helping with welfare support, fundraising and commemorative activities. Stemming from the hardships they faced in the interwar period, both Legion officials and those at county level describe and maintain the idea of a veteran in this way. Failing to continue these traditions, as the message suggests, left a branch and its members perceived as lacking. While some clearly got involved in branch life, the widespread lack of interest from Second World War veterans, highlights a contrast between how Great War veterans chose to define the role of the veteran in a group setting and their successors. While branches such as Billingham, appeared to create new initiatives to welcome the new generation and its leadership by acknowledging that veterans enjoyed the social aspect of branch life and had other commitments, other branches clearly held onto set activities and the idea of the veteran as someone to serve others even in civilian life.

As the lack of perceived interest continued, the messages delivered to veterans in county handbooks grew ever more serious in tone. A letter style article was written in 1979 for the 1980 Shropshire County handbook by Jimmy Hughes, the

prominent veteran of the Second World War and former national chairman of the British Legion from 1972 to 1975.⁴⁷ In the letter Hughes wrote:

‘My dear Legion friend and comrade,

The old saying “if that cap fits wear it”! This letter is NOT for that ten percent of our Legion members who work very hard for our movement, or who, having given loyal and dedicated service now find that age and infirmity have overtaken them. It is addressed to the other ninety per cent who do little or nothing at all for our organisation, and to especially those who only joined the Legion because they wanted their beer to be a penny or two cheaper’.

To you I say in all sincerity: “Take the badge down, mate”, because you are pretending to be something you are not. The first thing to get into your head is that you don’t wear that Legion badge simply because you are an ex-serviceman. There are literally millions of ex-Servicemen in this country today who are not entitled to wear that badge. You wear it because you are a special kind of ex-Serviceman – one who once upon a time, when you were admitted to membership, made a solemn promise to support the aims and objects of the Legion as laid out for us in the Royal Charter...that charter requires you to help in raising money for benevolent

⁴⁷ ‘Army Obituaries - Colonel Jimmy Hughes’ *Daily Telegraph* 05 September 2012 accessed 03/07/2019 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/army-obituaries/9523683/Colonel-Jimmy-Hughes.html>

and welfare schemes of the Legion. So I challenge you – what did you do to help last Poppy Week?⁴⁸

Written by a Second World War veteran who is actively addressing his own generation, the article clearly aims to persuade the younger generation to take a more active role in branch activities. It suggests that there was a division between those who were keen to take on the traditions such as selling poppies, and those who simply wanted to engage in the social side of the British Legion. Those that use the British Legion solely for socialising are condemned and it is suggested that those who do not ‘serve’ are not entitled to be part of the organisation. There were clearly some deeply dedicated members, like Jimmy Hughes, who were passionate about continuing the Legion traditions and helping fellow veterans.⁴⁹ However, the need for such a message to be printed, does suggest a clear division, between those who defined themselves as a veteran in keeping with the Legion ideals, and those who simply enjoyed the social side of the clubs.

How did branches aim to solve the perceived lack of interest? On a national level, leaflets were being produced to encourage branches to do more to solve the membership crisis, and to encourage those who did join to participate. Leaflets such as the ‘Ten Point Message to Members’, gave a range of suggestions to recruit members, including to recruit friends, create a warden system to regulate activity, update publicity and notice boards, create new branches in communities

⁴⁸ Jimmy Hughes, ‘Get Cracking, Writes Colonel Jimmy Hughes – Earn the Right to Wear That Badge’ in ‘British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1980’ Ref 2470/21 *Shropshire Archives*, 54-56

⁴⁹ ‘Army Obituaries - Colonel Jimmy Hughes’ *Daily Telegraph* 05 September 2012 accessed 03/07/2019 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/army-obituaries/9523683/Colonel-Jimmy-Hughes.html>

such as new housing estates, and encourage people to join sports clubs.⁵⁰ Other points are telling of the motivations of the Second World War generation. One point discusses the need to acknowledge that ‘a member may look upon a Club with some favour as part of branch life’ but ‘he must remain loyal to the branch...and see that other members do the same’.⁵¹ This acknowledges that many members joined for the social side of the organisation and joined clubs but avoided branch responsibilities. Similarly, another point notes how members of regimental and veterans associations ‘are singularly well suited to carry the Membership Battle forward’ and ‘they are particularly well urged to see how they can link up sources of Membership with the Legion’.⁵² This implies that Second World War veterans were forming their own associations, which were more popular than British Legion branches. Similar tactics to recruit members were clearly implemented at branch level. The York branch noted in 1964, that ‘it was high time both sides got together and tried to work together to build up a branch that we could be proud of...the club should be aware of the splendid work that the branch was doing to help ex-servicemen in distress and need’.⁵³ It seems the York branch were evidently trying to solve the lack of membership engaging with the social clubs.

It can be argued that during their working age life, the social side of the organisation was the main way in which veterans of the Second World War connected to one another and built a sense of group identity connected to the war.

⁵⁰ ‘British Legion Midland Area – Ten Point Message to Members’ Ref:2704/38 *Shropshire Archives*

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ York British Legion Branch Meeting – June 1st 1964 Ref: RBL/1/2 *York Explore*

British Legion clubs were able to avoid some of the traditional responsibilities outlined by British Legion officials. They offered a way for veterans to connect to one another without the obligations presented in branches. The Handbook of 1975 outlines the ways in which Social Clubs fell outside of the rules and regulations of British Legion branches:

‘It cannot be too clearly stated that neither the Royal Charter nor the Schedule of Rules apply to or govern Clubs and provision is made therein for the establishment or administration of Clubs. Membership of a Branch of the Legion cannot in any circumstances be contingent upon membership of a Club. Where, however, there is a desire to form a Social Club and a careful assessment of its future value to a Branch appears to be favourable, there is no objection to a Branch sponsoring the formation of such a society...It is strongly emphasised that Royal British Legion Clubs operating under Model Rules and thus registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act are legally responsible for the management of their own affairs through their elected Committees under the authority of their Seal. They are permitted to pledge neither the name of the Legion nor of the parent Branch, or indeed any other name other than their registered title...It should not have to make appeals to the public since if properly managed and conducted it should live financially, and with success, on its members’ activities’.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ ‘British Legion Shropshire County Official Handbook 1975’ Ref 2470/17 *Shropshire Archives*

Clubs were clearly separate entities to branches and appear to have held more freedoms and autonomy outside of British Legion branch rules and regulations. They were still liable to the British Legion headquarters and would be vetted by members of the county committee.⁵⁵ They also had to submit accounts or Clubs could have their 'licence to operate as a British Legion Club withdrawn'.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, they presented something less formal and traditional and created a far more socially orientated environment for veterans to connect to each other.

On a social level, ex-servicemen had access to gaming machines and bingo, and card games were permitted if conducted under the guidelines listed and if adhering to the regulations which outlawed betting.⁵⁷ Clubs were permitted music, entertainment, a licence for alcohol and had the ability to organise social functions.⁵⁸ While it is unclear how much veterans of the Second World War got involved in these activities, the ability to socialise with others who had served and gain access to sporting and gaming facilities, most probably helped to foster bonds of friendship over the shared experience of having served in the armed forces. It appears that members of Legion clubs had the access to what was happening in the wider community and had the opportunity to engage on a level which suited them, rather than adhere to a set of pre-existing traditions and rules set out as members of branches.

⁵⁵ See reports from West Midlands County HQ British Legion Clubs File Ref: 3566/5/2 *Shropshire Archives*

⁵⁶ Letter to Donnington British Legion Club from West Midlands Area Organiser, 21st April 1970, British Legion Clubs File Ref: 3566/5/2 *Shropshire Archives*

⁵⁷ A Guide for the Management of British Legion Clubs' n.d. Ref: 2704/7 *Shropshire Archives*

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

In an [circa early 1980s] booklet titled, 'A Guide for Management for British Legion Clubs' the Legion shows an acceptance of the popularity of the clubs and an endeavour to engage all members of both branches and clubs in the social aspects of veteran life. The guide openly admits that 'basically the prime incentive which brings together men and women within our organisation, is the desire to continue that comradeship enjoyed in the Armed Forces' and both clubs and branches 'could assist the organisation in attaining the substantial increase in membership'.⁵⁹ The British Legion started to acknowledge that socialising and connecting to a sense of veteran identity was largely accomplished by British Legion clubs rather than branches for veterans of the Second World War. It was through the social interaction of clubs, that Legion officials aimed to connect branches and clubs further:

'It is increasingly clear that there has been a recent revival of enthusiasm for the British Legion' and that 'whilst being aware that the legal relationship between Club and Branch requires separate membership registers, elections for Officers and Committee and separate accounts...The Club should be a meeting point with amenities suitable for enjoyment of all members of the branch; it should not merely cater for those desirous of using the facilities of the Bar, the gaming machines and other gaming'.⁶⁰ It also notes that 'it is hoped that Clubs possessing facilities for Darts, Billiards, Snooker and/or Bowls and other games, will

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ 'A Guide for the Management of British Legion Clubs' n.d. Ref: 2704/7 *Shropshire Archives*

make these available for the use of Branch members wishful of taking part in British Legion National Sports Competitions'.⁶¹

Clearly, the Legion officials were attempting to connect both clubs and branches and tried to use the popularity of the social side of their organisation to their favour and encourage some of the fundraising, sporting and more official activities in a social setting. They also hoped that membership of clubs and branches could coexist, despite having separate memberships. As Anthony Brown noted in 1971, this generation 'may not march but they'll get together'⁶² The legion eventually identified that sense of identity could still be fostered by the shared experiences of armed service comradeship, alongside an awareness of the values of the British Legion. The organisation had moved on from stigmatising those who wanted to enjoy the social aspects of the organisation and started to encourage a sense of identity based on both service and the comradeship of the clubs.

Veterans Associations

Veterans Association provided Second World War ex-servicemen with a sense of group identity, based on the location or campaign in which they served during the war. Unlike British Legion branches, these associations were set up by the veterans themselves and enabled them to create their own aims and traditions. Analysing the Norfolk and Norwich Dunkirk Veterans Association and the York

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Anthony Brown, 112

Normandy Veterans Association, it can be shown how these organisations have provided veterans with a sense of group identity and have evolved as veterans have aged.

Why did veterans set up these associations when they had access to ready-made groups such as British Legion branches and clubs? Some veterans associations were formed to fight for recognition and compensation such as the ex-Prisoners of War. As Clare Makepeace has shown, groups set up to aid ex-Far East Prisoners of War, ‘demanded public recognition for the way their lives had been damaged in the war’ and many were set up ‘across the country to campaign for compensation’.⁶³ On the other hand, the Dunkirk Veterans Association had very similar aims to British Legion branches and clubs. They intended to provide welfare support and create a social network for the veterans of Dunkirk. The draft constitution of the branch stated that the aims of the group were to ‘organise social functions as required by members’ and to ‘provide where possible, and co-ordinate, help for branch members’.⁶⁴ The organisation would have a committee and hold Annual General Meetings as well as committee meetings.⁶⁵ They chose to hold their own memorial day closest to June 1st each year where ‘the official branch standard should be carried’, and the organisation would participate in and parade at ‘other –ex-servicemen’s Memorial parades as may be determined by the Branch committee’.⁶⁶ The constitution of the organisation, highlights how it was in keeping with other veteran organisations such as British Legion branches, in its use of a committee and aims, as well as its emphasis on commemoration and

⁶³ Clare Makepeace, 258

⁶⁴ ‘Draft Constitution – Norfolk and Norwich branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association’ Ref: SO236/1/1 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

parading. However, what made the organisation different was the agency it provided for the Second World War veterans running the group to be able to create their own events and rituals which were unique to the organisation.

Veterans associations could create their own branding, which reflected where they served. The founder of the Dunkirk Veterans Association, H. Robinson, chose the colours 'of the 1939-1945 star' medal for the association, as 'representations have been made to Secretary of State for War to grant a special award for those who served with the B.E.F. but the reply was that no such awards could be granted or instituted. We are rather inclined to look upon the 1939-1945 star as our own'.⁶⁷ These comments are telling of the thought that veterans placed on the branding and identity of the associations. They clearly gave veterans the chance to create organisations themselves which could reflect their own interests and how they viewed their wartime experiences.



Figure 14 - Dunkirk Veterans Bill O'Callaghan and Albert Pooley reunite with Madame Creton – 'Continental greeting for ex-Pte O'Callaghan' *Eastern Evening News* 02 October 1946, Ref: SO236/1/2 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁶⁷ Letter from Hon. General Secretary Dunkirk Veterans Association to Vice-Chairman Major General Wade 19th September 1962 in Ref: SO236/1/2 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

Veterans associations could also organise their own commemorative and memorial events. The Norfolk and Norwich Dunkirk Veterans organised an event in Norfolk in honour of ‘Madame Creton, the French farmer’s wife who hid two members of the Royal Norfolk Regiment after over 90 of their comrades were massacred by the Germans at La Paradis in May, 1940’.⁶⁸ The two soldiers who were saved by the French woman, Albert Pooley and Bill O’Callaghan, were members of the Norfolk and Norwich Dunkirk Veterans Association and reunited with Madame Creton during the special event.⁶⁹ The dinner was widely publicised on a local level, and demonstrates how these associations were able to create events dedicated to those that mattered to them, and reflected what they wished to remember and commemorate. They also self-funded several memorials during the life of the branch. These included a bench created in 1978, in honour residents of Le Paradis ‘who had moved the bodies from their original graves’ of the members of the Royal Norfolk Regiment who had died during the Le Paradis massacre in May 1940.⁷⁰ These memorials were specific to those who were members of the group and to regiments connected to the Norfolk locality. Similarly, the York Normandy Veterans Association created a ritual of holding a yearly D-Day service at York Minster to honour fallen comrades.⁷¹ In recent years, as the branch has become an independent organisation after the official

⁶⁸ ‘French Wife who Saved Private Pooley coming to city’, July 17 1964 *Eastern Evening News* in Ref: SO236/1/2 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁶⁹ See ‘Private Pooley’s helper ill’ *Eastern Daily Press* 30 September 1964 Ref: SO236/1/4 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office* and ‘French Heroine Comes After All’ *Eastern Daily Press* 01 October 1964 in Ref: SO236/1/4 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁷⁰ ‘The History of the Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association 1961-1989’ in SO236/1/5 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*, 8

⁷¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ June 15 2011 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

disbandment of the Normandy Veterans Association, they have created further unique events. In 2010, they chose to hold an ‘impromptu’ commemorative walk around the city wearing their medals in honour of fallen comrades on the anniversary of VE-Day.⁷² These events highlight the agency present in veterans associations to create bespoke and unique commemorations and memorials related to the events most significant to each group.

Both local and low key and overseas commemorative events could be organised and planned by veterans themselves as part of associations. For the Dunkirk veterans, a yearly event to commemorate Dunkirk, closest to June 1st, was described as ‘Dunkirk Sunday’.⁷³ The group adopted similar rituals to the British Legion and formed their own Remembrance Day, but specifically for Dunkirk. On this date, the Norfolk and Norwich branch organised their own parades in the city each year.⁷⁴ While media representations of veterans focus largely on ‘round number’ events as shown in Chapter Two of this thesis, the yearly activities of veterans associations show that commemoration was valued each year, not just during anniversary periods. The Dunkirk Veterans Association chose to commemorate the Dunkirk evacuation each June, and could visit the battlefields connected to those who fell during the Battle of France. Programmes for the commemorations, show the agency of the veterans themselves and their own dedication to returning to Dunkirk each year. The 1963 programme, includes poems written by veterans and details of the special commemorative ceremony

⁷² ‘Normandy Veterans Keep the Flag Flying’ May 9 2014 *York Press*

⁷³ ‘Dunkirk Veterans Association – Norfolk and Norwich Branch newsletter’ April 1967, Ref: SO236/1/5 949X7 *Norfolk Records Office*

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

and social evenings planned by the organisation.⁷⁵ Ephemera of the Norfolk and Norwich branch, shows how further events were organised by individual branches. The chairman of the branch visited the farm where two members of the Royal Norfolk Regiment had been hidden and saved from death during the Battle for France.⁷⁶ Those attending commemorations abroad could clearly tailor their trip to their own specific requirements. These events highlight the level of agency veterans themselves had over the organisation of commemorations as part of veteran groups.

The York Normandy Veterans Association minutes emphasise a dedication to travelling to the battlefields each year. Each set of minutes from 2008 onwards shows the desire for veterans to return to Normandy.⁷⁷ These discussions show that despite media and political interest in the commemoration of D-Day, veterans actually struggled to gain financial support to attend commemorations. It was noted in the July 2008 minutes of the York Branch that, 'NVA headquarters inform us that last November the Government said that they would assist us with the financial costs of the Normandy visits. They have now reneged on this but say they are prepared to give some financial assistance at the 100th anniversary ?????'.⁷⁸ The York Branch chose to apply for charitable funds and filled in their

⁷⁵ '1940 Dunkirk Veterans Association 8th Annual Pilgrimage to Dunkirk – June 1st to 4th 1963 Programme' Ref: SO236/1/3 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁷⁶ 'Veterans go back to Le Paradis' June 6 1963, *Eastern Evening News* in Ref: SO236/1/2 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁷⁷ 'Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015' NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

⁷⁸ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association' July 16 2008 in 'Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015' NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

own applications for subsequent yearly visits to Normandy.⁷⁹ Insights such as this highlight the apparent lack of support for veterans wishing to conduct overseas commemorations, and the dismayed attitudes of the veterans. The groups persistence and dedication to applying for funds themselves, highlights how important attending overseas commemorations was to the identity of the group.

Although some of the events outside of the anniversary periods were not featured in national media, they show the importance of memory making to veterans themselves. They highlight veterans' own interest in commemorating their comrades and their willingness to organise and fund trips and events themselves. These actions highlight the forgotten memory making activities of veterans of the Second World War. As Winter notes of First World War 'fictive kinship' groups, 'it would be foolish to merge these activities in some state-bounded space of hegemony or domination. What these people did was much smaller and much greater than that'.⁸⁰ The activities of veteran groups may have been ignored in anniversary commemorations or now be forgotten in mediatised events to remember Dunkirk or D-Day, but they highlight how veterans themselves chose to commemorate their comrades and deal with their wartime experiences with others who had also served. These acts of commemoration show the personal experiences which veterans wanted to remember, and the low scale actions which enabled them to categorise themselves as veterans.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association' August 19 2009 in 'Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015' NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

⁸⁰ Jay Winter, 'Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War', *Kindle location*, 1393

Some of the veterans associations gained inspiration from Great War ex-service associations. The Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association appears to have been more informal than British Legion branches, and featured an emphasis on comradeship. The President advertised in the local press to gain members, noting that it ‘is becoming the second world war counterpart of the Old Contemptibles, it was suggested by speakers at Thursday evening’s annual dinner of the Norfolk and Norwich association’.⁸¹ The event featured guests from the Old Contemptibles and the chairman of the Dunkirk Veterans Association ‘remarked on the similarity between the two organisations’ and their guests ‘welcomed a close association between the two organisations’.⁸² The article highlights that the group viewed itself as a similar organisation to the Old Contemptibles Association, which referred to all members ‘regardless of rank’ as ‘Chum’ and published a journal featuring ‘obituaries, articles and reminiscences written by former soldiers of all ranks, which stressed, consciously or not, that a spirit of comradeship had existed and continued to exist’.⁸³ The organisation perhaps inspired the Dunkirk veterans, as this informality is present in the 1940 Dunkirk Veterans Association journals, which feature poems and letters from veterans, and reports from members of each branch.⁸⁴ Veterans were

⁸¹ ‘Dunkirk group “Counterpart of Old Contemptibles”’ *Eastern Daily Press* April 28th 1962, Ref: SO236/1/1 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ Jeffrey Verhey, “War Enthusiasm”: Volunteers, Departing Soldiers and Victory Celebrations in *The World War I Reader* ed. Michael S. Neilberg, (London: New York University Press, 2007), 144

⁸⁴ See ‘1940 Dunkirk Veterans Association Journal’ Vol. 23 No. 4 and Vol. 25 No. 3 Ref: British Library Vol. 42 and Vol 43 Ref: ZC.9.a.5089 *British Library*

given the opportunity to get involved with the journals and share their own views with others.

Journals and newsletters also contain a dedication to friendly welfare support. The 1991 'Chairman's Newsletter' stresses that 'if you have any problems regarding pensions, grants etc., my committee and myself will endeavour to help you to the best of our ability. We will help you all we can if you are in any trouble do not hesitate to ask. If you do not tell us of any help needed we are unable to help you'.⁸⁵ The association clearly aimed to provide practical and emotional support to members and presented the group as a friendly and supportive band of comrades. Clearly, in organisations such as this, veterans were encouraged to think of themselves as comrades who each shared a bond. Like the Old Contemptibles, they could also get involved in writing for the association publication and seek support from other members.

The membership choices of the associations show how veterans of this generation have categorised themselves, specific to where they served and the experiences they endured. In 1961, the President of the Norfolk and Norwich Dunkirk Veterans Association hoped to recruit members, and noted that '22 years after, it was not easy to contact Dunkirk veterans' but 'he reminded members that sailors, both RN [Royal Navy] and Merchant Navy, and airmen were eligible for

⁸⁵ 'Chairman's Newsletter Jan 1991' Dunkirk Veterans Association, Ref: SO236/1/26 949X8
Norfolk Records Office

membership, together with men who were prisoners of war after Dunkirk'.⁸⁶ The inclusion of Prisoners of War who were left behind at Dunkirk and sailors and airmen, made the Norfolk and Norwich Dunkirk Veterans Association appear fairly inclusive to anyone who had connections to the Battle of France, even if they had not been evacuated soldiers.⁸⁷ While British Legion branches catered to a large body of veterans spanning two or more generations, veterans associations such as the Dunkirk Veterans were more compact, allowing members to categorise themselves based on their personal wartime experiences.

Yet, it appears that even within groups specifically designed for those who served in the same locations or campaigns, there were those who wanted to connect with those who had gone through similar experiences. Makepeace has pointed out that the founder of the 'National Ex-Prisoner of War Association (NEXPOWA)', was captured at Dunkirk in 1940.⁸⁸ He left the Dunkirk Veterans Association to form his own association as he was 'frustrated at POWs rarely receiving any attention' so 'decided to establish an ex-POW association, which would have the added uniqueness among all existing ones of being open to any ex-POW, irrespective of his branch of service'.⁸⁹ This information illustrates how even as part of an apparently inclusive association for those with a connection to the Battle of France, some veterans wanted to connect with others who had specifically endured the same experiences. It is clear that associations offered the opportunity

⁸⁶ Dunkirk group "Counterpart of Old Contemptibles" April 28th 1962, *Eastern Daily Press* Ref: SO236/1/1 949X7 *Norfolk Records Office*

⁸⁷ 'Dunkirk group "Counterpart of Old Contemptibles"' *Eastern Daily Press* April 28th 1962, Ref: SO236/1/1 949X7 *Norfolk Records Office*

⁸⁸ Clare Makepeace, 262

⁸⁹ Clare Makepeace, 262

for the Second World War generation to define themselves in these unique groupings and categorise themselves by location, experience, battalion or campaign.

Some veterans chose to be members of more than one group, suggesting that veterans could hold multiple identities. Dennis Haydock was a member of both the York Normandy Veterans and the York Branch of the regimental association of the Coldstream Guards.⁹⁰ Similarly, it is noted in the history of the Norfolk and Norwich branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association that one member of the Dunkirk Veterans Association ‘Harry Few presented the branch with a shield to be competed for at bowls between the branch and the Desert Rats Association to which Harry also belonged’.⁹¹ Being part of one group did clearly not necessarily exclude veterans from joining others. Some even chose to take on roles in both veterans associations and British Legion branches such as Mr Richard Rice, who served as both ‘Honorary Secretary and Treasurer’ of the Norfolk and Norwich branch of the Dunkirk Veterans and as ‘Eastern Area Councillor’ of the British Legion.⁹² Veterans evidently joined the group or groups which reflected their wartime service and best served their sense of self. While veteran groups saw themselves as distinct entities, their feelings towards other groups, including other associations appear to be positive. The Dunkirk Veterans Association attended the VJ Commemorations to support the Burma Star Association each year to

⁹⁰ ‘Dennis Haydock Remembers’ NVA/2/1 *York Explore*, 35

⁹¹ The History of the Norfolk and Norwich Branch of the Dunkirk Veterans Association 1961-1989’ in SO236/1/5 949X7, *Norfolk Records Office*

⁹² Letter to Mr Griffiths (MP) regarding New Years Honour of Mr Rice by [Chairman] of Norfolk and Norwich DVA Ref: SO236/1/17 949X8 *Norfolk Records Office*

‘support’ the organisation.⁹³ Visits between branches of the Dunkirk Veterans Association suggests that each group saw themselves as specific entities, with their own aims and rituals, but placed themselves as part of a wider network of Dunkirk veterans who supported one another. In later years, some groups held joint ceremonies, such as the Normandy Veterans and Dunkirk Veterans ceremony held in Norwich in 1986.⁹⁴ Clearly, groups could interlink and support one another while maintaining their distinct identities. The creation of the ability to choose from a range of associations also shows the diversity of Second World War veteran identity, even within group settings.

The life cycle and ageing of veterans shaped how and why veterans associations evolved and changed. As Winter highlights, the sites of memory created by these type of ‘fictive kinship’ groups are not fixed. He notes that ‘the reason for this transformation is imbedded in the life cycle of agency itself’ and while originally they gave ‘men and women a way to live on after the horrors of war...as those agents of remembrance grew tired or old, developed other lives, moved away, or died, then the activity – the glue – which held together these cells of remembrance atrophied and lost its hold on them’.⁹⁵ In the case of these groups, the inevitable decline and death of members contributed to the ending of the association or to the continuation of it in a different form. Initially, the Dunkirk Veterans Association saw younger, working age veterans actively participating in commemorative events, providing social and welfare support to one another, and

⁹³ ‘Dunkirk Veterans Association – Norfolk and Norwich Branch newsletter regarding forthcoming events’ Ref: SO236/1/4 949X7 *Norfolk Records Office*

⁹⁴ ‘Veterans Honour War Dead’ *Eastern Daily Press* June 1986

⁹⁵ Jay Winter, ‘Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War’, *Kindle location*, 1400

honouring comrades from 1961 onwards. Yet, the journals of the Dunkirk Veterans Association highlight how branches began to deal with the ageing of members from around the 1990s. The journals took on the role of memorialising deceased members of the association and honouring members with obituaries and anecdotes.⁹⁶ In the sections for each branch to share news, most began to contain obituaries to members who had passed away.⁹⁷ The disbanding of the Norfolk and Norwich branch in 2000 was a result of the nationwide choice to disband the association by branch officials.⁹⁸

With the decline of members, the groups commemorative activities and shared identity as veterans who had all experienced the Battle of France would be lost. While official anniversary commemorations for Dunkirk continue and individual surviving veterans are praised, the small-scale activities and fictive kinships formed in branches would be confined to the past.



⁹⁶ See '1940 Dunkirk Veterans Association Journal Vol. 40, No.2 (1996) Ref: 326/1/32 949X9 *Norfolk Records Office* and '1940 Dunkirk Veterans Association' Vol 42 and Vol 43 Ref: ZC.9.a.5089 *British Library*, 3

⁹⁷ *Ibid*

⁹⁸ 'Final Event of the Normandy Veterans Association' 16 October 2014 *Gov.UK* accessed 04 October 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/final-event-of-normandy-veterans-association>

The York Normandy Veterans in recent years has continued beyond the official disbanding of the Normandy Veterans Association in 2014. The continuation of the group has meant that remaining veterans have gained greater freedom and fame as an independent group, but have sought external support as veterans age. The ageing of veterans has seen the identity of the group being altered to encompass fewer members and outside assistance from external non-veterans. From 2011 onwards, minutes show Nick Beilby of the York Scooter Club supporting fundraising for the group.⁹⁹ He now plays a central role as an honorary member of the group in helping elderly veterans attend events and support. The meeting minutes highlight this ongoing support, with Beilby assisting with the organisation of activities, the running of meetings and with the welfare support of veterans.¹⁰⁰ As the veterans have aged and become fewer, they have become recognised local members of community. In 2011, the group gained Freedom of the City of York. The York Normandy Veterans were previously denied the Freedom of the City of York, ‘as much as the Lord Mayor would like to grant our request, this would open the gates to a flood of requests from other bodies’.¹⁰¹ Yet, as members were ageing and becoming scarcer, the privilege was granted to

⁹⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ September 21 2011 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ March 18 2015 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

¹⁰¹ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ June 18 2008 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

them in 2011.¹⁰² The veterans have clearly been given greater status in the community as their members have become fewer.

The group is able to concentrate on low key, community based projects and has agency to get involved with any project without being answerable to a larger organisation. In recent years, the veterans have enjoyed visiting school children and telling them about their wartime experiences. One member Ken Cooke described the joys of talking to school children and finds it ‘fun’ to answer their questions about the war.¹⁰³ The veterans clearly enjoy working in the community and connecting to other generations via their membership of the group. They have also gained further press interest, being interviewed for the local newspapers and radio stations.¹⁰⁴ Rather than focus on activities related to the wider organisation of the Normandy Veterans Association, as seen in earlier minutes and in the Dunkirk Veterans Association, the York Normandy Veterans now have the ability to choose activities which suit them as sought after members of the local community.

These changes are a result of the veterans reaching older age. As Taylor and Ford note, there is a ‘distinction between the “young” and the “old” and we cannot treat ‘the elderly as one homogenous group’.¹⁰⁵ The association has evolved as veterans

¹⁰² Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ September 21 2011 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

¹⁰³ Appendix 4

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the Meeting of the York Branch of the Normandy Veterans Association’ July 16 2014 in ‘Normandy Veterans Association Meeting Minutes and Agendas Jan 2008 – Sep 2015’ NVA/1/1 *York Explore*

¹⁰⁵ Rex Taylor and Graeme Ford, ‘Inequalities in Old Age: An examination of age, sex and class differences in a sample of community elderly’ *Ageing and Society* Vol 3. No. 2 (1983), 183

reach the third age and enter ‘older’ old age, or the ‘forth age’, which encompasses a loss of agency and the need of further care.¹⁰⁶ Unlike the social perception of the fourth age, which sees this age group categorised, as those who are ‘powerless to assert their own identity or realise their social agency’, the veterans of the York Normandy Veterans Association can retain a sense of purpose, social life and interaction with others, as a result of their connection to the group.¹⁰⁷ As Ken Cooke describes, the social aspect of the group enables him to continue to meet friends:

‘Well it’s meeting the people you know...and there is always somebody with a new story and there are quite a few honorary members now, including Nick, and different people talk and somebody will say “what happened then?” and somebody else will say “I was round that area” and you get a story and you know, you get stories banded about. It’s good, it’s good’.¹⁰⁸

In some ways, the sense of group identity is more apparent in this life stage, as veterans become rarer, more sought after and retain a sense of self through these social activities. The change in emphasis and response to the York Normandy Veterans Association is reflective of these differences, as veterans become rarer and more in demand just as they are unable to run an association without support.

Conclusion

¹⁰⁶ Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, ‘Social death and the moral identity of the fourth age’ *Contemporary Social Science* Vol. 10 No.3 (2015), 1

¹⁰⁷ Chris Gilleard and Paul Higgs, 3

¹⁰⁸ Appendix 4

Overall, exploring Veterans Associations and British Legion branches and clubs highlights the low key and forgotten activities conducted by veterans, which are missing in representations of them in popular culture. They show how veterans had a range of groups in which they could build and sense of veteran identity and chose membership based on their personal motivations and to connect to events specific to their own experiences. In the case of the British Legion, veterans of the Second World War had access to two spaces in which they could adopt a sense of identity. If they chose to take part in branch life, they could engage in the commemorative and community rituals of the British Legion which emphasised service, parading and fundraising. Yet, for this generation, it appears that the social interaction and comradeship available in the clubs was most appealing. This was certainly connected to the lack of need to fight for work and resources as the previous generation had done, and connected to the desire to move on from army life in the post-war decades. The clubs could provide a subtler sense of identity without the obligations of branch life.

This chapter highlights the diversity of Second World War veteran experience, even within group settings, and suggests that many of this generation chose to categorise their sense of identity with where they served during the conflict by joining and setting up veterans associations. This chapter has provided a starting point to exploring these associations, by showing how two branches of different associations have defined themselves, created their own activities and evolved as veterans aged. This chapter emphasises the commemorative and social activities

of Second World War veterans themselves and the ways in which they chose to define themselves collectively.

Chapter 7

“Computer literate” veterans: Using the internet to create a distinctive sense of self identity

This chapter will show how two Second World War veterans have used the internet to share their memories of war, leave a legacy and assert a distinctive sense of veteran identity. This research will focus on the activities of Ron Goldstein and Harry Leslie Smith, who have both curated material online themselves which exists beyond official channels. They give an in depth insight into how individual veterans have made sense of their experiences in later life and shared their views in public. Previous chapters in this section have highlighted the tangible markers which have helped many veterans articulate their connections to their wartime experiences, those who remain silent and those who create identities in groups which are often absent from dominant representations of veterans. This chapter serves to further demonstrate the differences present in the veteran community, by focusing on the actions and attitudes of two veterans who have attempted to take control over their public image online.

Ron Goldstein was born on August 16th 1923 in London and was called up in October 1942 and served as a Wireless Operator in Light Ack Ack in the UK. He later served in North Africa, Sicily and Italy and was later re-trained as a Loader/Operator and ended his wartime career in the 4th Queen’s Own Hussars as a Corporal in March 1947. Harry Leslie Smith was born on February 25th 1923 in Barnsley, and joined the RAF in 1941. From 1945 to 1948, he spent time serving in post-war Germany where he met his wife and witnessed the hardship endured by Germans and refugees. Harry Leslie Smith passed away on November 28th

2018 aged 95. The activities of both veterans serve to emphasise the diversity which has existed within the Second World War veteran community, and show how individuals have the ability to curate a distinctive sense of self by engaging with new technology.

Although the same age, Goldstein and Smith experienced war in different settings and have held alternative attitudes to their experiences of conflict. They also formed unusual ideas about their self-identity as veterans. Goldstein uses a blog and forum to share autobiographical memories beyond the limitations of official channels. On the other hand, Smith used his status as a veteran and memories of the war and his childhood to create an identity online. He used social media and online newspapers to share his activist and political views surrounding poverty, the plight of refugees and pacifism. While these individuals' online actions are unusual, they show how the internet has offered opportunities some veterans to hold greater agency over the sharing of their wartime experiences in the creation of their self-identities.

As shown in earlier chapters of this thesis, many veterans have sought veterans' groups, or relied on traditional channels to share their memories or to gain a sense of self based on their wartime experiences. Those who shared their memories in the decades before the internet, frequently used memoir writing or created oral testimonies to leave a legacy of their lives. As scholars such as Frances Houghton discovered, 'the war memoirs of Second World War combatants proffer a singular and important insight into the multitude of 'human factors' which comprised the

individual's experiences of frontline service between 1939 and 1945'.¹ Both Ron Goldstein and Harry Leslie Smith have written books related to their experiences and have chosen to share their memories and ideas both online and on paper.² This chapter focus on how and why they have taken to the web, and in which ways the medium has enabled them to manage and create an unusual sense of self and to share memories with greater agency.

The internet and old age

Goldstein and Smith can be viewed as unusual in having the interest and ability to engage so strongly with new technologies at an advanced age. Scholars have highlighted the challenges facing those aged 65 and over in gaining access to the internet. As Karahasanovic *et al* stated in 2008, that 'so far, the lack of elderly people using these new opportunities for active online participation is striking and indicates a gap between digitally literate users and the elderly, *a digital generational divide*'.³ Harley and Fitzpatrick argue that these divisions can be traced to 'physical, cognitive and social obstacles inherent in the design and use of web technologies', there is an 'expressed reluctance' from the elderly to engage.⁴ Surbati has similarly noted in a British context, how 'age continues to feature as a

¹ Frances Houghton, "Remembering with Advantages": British Military Memoirs of the Second World War, 1950-2010', (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015), 1

² See Harry Leslie Smith, *Love Among the Ruins – A Memoir of Life and Love in Hamburg 1945* (London: Icon Books, 2015) and Ron Goldstein describes finalising his memoirs in 'Getting Your Army Records' (blog) *Ron Goldstein's Army Album* February 26, 2006, accessed 29 October 2018 <http://rongoldsteinsarmyalbum.blogspot.com/2006/02/getting-your-army-records.html>

³ Amela Karahasanovic, 'Co-creation and user-generated content—elderly people's user requirements' in *Computers in Human Behavior* Vol. 25, (2009): 655–678

⁴ Dave Harley and Geraldine Fitzpatrick, 'Creating a conversational context through video blogging: A case study of Geriatric1927' *Computers and Human Behaviour* Vol. 25 (2009), 679-680

significant factor in whether people use the internet' and there are stereotypes, including that the web is the 'domain of the younger generations'.⁵ Despite these stereotypes and a reluctance from the elderly to engage with the internet, not all older adults avoid using the web. This chapter will concur that gaining access to the internet can enhance the lives of older people, by helping them connect with other generations and combat loneliness. Minocha *et al* describe how gaining access to the web can aid 'employability, learning new skills and technologies, utilising social networks to combat loneliness and isolation, being 'empowered' consumers, and having greater civic participation'.⁶ This can be seen in the actions of Goldstein and Smith, who have used the web to engage with their memories and create an online sense of self. While Second World War veterans who are 'computer literate' may be a minority, their internet use gives a fascinating insight into the diversity of the Second World War veteran experience in cultivating their own legacies and sharing their memories.

Perhaps as a result of the perceived lack of participation in the internet by older adults, the Second World War veteran has seldom been discussed in the scholarly examinations of web use. Social scientists, Dave Harley and Geraldine Fitzpatrick, analysed the intergenerational communication possibilities offered by Youtube, by focusing on the case of a Second World War veteran and 'vlogger' Peter Oakley, known as Geriatric1927.⁷ Oakley documented his everyday life,

⁵ Maria Surbati, 'It could be useful, but not for me at the moment': older people, internet access and e-public service provision' *New Media and Society*, No. 7 Vol. 11 (2009): 1084-1085

⁶ Shailey Minocha, Catherine McNulty, and Shirley Evans, 'Imparting digital skills to people aged 55 years and over in the UK' *The Open University* (2005) accessed 24 October 2018, <http://oro.open.ac.uk/44009/7/DigitalSkills-People-over-55-11Aug2015-FINAL-SUBMITTED-ORO-2Sept2015.pdf> 5, 10

⁷ Dave Harley and Geraldine Fitzpatrick, 679-680

childhood and war memories, alongside giving cooking tutorials and connecting with younger generations through posting online videos.⁸ Gonzalez and Kurniawan also explored Oakley's activities in a conference paper, showing how 'video blogging' could act as an 'intergenerational communication bridge and could create 'positive stereotypes of an older person'.⁹ The same can certainly be said of Goldstein and Smith, who have both gained new connections and positive reactions from other generations as a result of their online activities.

Cultivating Online Identities

The medium of the internet can be used to form new personas and extended identities. Chester and Bretherton explain how in the 1990s, 'online communication was seen to hold the potential for unique opportunities to present the self: no longer constrained by corporeal reality, users could invent and reinvent themselves. They could manage impressions in ways never before possible'.¹⁰ The internet made it possible for individuals to create multiple personalities anonymously and was originally seen as a separate, digital world in which users could create alternate identities. Yet, the web has become an extension of everyday life, allowing users to extend their real life personal image, or even gain recognition through their activities online. As access to the internet

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Victor M. Gonzalez and Sri H. Kurniawan, 'On new media for intergenerational communication: The case of Geriatric1927' Presented at the 2008 IEEE International Symposium on Technology and Society (ISTAS 08), Fredericton, Canada 25-28 June.

¹⁰ Andrea Chester and Di Bretherton, 'Impression Management and Online Identity' in *Oxford Handbook of Internet Psychology* ed. Adam N. Joinson, Katelyn Y. A. McKenna, Tom Postmes, and Ulf-Dietrich Reips, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 2

has become more commonplace, ‘cyberspace is not a virtual world without connection to the rest of people's lives. What we do and who we are online are shaped consciously and unconsciously by who we are offline’.¹¹ It is clear that the internet has become an extension of real life, and can help to strengthen real world identities or create the opportunity for users to share their views and gain an online status which permeates into the offline world.

The curation of online self-identity can take place via online social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, where people can ‘share content, express opinions about a topic and where communication and interaction processes intensely take place without any time or place limitation’.¹² Alternative places where individuals can share their ideas include blogs, which allow individuals to ‘offer a different form of text based communication, broadcasting text entries or *posts* to the whole internet in a manner akin to a radio show’.¹³ Other online communities like discussion forums, offer users the ability to connect with others surrounding particular topics. As Pendry and Salvatore describe, ‘although seemingly eclipsed in the past decade by social networking sites such as Facebook, forums are still regularly used by around 20% of online users in the US, and about 10% of online users in the UK’.¹⁴ Similarly, online newspapers or physical publications which have an online presence, allow for articles to be spread virally online. Using the online activities of Goldstein and Smith, including blog posts, online articles, social media posts and context on discussion forums

¹¹ Andrea Chester and Di Bretherton, 19

¹² Uğur Gündüz, ‘The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction’ *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* Vol. 8 No. 5 (2017): 85-92

¹³ Dave Harley and Geraldine Fitzpatrick, 680

¹⁴ Louise F. Pendry and Jessica Salvatore, ‘Individual and social benefits of online discussion forums’ *Computers in Human Behaviour* Vol. 50 (2015): 211-220

and the BBC 'People's War' archive, it is possible to discuss the ways in which the web has enabled two individual veterans to create distinctive self-identities.

Becoming 'computer literate'

Both Smith and Goldstein have taken to the internet to share their memories and views in later life, following their retirement. Smith described how 'the initial euphoria at having escaped the tyranny of employment evaporated when I was tasked with finding meaning and dignity in the last season of my life'.¹⁵ For Smith, retirement was daunting and was made more so following the death of his wife in 1999 and his eldest son in 2008.¹⁶ He describes feeling 'grief stricken' and found that writing down his memories and using the internet helped to 'expiate' these emotions and find new purpose and meaning in life.¹⁷

Smith described his experiences using the internet:

'In my lifetime, I have gone from learning Morse code to sending messages on Twitter...For me, being able to navigate through the internet has made my old age a less lonely place. The death of my wife and then the loss of one of my sons forced me to confront and become familiar with this new, and at first forbidding computer equipment. Simply put, as my grief over my wife and son eased, I wanted to join the land of the living

¹⁵ Harry Leslie Smith, 'Retirement is like any other stage of life – filled with joy and sorrow', 21 July 2013, *Guardian* accessed 30 October 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/21/retirement-stage-life-joy-sorrow-retired>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Micah Toub, '15 Minutes with Harry Leslie Smith', *Readers Digest Canada* accessed 06 November 2018 <https://www.readersdigest.ca/culture/harry-leslie-smith-interview/>

and all of the diversity it offered...My early attempts to become computer literate were hard, frustrating and comical. But I knew I would persevere because that is what I have always done when faced with difficult problems...

Being engaged online has given me the chance to interact and share my life stories with people from different lands and cultures. It has let me experience new ideas and kept me in close contact with old friends and family, now scattered across the globe...

Everyone in this country should be part of this ever-evolving information highway, including the elderly and those on fixed incomes. I know if more seniors were able to access the internet they would be better able to voice their concerns about elder-care, the NHS and our current economic crisis...The internet has given me something that the Flying Scotsman could never do: a chance to keep pace and still be part of the conversation with a much younger generation...¹⁸

Smith clearly found a new purpose from gaining internet access. He was able to combat his loneliness, share his stories with others and connect with younger generations. Smith's words emphasise his wonder at the possibilities offered by the internet and has been given a tool with which to share his views and experiences with others. Similarly, Goldstein describes how learning how to use a computer became a hobby upon retirement but it was 'something I could do,

¹⁸ Harry Leslie Smith, 'Being online aged 90 has made my old age less lonely. Others aren't so lucky', 17 May 2013, *Guardian* accessed 30 October 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/17/online-aged-90-less-lonely>

separately from my wife without leaving the home...'.¹⁹ He explains his journey to becoming 'computer literate':

' I retired [when] I was 63. I'm 93, so that's thirty years ago... My accountant sent me a computer and said "Ron, I am no good at manuals...they'd brought out a cheap computer, I think it was around £30, £60...it's cheaper than a typewriter, if you could, I know your interested in these things, work out how to use the computer and then come and teach me". So he had the computer sent here...and I was fascinated by it. So I phoned him up and said "you'll have to buy another one, sorry you're not getting this one back". I sent him a cheque for it and I got sold on computing. So I joined evening classes...miles away from where I was living. Subsequently, I became the secretary of the group...'²⁰

Rather than a response to loneliness and grief, Goldstein found a new hobby as his working life came to an end. He describes as using the skills he has gained in computing to 'write an obscene amount...on the WW2Talk sites I have got 8000 postings'.²¹ For Goldstein, the transition towards retirement was eased by the discovery of computing and this gave him the ability to be able to share his memories online and connect with others surrounding his wartime experiences. Both veterans have turned to the internet as a new hobby in post-retirement and use the medium to reflect on their lives and connect to others. As Malette and Oliver note, 'retirement, like other transitions, prompts many individuals to

¹⁹ Appendix 1

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

become at least temporarily introspective. At such times, they may question their values, past professional and personal accomplishments, current life situation, and how to live the rest of their lives'.²² Discovering new interests and reflecting on the past in retirement reflects the findings of previous chapters which showed the importance of retirement in the life cycle of this generation of veterans. It is a key moment when many veterans started to speak about their experiences.

Motivations

Smith and Goldstein describe contrasting motivations for engaging with the internet. The veterans outlined vastly different aims in choosing to share their experiences and have alternate views on the meaning of their status as veterans. While Smith used the web to share his political views and to teach younger generations the failures of the past, Goldstein has used it to share his wartime autobiographical memories, and as a platform to leave a legacy, which does not contain the restrictions present in participating in documentaries or remembrance events.

Goldstein's motivations stem from his personal desire to leave a legacy of his life for his family and for future generations. He publicly described his motivations in detail in a reflective forum post on the discussion board World War Two Talk:

²² Judith Malette and Luis Oliver, 'Retirement and existential meaning in the older adult: A qualitative study using life review' *Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Health*, Vol. 2 No.1 (2006):30-49

‘I have to tell you that one of the signs of old age is a strong desire to tidy up one's life while one is still around to supervise the proceedings...It would be fair to assume that my actions are down to simple vanity on my part in assuming that my offspring and in turn their children are all that interested in their Dad's/Grandad's wartime past but, on reflection, I think that it is the right thing to do and certainly at the right time’.²³

Goldstein clearly reflects on his legacy and wants to record his experiences for his descendants. His motivations in sharing his memories stem from his own personal desire to leave a digital record of his life and to preserve the past. He cites a poem which summarises how he feels about his own legacy, and the spiritual reasons behind his desire to share as many memories as he can for future generations:

All things to nothingness descend,
Grow old and die and meet their end;
Man dies, iron rusts, wood goes decayed,
Towers fall, walls crumble, roses fade...
Nor long shall any name resound
Beyond the grave, unless't be found
In some clerk's book; it is the pen
That gives immortality to men

²³ Ron Goldstein, ‘Musings of an old git’ *World War Two Talk*
<http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/musings-of-an-old-git.57892/> accessed 7 August 2018

Master Wace - from his *Chronicles of the Norman Dukes Found on the Chart of Harold F Umstott (1907-1922) c 1170*.²⁴

The poem emphasises the importance of the written word in creating a legacy which can outlive a person and allows them to continue in cultural consciousness. Goldstein uses the poem to highlight his own belief that ‘the fact that this poem has remained and survived since those days proves his point...nothing is remembered unless someone writes it down...I believe a person doesn’t truly die until his name is not mentioned again. Something has to be written down...and he proved his point...This is why, I am being completely selfish when I write such an awful lot...by doing so I buy myself a few more years even though I am no longer around...’²⁵ Goldstein has very personal and individual reasons for wanting to share his wartime memories online. His own spirituality and drive to leave a written account for future generations is central to Goldstein’s choice to use the internet and in his sense of self as a veteran. His wartime experiences represent a defining moment of his life which he believes should be preserved.

Thinking about mortality and creating a legacy, are defining features of the life cycle stage which Goldstein occupies. As shown in previous chapters, the decision to share memories appears to occur mostly in later life, and Goldstein’s efforts present his own personal desire to create a legacy which will outlive him. Poole and Snarey outline Erikson’s stage eight in the life cycle as being the point

²⁴ Ron Goldstein, ‘Musings of an old git’ *World War Two Talk*
<http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/musings-of-an-old-git.57892/> accessed 7 August 2018

²⁵ Appendix 1

at which older adults age and contemplate their lives.²⁶ They note that ‘those who have a sense of personal integrity from the contributions they have offered during their life experience the rich depths’ and ‘if a legacy can be established, there is no need to fear death’.²⁷ Goldstein’s motivations reflect this shift in the life cycle, where older adults can cope with their mortality by reflecting on the important experiences in their lives and endeavour to create a legacy. Leaving a written testimony of his wartime experiences, highlights how Goldstein has chosen to use the internet to reflect and preserve an important period in his life and create a legacy by preserving those memories.

While Goldstein has shared his autobiographical memories online, Smith initially used the web to promote his published memoir. Smith had originally shared his life stories by publishing his first book titled *1923: A Memoir: Lies and Testaments* in 2011.²⁸ He joined Twitter in 2010, using two accounts to promote his upcoming works, one tweeting snippets from the book in ‘real time’ as if it was 1929, and another to share promotional material.²⁹ Smith also created a blog (now deleted) which acted as a promotional tool and a diary to document his life. Posts included reminiscences and insights into Smith’s political views. One recovered post acknowledging his 88th birthday, shows how the narratives that

²⁶ Sarah Poole and John Snarey, ‘Erikson’s Stages of the Life Cycle’ in *Encyclopaedia of Child Behavior and Development* ed. Sam Goldstein and Jack A. Naglieri, (New York: Springer-Verlag: 2011), 602

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Harry Leslie, Smith, *1923: A Memoir: Lies and Testaments* (Ontario: Barley Hole Press, 2011)

²⁹ Harry Leslie Smith (@Harryslaststand), tweet, 10:34 AM - 28 Oct 2010, accessed January 02 2020, <http://twitter.com/#!/Harryslaststand> and Harry Leslie Smith (@1923thebook), tweet, 4:47 AM - 21 Nov 2010; accessed January 02 2020; <https://twitter.com/1923TheBook/status/6327720854167552>

would later define him were already present in these early online musings surrounding inequality and poverty:

For some of us, the memories surrounding the unjust and uncivilized conditions we were born into were so strong, we fought to reform the systems of government across Europe and North America. Other's from my class of 23 were quiet revolutionaries and insured that those in their families were loved and would never want for food or shelter.³⁰

Initially, it seems as though Smith was using social media purely as a promotional tool for his books. Yet, it was through his increased use of Twitter that Smith seems to have gained recognition. Interest in his social media activities appear to have grown following his involvement with the Labour Party conference in 2014.³¹

Using the public platform he had generated, Smith aimed to share his memories as part of a dedication to campaign for the poor and highlight the plight of refugees. He appeared to want to tell of his experiences of the Great Depression and his wartime memories to prevent them from reoccurring under current political and social climate of the 2010s. Smith described his motivations in an article reflecting on later life and his fears for the future:

³⁰ Harry Leslie Smith, 'The Gin Party of 1923' 25 Feb 2011, *1923thebook's Blog* accessed 02 January 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110302133124/http://1923thebook.wordpress.com/>

³¹ See the increase in popularity of Smith's 'tweets' in 2014 following the Labour Party Conference in September 2014: Harry Leslie Smith (@Harryslatstand), tweet, 7:52 AM - 29 Dec 2014; ; accessed January 02 2020; <https://twitter.com/search?q=from%3Aharryslatstand%20since%3A2010-01-01%20until%3A2014-12-31&src=typd>

‘All of you, when young, will make your own history: you will struggle, you will betray some and others will betray you. You will love and lose love. You will feel profound joy and deep sorrow and during all of this you will grow as an individual...That’s why it is your duty when you get old to tell the young about your odyssey across the vast ocean of your life’.³²

This quote suggests that Smith viewed his wisdom as living history which can offer something to the younger generations. He saw it as an obligation and purpose of the elderly to educate by sharing their life experiences, including those of the war. In the promotional material made to promote one of his books, Smith declared, ‘I am not an Historian, but at 91, I am history and I fear its repetition’.³³ Smith’s motivations to share his memories and present himself online, stem from his desire to change the political and social landscape for the better. His identity was based upon viewing himself as a witness to the past and campaigning for a better future. This self-identification as having wisdom and offering knowledge to society based on life experience, also reflects the stage in the life cycle that Smith occupied. As Poole and Snarey note, ‘persons in this stage value not only life, but their life within history’.³⁴ Smith viewed his life in this way and used his memories online to actively champion causes which are important to him. He generated a sense of purpose in later life based on this narrative and placed his status as a veteran as central to this online persona.

³² Harry Leslie Smith, ‘Don’t dread old age. I’m 94, and I won’t spend my last years living in fear of the Tories’, *Guardian* 24 Feb 2017 accessed 02 Nov 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/24/dont-dread-old-age-fear-tories-tyranny-austerity>

³³ ‘Harry’s Last Stand – About’ accessed 01 July 2019 www.harryslaststand.com/about

³⁴ Sarah Poole and John Snarey, 602

As Smith aged and became increasingly unwell, controversy emerged surrounding the authorship of his online material. While this chapter does not attempt to clarify the truth behind these claims, it must be acknowledged that Smith's later activities may have been influenced or curated by others. In 2016, former Conservative MP, Louise Mensch publicly questioned whether Smith wrote his own material due to his advanced age and the speed at which the tweets were published.³⁵ Likewise, a senior political correspondent from *BuzzfeedUK*, Alex Wickham, declared that Smith's Twitter page 'is apparently run (at various times) by his son, his agent and an assistant'.³⁶ The political blog, *People's Guido* covered the controversy, stating that 'Guido contacted Icon Books to politely ask if anyone from the company had access to the account. Given the opportunity to deny this well-established rumour, Icon Books failed to get back to us'.³⁷ The blog suggests that the lack of response from Smith's publishers and 'the large amount of bizarre, sometimes downright offensive material' published by Smith could indicate that he did not write his own content.³⁸ Other commentators included the journalist, Louis Barfe, who nicknamed Smith's Twitter account 'Larry's Hat Stand' and also suggested that his son was actually in control of publishing its content.³⁹ He voiced in 2018 that 'it reads like a younger person doing it for the numbers, while using the persona of a forces

³⁵ Louise Mensch (@louisemensch), tweet, 9.49 PM – 03 Feb 2016; accessed January 02 2020; <https://zelo-street.blogspot.com/2016/02/dont-menshn-harry-leslie-smith.html>

³⁶ Alex Wickham (@alewickham), tweet, 1:08 PM - 31 Jan 2016; accessed January 02 2020; <https://twitter.com/alexwickham/status/693903593796169728>

³⁷ Publisher Refuses to Deny Tweeting as War Hero' *People's Guido*, 03 Feb 2016; accessed 02 January 2020, <https://order-order.com/2016/02/03/publisher-refuses-to-deny-tweeting-as-labour-war-hero/>

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Louis Barfe #PTFE (@AlanKelloggsMore), tweet, 8.58 AM – 22 Nov 2018; accessed January 02 2020; <https://twitter.com/alankelloggs/status/1065650711755718662?lang=en>

veteran to deflect criticism'.⁴⁰ These criticisms directly question Smith's authorship of his social media content and the reliability of the content produced. While these claims have been limited and Smith defended his authorship of all material, it is unclear whether Smith did gain assistance with running his social media channels.

Trott identified that the last veterans of the First World War relied on collaborators to help them share their memories.⁴¹ In the books analysed by Trott, the 'voice of the collaborator is separated from the main narrative in which the veteran is presented as the speaker'.⁴² In the case of Smith's online and published material, it was never made plain whether Smith's words had been shaped or modified by a relative or a publisher. The unresolved issue of authorship in the creation of Smith's online persona, raises additional questions surrounding veteran identity in how veterans and perhaps their collaborators utilise the internet.

Despite appearing to have very different reasons for sharing his memories to Goldstein, Smith and those around him were aware of his mortality and clearly wanted to leave a legacy. Smith described in his final book how he viewed sharing his political views and memories of poverty and war as a legacy:

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Vincent Andrew Trott, 331

⁴² Ibid

After so many years alive, I am comprised of many moments that are both ordinary and profound. They define my personality and my outlook on life. But they will all evaporate from me like smoke from a chimney pot on a winter's morning when the second of my two remaining sons closes my eyes on my death bed and my body is dispatched to the crematorium ovens. My ashes will be scattered over the dales of Yorkshire that I once rambled across with my young wife and our friends during a time when Britain was transforming itself into a social democracy after the Second World War.⁴³

This statement gives an insight into some of the deeper motivations which inspired Smith to share his memories and ideas. Despite holding very clear political reasons for writing and sharing his views, Smith (and perhaps his publishers) also wanted to leave a tangible legacy.

Forming a sense of identity online based on wartime experiences

Ron Goldstein

For Ron Goldstein, the Second World War represents an important part of his life story that he aims to preserve. Goldstein uses blogging, an online discussion board and the BBC People's War platform, to share his wartime autobiographical

⁴³ Harry Leslie Smith, *Don't Let My Past Be Your Future: A Call to Arms* (London: Little, Brown Book Group, 2017), kindle Locations 101-108, Kindle Edition.

memories. As Phillips notes, ‘culture makes available certain narrative tools to create autobiographies, such as diaries, and other written accounts, including those crafted through technology such as blogs and Twitter feeds’.⁴⁴ The internet allows Goldstein to share his memories and fulfil his aims of leaving a legacy for future generations with perhaps greater freedom than real world channels.

The origins of Goldstein’s online memory making activities stem from the war itself, when he kept a diary to document his wartime experiences. Despite being aware that keeping a diary throughout the war ‘was forbidden’, Goldstein continued to keep one, and turned to preserving his memories when he created a scrapbook in 1946.⁴⁵ He describes that even when there was a possibility that he could be captured as a Prisoner of War, ‘I never stopped, I was selfish probably, never stopped to think about it. Too much was happening to me, I felt I had to write it down...I wasn’t alone, other people did that as well. Looking back it was foolhardy and dangerous’.⁴⁶ Evidently, during the war itself, Goldstein felt he had to document the experience of enduring warfare and the origins of preserving and sharing his memories stem from writing a diary .

⁴⁴ Barbara Phillips, ‘The scrapbook as an autobiographical memory tool’ *Marketing Theory* Vol.16 No. 3 (2016): 327

⁴⁵ Appendix 1

⁴⁶ Ibid



Figure 16 - Ron Goldstein, 'A Letter to an Unknown Researcher of the year 2056' 29 November 2005, *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed November 15 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/92/a7394592.shtml>

The People's War BBC website enabled Goldstein to share his memories online for the first time, connect with other veterans and create a sense of online identity based on his wartime experiences, as a prolific writer on the website and by helping others to share their memories. The now archived project website outlines that the BBC aimed to create 'a record of how a generation remembered the war'.⁴⁷ It 'ran from June 2003 to January 2006' and hoped to 'collect the memories of people who had lived and fought during World War Two on a website' and 'form the basis of a digital archive which would provide a learning resource for future generations'.⁴⁸ The 'About Us' page notes that the 'target audience, people who could remember the war, was at least 60 years old' and 'over 47,000 stories were collected' both online and in collecting centres such as 'libraries, museums and learning centres' which 'ran events to help gather

⁴⁷ 'Project History' *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 20 October 2018 http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/about/project_03.shtml

⁴⁸ Ibid

stories'.⁴⁹ The project was clearly an opportunity for computer savvy veterans or those able to attend the story gathering events, to share their memories and to encourage others to do the same. Goldstein cites the project as the starting point to his online memory making activities:

I was not to write about the war until the BBC...when the BBC started I think that was in 2004, the BBC started this archives called BBC People's War and I was tempted to write on that and I started writing and I wrote about one hundred articles and that opened the box if you like. From the time I was demobbed in 1946 to 2004, I never wrote about the [war]...I must have bored my wife [with] stories of the war...I did nothing positive about it not until 2004.⁵⁰

Goldstein clearly found an outlet to share his memories and to interact with other veterans and those interested in the conflict by using the BBC website. His posts include chronological memories of the war itself, alongside guides to other veterans to help them receive their own war records.⁵¹ The content posted by Goldstein is hugely detailed and based on his diaries kept during the war, ephemera collected and his official war records.⁵² He was meticulous in making sure the content would be clearly accessible and ordered and noted in 2005, that in order to 'bring some sort of order to this potpourri I have listed these stories,

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Appendix 1

⁵¹ See 'About the Contributor: Ron Goldstein'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/user/16/u520216.shtml> *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 20 October 2018

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/user/16/u520216.shtml>

⁵² Ibid

chronologically, wherever possible, together with links to the articles themselves and these can all be found on my Personal Page'.⁵³ By engaging with the internet, and the BBC People's War project, Goldstein has been able to write about topics that interested him and add as many, or as little posts or comments as he wanted.

Goldstein has also been able to engage with others and the website includes spaces where veterans and the public could reminisce and share memories together. One discussion Goldstein had with a fellow veteran called Norman Freeman, is telling of the possibilities that were available from websites like the People's War. Freeman posted beneath one of Goldstein's stories:

'I was very interested reading of your service, it hardly corresponds to my own, but I am real envious at the response you have received to your letters. I have tried for some months now to reach any former comrades from my old RAF UNIT without any results, so I have given up for now. You and I similar in some respects I will be 80 in a couple of months and I follow the same faith. I am jealous of your memory, I have difficulties remember my service in the RAF as to stations and such, it seems you may have kept a journal, I wish I had the foresight to have kept one...I wish our paths had crossed but you being in the army it was unlikely. Keep up the good work, perhaps we can chat from time to time. Keep well...'.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ron Goldstein, 'Ron Goldstein's War – A month at a time' 27 June 2005 *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 09 November 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/48/a4281248.shtml>

⁵⁴ See figure 18- Ron Goldstein, 'Ron's Grand Tour' 27 November 2003, *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed November 15 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/64/a2156564.shtml>

Goldstein replied to Freeman stating ‘...Welcome Aboard! As you've sussed out, I'm still a compulsive diarist which is just as well for my bad memory. I would also like to stay in touch so I shall post this in your message box as well...’.⁵⁵ This correspondence between two veterans highlights the possibilities for new friendships to form with the use of the internet. The men had never met offline and did not have similar wartime experiences or memories but clearly struck up a friendship due to their shared veteran status and hoped to stay in contact and share memories via private messages. Freeman’s comments also suggest that Goldstein’s efforts sharing memories could also make other veterans want to do the same, as he describes being ‘real envious at the response you have received to your letters’ and as ‘jealous of your memory’. This suggests that Freeman sees value in being a veteran who is pro-active about sharing their memories. Clearly, sharing memories like Goldstein has enables their experiences to be praised and discussed by others which is something Freeman aspires to experience. In this case, it seems that the idea of what it means to be a veteran has been shaped by the ability to share memories online.

In an evaluation of the BBC People’s War project conducted in 2005, Hugh Hope-Stone Associates discovered that ‘leaving a legacy was the most vocalised reason for contributing a story...people felt the real pleasure of contributing was in talking, reminiscing and having a willing ear to bend. Many felt they were learning more about World War Two (service personnel learning about the Home Front, and vice versa) and for some it was an opportunity to get the autobiography

⁵⁵ Ibid

out of the cupboard'.⁵⁶ These findings reflect the views of Goldstein and what he, along with others, gained by participating in the project.

The screenshot shows a BBC website page titled "WW2 People's War" with the subtitle "An archive of World War Two memories - written by the public, gathered by the BBC". The main article is "Ron's Grand Tour" by Ron Goldstein. The page includes a navigation menu on the left, a map of the Mediterranean region, and two messages from other users. The first message is from Norman Freeman, dated 13 March 2004, and the second is from Ron Goldstein, dated 26 March 2004.

Figures 17 and 18 Ron Goldstein, 'Ron's Grand Tour' 27 November 2003, *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed November 15 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/64/a2156564.shtml>

Goldstein's faith and being part of the Jewish ex-service community has been important in shaping his sense of veteran identity. After the war, he chose to join AJEX, the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women, rather than the British Legion:

'I joined AJEX...and I still am a member...I pay a fee every year to stay a member...and once a year the week after the main British legion march in Whitehall, where the Queen attends, a week later we always have our own

⁵⁶ 'Project History' *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 20 October 2018 http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/about/project_03.shtml

parade...one reason why we've kept the parade and kept it separately, is at the parade we say a Kaddish, which is a Jewish prayer for the fallen'.⁵⁷

Clearly, Goldstein values the Jewish orientated commemorative events and his strong sense of faith is reflected in both his online and offline activities as a veteran. As Morris has outlined, after the Second World War, AJEX branches focused on creating local connections, running the Association, 'monitoring and combatting anti-Semitism' and commemoration.⁵⁸ The AJEX remembrance parade was a 'focal point' in the year.⁵⁹ It is telling that on the People's War website, Goldstein recruited others to write posts on topics of interest to him, including a piece by Martin Sugarman of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women Jewish Military Museum on 'Jack Nissenthall - The VC Hero who Never Was', who was a member of the Cambridge and Bethnal Green Boys Club with Goldstein.⁶⁰ These posts reflect Goldstein's dedication to his community and faith and his ability to connect with others to write about topics that are important to him. Recording the contributions made by British Jews in the war is seen by Sugarman as 'a permanent testimony to the truth' in a climate where Jews have been viewed as 'just civilians or victims or bystanders' to the war.⁶¹ This correlates with Goldstein's interest in recording thorough and accurate memories of his own contribution and those of his fellow Jewish

⁵⁷ Appendix 1

⁵⁸ Henry Morris, *The AJEX Chronicles – The Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women: A Brief History* (London: AJEX, 1999), 36

⁵⁹ Henry Morris, 41

⁶⁰ Ron Goldstein, 'Jack Nissenthall - The VC Hero who Never Was' History' *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 20 October 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/44/a2665244.shtml>

⁶¹ Martin Sugarman, *Fighting Back – British Jewry's Military Contribution in the Second World War* (Middlesex: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), xv

participants in the conflict. Goldstein's motivations in sharing material go beyond simply sharing his own experiences for future generations, he also wants to locate and publish accurate and well-researched historical information on those that served from the Jewish community.

Goldstein's concerns about the accuracy of some of the posts made by others in a post titled 'A Letter to an Unknown Researcher of the year 2056' also emphasise this dedication to providing material which is accurate and tell more about his perceived identity as a veteran:

'Some of the older contributors (including myself) have crossed swords with the controllers of the site because we felt that some articles were, to put it politely, risibly inaccurate. The Organisers in turn have told us in no uncertain terms that the individual posters were responsible for their own stories and that there was even merit in what was referred to by the organisers as "perceived memories".

In an effort to keep the record straight I would urge future readers and in particular researchers to take nothing that has been written on this site as being factually correct unless it has been confirmed by other research sources. I would also urge future researchers to read any threads that have been added to the stories as these have been, in the main, added by those who were concerned for factual accuracy...

Having stated my case, and with that proviso safely out of the way, may I now praise the site and its organisers. There are some wonderful stories here. People have given freely and generously of their memories and have created an amazing patchwork picture of life during the most catastrophic of times. Despite the difficulty of their task, the organisers have kept the ball rolling and have not allowed petty bickering to distract them from their main task which was always to offer help to prospective contributors, gather their stories and to analyse and categorise them...I have no idea what innovations will be available to you folk in 2056 but judging by the progress I have seen within my own lifetime I envy you...Make good use of this site, a lot has been put into it and as you do, spare a thought for those of us who have placed our stories on this site so that the future generations would know about who we were and what we did during World War II'.⁶²

Recruiting others to write articles and his concerns in the post above highlight Goldstein's perceived veteran self-identity as a caretaker of accurate and detailed memories, shared by those who have the first-hand experience or the legitimacy to distribute them. He is clearly disappointed that the BBC would permit potentially inaccurate content, despite the site stressing that 'these stories don't give a precise overview of the war, or an accurate list of dates and events' and they do not give an 'historical record of events, a collection of government or BBC information,

⁶² Ron Goldstein, 'A Letter to an Unknown Researcher of the year 2056' 29 November 2005, *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed November 15 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/92/a7394592.shtml>

recordings or documents relating to the war'.⁶³ Nevertheless, Goldstein clearly sees himself as a gatekeeper of accurate wartime memories and dismisses posts which he views as not being accurate, as they do not fit either with his own experiences of conflict, or fail to include the level of detail present in his own posts. Despite these concerns, Goldstein has clearly benefitted himself from sharing his own memories using the site, and developed an online persona based on his detailed accounts of his wartime experiences.

Goldstein later started blogging to further share his memories as the People's War website was to be archived in 2006. The blog offered Goldstein the ability to share content without restriction, or in fear of the website being discontinued. He copied many of the posts added to the BBC People's War website onto a blog titled 'Ron Goldstein's Army Album'.⁶⁴ Goldstein also created a blog titled 'Actual Army Album', featuring scanned pages of a scrapbook that he created and added additional memories beneath. As the war was ending, Goldstein started to create the scrapbook in 1946 and he has since donated it to the Imperial War Museums. He discussed the origins of the project:

'I decided, it's a good idea, to gather all the bits of ephemera that I'd accumulated, including pieces of my diary, and put it all in one place. So I bought this album, on my first leave back in England...and I started sticking things in it...I gathered together all the photographs I'd sent from

⁶³ 'Project History' *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed 20 October 2018

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/about/project_03.shtml

⁶⁴ 'Ron Goldstein's Army Album' accessed 15 November 2018

<http://ronsactualarmyalbum.blogspot.com>

Italy, home, and saved them and stuck them all in the album and so I was able to preserve those. So that's when I created the album...in the year I was in Trieste. And subsequently I gave it to the Imperial War Museum...I made a duplicate copy, a physical duplicate, literally copied every page of the album...and built another separate album which I still have... And I did something further because it was 'belt and braces', I created a blog. And the blog has got every page. So I knew what I was doing and I accept that not everybody did, because if not the IWM would have said to me "thanks all the same but we've got so many of them..."⁶⁵

These comments highlight Goldstein's keenness to preserve his memories in various forms, even while in the forces. The blog is an extension of Goldstein's physical efforts to construct the scrapbook featuring his wartime ephemera, photographs and pages of the diary he wrote during the conflict. Scrapbooking can be seen as a platform to share autobiographical memories. Phillips describes how 'people craft their autobiographies looking for patterns of connection—a chance to order their experiences and create an overarching narrative with themselves as the protagonist'.⁶⁶ The collecting, preserving, and reconstructing autobiographical memories' can be 'facilitated' by scrapbooking in the conservation of 'tangible memory markers and keepers of the extended self'.⁶⁷ These activities emphasise the fact that Goldstein has always been keen to document his life and memories, both during the war and shortly after in the creation of the scrapbook. The web has offered him the opportunity to further

⁶⁵ Appendix 1

⁶⁶ Barbara Phillips, 343

⁶⁷ Ibid

preserve, catalogue and add to these memories and to leave a more detailed legacy online.

It is the pages of this album which serve to illustrate Ron's wartime memories on his blog. He uses each page as a starting point to discuss his memories and to build up a picture of his wartime experiences, in the order of the pages of the physical scrapbook.⁶⁸ Scholars exploring computer technology have highlighted how blogging can allow the writer to curate a sense of self and control and manage the content they post to create an expression of their lives. As Dennen notes, 'bloggers weave the narratives of their lives into posts, these narratives, which are acts of self-construction and self-depiction, express a sense of author agency'⁶⁹ McCullagh adds that, 'over time, a blog archive can read very much like an evolving portrait of the blogger's interests and experiences'.⁷⁰ Goldstein has created an online portrait of his life and has extending his blogging content to another set of pages about his post-war life and family.

⁶⁸ *Ron Goldstein's Actual Army Album* accessed 17 November 2018

<http://ronsactualarmyalbum.blogspot.com/2006/04/page-20.html>

⁶⁹ Vanessa Paz Dennen, 'Constructing Academic Alter-Egos: Identity Issues in a Blog-based Community' *Identity in the Information Society* Vol. 2 No. 1 (2009): 23-38

⁷⁰ Karen McCullagh, 'Blogging: Self Preservation and Privacy' *Information & Communications Technology Law* Vol. 7, No. 1, (2008), 3

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Of my week's leave in Cairo I most vividly remember a day trip to the Pyramids and the Sphinx and the pleasant days we spent swimming at the pool at Heliopolis.

On 16th August 1944 I celebrated my 21st birthday by having a drink with an American seaman in a bar in Cairo. I had just dropped the C.O. off in the city and was killing time before picking him up for the trip back to camp at Ishmalia. By one of those remarkable coincidences that used to occur in wartime, the seaman at the bar, a Mr. John Merry of 3830 North Carmac St Philadelphia, U.S.A., happened to be a crew member of a Liberty ship called the SS Homer Lee. When at the end of our stay in Egypt we boarded ship for our return to Italy the ship turned out to be, yes, you have guessed it, the afore-mentioned Homer Lee and as a result I had the pleasure of access to the crews' quarters and some smashing food.

Figure 19 - A page of Goldstein's digital Army Album – 'Page 20' April 19 2006, *Ron Goldstein's Actual Army Album* accessed 17 November 2018
<http://ronsactualarmyalbum.blogspot.com/2006/04/page-20.html>

Alongside blogging and writing on the BBC People's War website, Goldstein is also a prolific writer on the discussion forum, World War Two Talk (WW2Talk). The website is designed for those with an interest in the Second World War and users can discuss topics together as part of an online community.⁷¹ Peter Holtz *et al* describe how 'internet forums have a tree-like structure: usually, different topics are discussed within different thematic sections and sometimes sub-sections. Within the sections or sub-sections, users can start a discussion – a so-called thread – with a starter posting. Other users can reply to the starter posting or to other users' comments...' ⁷² Goldstein uses WW2Talk in similar ways to the forum feature on the BBC People's War pages, to talk to other veterans and relatives of veterans, discuss his experiences with those interested in the period. In

⁷¹ 'Homepage' *WW2Talk* accessed 16 November 2018 <http://ww2talk.com/index.php>

⁷² P. Holtz, N. Kronberger, and W. Wagner, 'Analyzing internet forums: A practical guide', *Journal of Media Psychology*, Vol. 24 No. 2, (2012): 55-66

recent years, he has also used the forum to create an additional archive of information.

Upon turning 95, he added the following thread listing all the interviews he had conducted relating to his wartime experiences:

‘One of the less favourite joys of using the internet is finding that carefully placed links to previous articles no longer work. With this in mind, I have just created this up-dated version of "A record of Ron's Interviews & Publications" and have removed all links that no longer work. It is my intention to edit this file on a weekly basis and I would also be grateful if any other broken links are drawn to my attention. I have also up-dated the Reference Number system to make it easier to "point" to a particular Ref No...Ever conscious of the fact that at the age of 95 I am living on borrowed time, I drew up this index so that my family would know where to look for various articles. It has since occurred to me that others might also find it of some interest’.⁷³

These comments highlight Goldstein’s continuing motivations in sharing material and his dedication to making sure his experiences and involvement in media interviews and events is recorded for the future.

Alongside acting as a further archive for Goldstein to preserve his memories and content, users can ask questions, share photographs and stories or discuss the

⁷³ See ‘Ron Goldstein Remembers WW2’ November 5 2017 *WW2Talk* accessed 16 November 2018 <http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/ron-goldstein-remembers-ww2.71528/>

latest articles related to the history of the conflict. For Goldstein, this community enables him to and to ‘help other strangers with advice and information’ and continue to share memories with those who are interested in the history of the conflict.⁷⁴ These discussion boards can be open to view by anyone, but users have to register to create posts. Due to this selective nature of the forum, Goldstein can assume a special status as one of very few Second World War veterans who posts on the website. Goldstein is publicly singled out as a ‘WW2 veteran’ which has acquired him a special status.⁷⁵ As Lampel and Bhalla explore, ‘a powerful motivation for disproportionate gift giving in offline communities can be traced to status seeking’.⁷⁶ Whether consciously sought or not, Goldstein has gained a certain position from contributing to the WW2Talk online community. This may add to Goldstein’s desire to post more frequently about his memories, especially if users ask him questions. The status held in this community enables Goldstein to further reinforce his self-identity as a veteran in a virtual space which values him and his contributions.

For Goldstein, internet platforms such as forums, blogs and websites like the BBC People’s War, have offered him the agency to document as many of his wartime experiences as he wishes without the restrictions present when sharing memories with the media or having his memories altered or shortened. Goldstein describes his frustration with sharing his memories with the media:

⁷⁴ Joseph Lampel and Ajay Bhalla, ‘The Role of Status Seeking in Online Communities: Giving the Gift of Experience’ *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication* Vol 12, No 2, (2007), 434

⁷⁵ See ‘Ron Goldstein Remembers WW2’ November 5 2017 *WW2Talk* accessed 16 November 2018 <http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/ron-goldstein-remembers-ww2.71528/>

⁷⁶ Joseph Lampel and Ajay Bhalla, 435

‘It’s so frustrating, because... I have so much to say, and then they cut it down, to two minutes, three minutes, I find it frustrating. And sometimes because of the cutting...for instance if you saw the BBC one...I mentioned that I learned to be a tank [driver]...I mentioned that at the time I was trained on Sherman Tanks, so the footage shows Sherman tanks going along...but I was never on the Sherman Tank in action...but my tank was a... turretless tank [completely different] but it would give the person listening to it the thought that I did my fighting on a Sherman Tank, this wasn’t the case...You have no freedom. You have no freedom whatsoever...one usually feels, after one has spent anything from an hour to two hours...that you get a fair crack at the whip, and it hasn’t always been the case. In fact its usually not the case, usually the best parts [find themselves] on the cutting room floor...’.⁷⁷

Evidently, Goldstein feels his participation in media projects does not allow him the time or the freedom to share his memories as he wishes. He highlights the selective nature of what is presented of veterans in documentaries and during special commemorative programmes. As Hanna notes, ‘media interviews can fracture the essential meaning-making structures in the service of interpretation and generalisation by making snippets of a response out of context’.⁷⁸ Like all media representations of veterans, the images and content are selective and can be presented in snippets or in a reduced form of the original interview. They are

⁷⁷ Appendix 1

⁷⁸ Emma Hanna, 65

chosen by the programme makers, politicians and media organisations and not by the veterans themselves. For Goldstein, this lack of freedom has meant that he has sought other ways to share his memories which offer a greater level of control. Using internet forums, blogs and other websites gives Goldstein the power to present his memories in detail, communicate with others and share his stories and fulfil his aim of leaving a legacy.

Goldstein adopts an extended identity based on the traditional construction of the veteran as seen in annual and anniversary commemorations as a patriotic and wise figure, who engages in wearing the poppy and medals. This is evident in Goldstein's use of bemedalled images of himself and in his participation in commemorative events in the real world, such as the 60th anniversary of VE-Day events.⁷⁹ Yet, Goldstein has uniquely cultivated a richer persona than is available to many veterans, by engaging with the internet and sharing his memories so prolifically, he has been able to assert greater control of the sharing of memories and is able to self-cultivate his own image as a veteran. He has also gained access to a community of those interested in the Second World War and gained connections with other veterans, via the People's War website and WW2 Talk.

Harry Leslie Smith

⁷⁹ Ron Goldstein, 'Commemoration Parade June 10th 2005' 23 July 2005 *The People's War – An Archive of Memories Written by the Public, Gathered by the BBC*, Accessed November 15 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/63/a4524563.shtml>

While Goldstein documents every aspect of his wartime life online, Harry Leslie Smith was extremely selective in the discussion of his wartime memories. He used his status as a Second World War veteran as a platform to share his activist, pacifist and political views. His self-identity was centred around his age and his experiences, having lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War. The conflict was not directly central to his sense of self, but was used as a tool that was used to gain authority as a living witness of previous atrocities and hardship. Smith chiefly used the social media platform Twitter to share his views. He frequently discussed political matters, directly challenges politicians, and shared newspaper articles and details of his offline activities to his 220,000 followers. As Marwick and Boyd describe, 'Twitter is a microblogging site... designed to let people post short, 140-character text updates or 'tweets' to a network of others' and participants can 'follow' each other and 'retweet' others users posts to 'introduce content to new audiences'.⁸⁰

Smith used Twitter to highlight the plight of refugees and was organising a 'tour' of refugee camps to highlight their plight in 2019. He described the trip in a GoFundMe page he set up on October 04 2017 to raise money for the trip which is 'pinned' to his Twitter page:

'I need your help today, so that I can complete the last great challenge of my existence before old age consumes me. I am one of the last few remaining voices left from a generation of men and women who built a

⁸⁰ Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd, 'I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience' *New Media and Society* Vol. 13, No. 1 (2010): 116

better society for our children and grandchildren out of the horrors of the Second World War as well as the hunger of the Great Depression. Sadly, that world my generation helped build on a foundation of decency and fair play is being swept away by neo liberalism and the greed of the 1% which has brought discord around the globe. ... before my time dwindles down to a few precious moments, I want to travel to as many refugee hot spots as possible in Europe, North America and possibly Australia to document this preventable tragedy that may lead us to another war as gruesome as the one I helped fight against Hitler over 70 years ago. I want to turn my research, my impressions, my outrage and passion into a book that can help shake people from their complacency. Moreover, while I am in the field, researching my new book on the refugee crisis; I also want to be podcasting, writing and tweeting from these camps of despair'.⁸¹

The statement draws on Smith's memories of the war as a point of comparison to the political situation of the present day. Smith presented his generation as more welcoming of those in need of salvation and refers to the 'decency and fair play' and how his generation built a 'better world' via the social reforms of the post-war years. This is a narrative which is used commonly by Smith in posts relating to British politics and his views on poverty alleviation. Smith also used his status as a veteran to give himself the legitimacy, as someone who witnessed the past, to share his views on the refugee crisis. He described via Twitter that 'on my refugee tour in 2019, I am going to retrace my steps that I took at the end of World War

⁸¹ 'Harry's Last Stand Refugee Tour' *GoFundMe* accessed 18 November 2018
<https://www.gofundme.com/harrys-last-stand-tour>

Two through Belgium, Holland and into Northern Germany and reflect upon how refugees were treated in 1945 when I was 22 years old and in 2019 when I will be 96'.⁸² Snippets of Smith's experiences were used as comparisons to the current plight of Syrian refugees.

While Smith may well have written this statement and created the Gofundme page, it must be acknowledged that he was becoming increasingly frail at this time and had to cancel speaking at a number of events.⁸³ Since Smith's death, the page continues to be promoted by his son who plans to continue his father's work. The language used in the statement is reminiscent of that of used by Jeremy Corbyn in December 2017, when he connected the plight of refugees and the need to protect human rights while dealing with the 'growing concentration of unaccountable wealth and power in the hands of a tiny corporate elite, a system many call neoliberalism, which has sharply increased inequality, marginalisation, insecurity and anger across the world'.⁸⁴ This was the same argument made by Smith in his campaign to support refugees. Similarly, event held after Smith death, hosted by and including speeches from Jeremy Corbyn and Owen Jones (as discussed in Chapter Three) also indicate a clear connection between the narratives being stressed by Smith in his last few months and those by Corbyn's rhetoric. Could the Gofundme page and political language seen in the press

⁸² See Figure 21

⁸³ Smith was due to attend a number of events being held at the University of York in 2017 and 2018 that had to be cancelled or altered, including the Bringing Conflict Home conference which was jointly organised by the author. Other events included: 'Being Rescheduled: Harry Leslie Smith talk' (11 October 2017) *University of Liverpool Labour Students* accessed 16 Jan 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/events/liverpool-guild-of-students/being-rescheduled-harry-leslie-smith-talk/323831358081899/>

⁸⁴ 'Jeremy Corbyn speech at the United Nations' Geneva headquarters' 8 December 2017, *Labour* accessed 16 Jan 2019 <https://labour.org.uk/press/jeremy-corbyn-speech-at-the-united-nations-geneva/>

surrounding the refugee tour, be an indicator that Smith was being used as a tool by his publishers and those in connection to the Labour party to promote certain narratives and to foster support for the party?

Earlier posts show the use of detailed memories of war alongside images of Smith in 1946 and in the present:

On May 1 1945, when Hitler was just 24 hours dead, I was deployed along with the other men from my squadron to journey to Hamburg and occupy the Luftwaffe airfield located there. From the back of a lend lease army truck lumbering through northern Germany, I witnessed the dying gasps of Nazism. Along our way death and refugees were strewn to the side of the dual carriageway like a wedding garland that had been tossed out from behind the gates of hell.⁸⁵

Examples such as these highlight how Smith wove snippets of his wartime memories to legitimise and strengthen his campaign to support refugees. His advanced age and status as a veteran were legitimising tools which reinforced Smith's motivations to share the past to aid the present.

⁸⁵ Harry Leslie Smith, 'My generation's hard fought lessons are being forgotten' 8 May 2017 *New European* accessed 01 November 2018 <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/my-generation-s-hard-fought-lessons-are-being-forgotten-1-5008755>



Figure 20 Harry Leslie Smith (@Harryslaststand), tweet, 20 June 2018 3:30 a.m., accessed November 19 2018, <http://twitter.com/#!/Harryslaststand> and Figure 21 Harry Leslie Smith (@Harryslaststand), tweet, 29 September 2018 7:59 a.m., accessed November 19 2018, <http://twitter.com/#!/Harryslaststand>

While Twitter was Smith’s most used social media platform, he also wrote articles for the *Guardian* and the *New European*. While newspaper articles can be found in print, they are circulated and discussed most predominantly online. An Ofcom report in 2018 on news consumption highlighted how ‘64% of UK adults say they use the internet for news’ and ‘social media is the most popular type of online news’.⁸⁶ Smith’s written content in newspapers was therefore widely read and circulated via the internet and has helped to further enhance his internet fame. His political persuasions clearly suited the *Guardians’* own political leanings towards the political left. The newspaper clearly helped to further promote Smith’s online and offline persona and has embellished his views further in producing visual material surrounding his upcoming refugee aid campaign and tour. Smith himself re-shared his own written content with this audience and this material was readily shared by others with similar political or pacifist views. A video made by the

⁸⁶ ‘News Consumption in the UK: 2018’ Produced by: Jigsaw Research 2018 *Ofcom* accessed 18 November 2018 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/116529/news-consumption-2018.pdf

Guardian to promote Smith's refugee tour, promoted him as a witness to history and embellishes his story with moving images of refugees, holocaust survivors and emotive music. The video shows Smith describing his wartime experiences, seeing refugees first hand and the views of his wartime friend who had been a Polish refugee who grew up in Scotland.⁸⁷ Smith states that his 'character has been shaped by the experiences [that he] endured during the Second World War'.⁸⁸ This leads to a discussion of the plight of modern day refugees in Calais. Evidently, the *Guardian* widely supported Smith's activities and promoted his views which coincided with their own surrounding the state of British politics, the welfare state and refugees.

Smith frequently wove both memories of war and his childhood (during the Great Depression) as ways in which to describe his support for the NHS and Welfare State in articles written for the *Guardian*. In one article, he describes both his childhood and how he perceives his own generation:

Come this October it will be 90 years since my eldest sister Marion was buried in a pauper's pit on the outskirts of Barnsley. Not a day has gone by in the intervening decades when I have not thought of her miserable death from TB in a workhouse infirmary, or her ignoble burial in a mass grave for indigents because my parents, being from the working class, were too poor to afford my sister a doctor's care.

⁸⁷ Harry Leslie Smith, Bruno Rinvoluceri and Leah Green, 'In my opinion: We welcomed refugees in 1945. We can't abandon them today' [video] *Guardian* 23 March 2016 accessed 19 November 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2016/mar/23/we-welcomed-refugees-in-1945-we-cant-abandon-them-today-video>

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

... the younger generations must now shoulder the responsibility to maintain and preserve my generation's legacy, the welfare state.⁸⁹

While Goldstein chooses to share as much detail about his wartime experiences as he can, Smith selected certain narratives about the past to shape his online persona and political standpoint. As McHale and Hunt describe, 'personal stories are not just about telling stories, they are the means by which identities can be fashioned and developed'.⁹⁰ They note that selecting and 'over-emphasising' certain events about the past is part of the narrative process and how we make sense of ourselves.⁹¹ Smith clearly exhibited this selecting of his memories of the Great Depression and his wartime and post-war service, specifically his memories of seeing refugees and meeting his wife in post-war Germany as key moments in his life narrative and in the construction of his self-identity. Unlike Goldstein, Smith did not identify solely as a veteran, he was a political activist who used his status having served in the RAF, his experiences of war and his childhood memories of poverty as part of a political identity toolkit. Interestingly, little information about Smith's wartime service is ever discussed beyond his later years in Hamburg and the rest of his life is rarely discussed beyond what he has written in his own memoirs and articles. Smith's selecting of certain events of his life has allowed him to create a clear sense of self only related to his political motivations.

⁸⁹ 'I remember the welfare state being built. A divided Labour cannot save it', *Guardian* 19 September 2016 accessed 10 November 2018
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/19/welfare-state-divided-labour-nhs-social-safety-net>

⁹⁰ Nigel Hunt, and Sue McHale, 43

⁹¹ *Ibid*

Smith's self-identity was more aligned to the Labour narrative of the Second World War and used the narrative of his generation as the founders of the welfare state in his rhetoric about his life and in his political messages. As shown in the third chapter of this thesis, attempts have been made by the Labour party to re-ignite this idea of the Second World War generation, even by using Smith as a speaker at Party Conferences and his legacy. Smith connected his own experiences with view that the Labour 'party was swept to power on a tidal wave of left-wing fervour'.⁹² Smith described in *Harry's Last Stand*:

I had faith that out of the ashes of war, something new was being built, especially at home in Britain. For me, nothing better exemplified the rebirth of our nation than the 1945 General Election. After all, I thought, it was the common people's blood, sweat and tears that had allowed Britain to survive the war; therefore it was our time to reap the dividends of peace. It was wonderful to be part of a great democratic renewal that was unleashed during that General Election. It was remarkable and unprecedented, but millions of British soldiers, sailors and airmen who had served in the war and were now stationed in military bases strewn across the Empire and in occupation zones in Germany and Japan turned out to vote and democratically determined the political fate of our nation.⁹³

Smith's own views and the Labour narrative of the wartime generation, portray both veterans and the general British population as having all subscribed to

⁹² Steven Fielding, 'What Did 'The People' Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election, 639

⁹³ Harry Leslie Smith, *Harry's Last Stand* (London: Icon Book, 2014), 52

Labour in 1945. As Fielding has shown, in 1945, 'Labour won just over one-third of the votes of those eligible to exercise the franchise'.⁹⁴ Yet, Smith made the narrative of the service vote part of the construction of his self-identity as a veteran and to propel his political views.

Smith openly campaigned against Conservative patriotism and poppy wearing, and rejected these in an article in the *Guardian*. His views on the poppy highlight how Smith perceived his role:

Still, this year I shall wear the poppy as I have done for many years. I wear it because I am from that last generation who remember a war that encompassed the entire world. I wear the poppy because I can recall when Britain was actually threatened with a real invasion and how its citizens stood at the ready to defend her shores. But most importantly, I wear the poppy to commemorate those of my childhood friends and comrades who did not survive the second world war and those who came home physically and emotionally wounded from horrific battles that no poet or journalist could describe...However, I am afraid it will be the last time that I will bear witness to those soldiers, airmen and sailors who are no more, at my local cenotaph. From now on, I will lament their passing in private because my despair is for those who live in this present world. I will no longer allow my obligation as a veteran to remember those who died in the great wars to be co-opted by current or former politicians to

⁹⁴ Ibid

justify our folly in Iraq, our morally dubious war on terror and our elimination of one's right to privacy.⁹⁵

Smith acknowledged his 'obligation as a veteran' as remembering those who have lost their lives and did not discount the significance of commemoration. However, he went against the traditional image of the poppy wearing and bemedalled veteran, and suggested that remembering could take place without these rituals. His pacifist views highlight the difference in opinion that can exist between Second World War veterans, and how the internet and media enabled Smith to openly declare these views with a wide audience. This article and the views he expressed are still frequently re-shared around the annual remembrance period each year. Posts in November 2018, highlight how Smith was unafraid to challenge the those who speak out against his anti-war views.⁹⁶ Smith used his platform to campaign against the conservative and military use of commemoration. His image as a veteran was frequently re-emphasised in an attempt to gain authority to be able to share his anti-war views, having lived through the Second World War.

⁹⁵ Harry Leslie Smith, This year, I will wear a poppy for the last time' *Guardian* November 8 2013 accessed 10 November 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/08/poppy-last-time-remembrance-harry-leslie-smith>

⁹⁶ See Figure 22



Figure 22 - Harry Leslie Smith (@Harryslaststand), tweet, 06 November 2018 5.30 a.m., accessed November 19 2018, <http://twitter.com/#!/Harryslaststand>



Figure 23 - Smith's online activities to share the plight of refugees have gained him recognition by major politicians and charities such as UNHCR. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency (@Refugees), tweet, 17 November 2018 4:05 a.m., accessed November 19 2018, <https://twitter.com/Refugees>

Smith's sense of veteran identity clearly went against the traditional marching, patriotic and poppy wearing image as described in the first section of this thesis. Smith, and perhaps his publishers and relatives, used the internet to openly construct and advocate a different persona, based on activism and politics. It is by using Twitter and the internet, that Smith gained real life recognition as an activist and political campaigner. As Knibbs notes, 'platforms like Twitter give normal people an opportunity to gain fame'.⁹⁷ Smith gained a huge following because of his online activities and this has enabled him to create a distinctive persona.

⁹⁷ Kate Knibbs, 'How social media has changed what it means to be a celebrity' *Digital Trends*, April 15 2013, accessed 18 November 2018 <https://www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/celebrity-social-media-anger/>

After Smith's death in November 2018, reactions from people across the world are telling of how people perceived him. Despite cultivating a politicised and unconventional persona which shunned traditional tropes of veteranhood, such as wearing medals and poppies and marching in commemorative events, Smith created the same emotional connections with people as other well-known veterans because of his age and perceived wisdom. Bella Mackie describes: 'his popularity was, in part, because his wisdom came from his long life. We have all lost something in his passing: a link to a time that most of us cannot imagine and have no desire to. For me, personally, I've lost a man who sort of felt like family to me in some way. My grandfathers both died some years back, and Harry felt like an wonderful last-minute gift. An unfailingly kind man, who lived his values and grabbed his chance at a second act with both hands until the very end'.⁹⁸ Smith's own actions online which made him famous influenced how the public perceived him. Like the last First World War veterans, those that followed and met Smith gained an emotional connection to him. This illustrates how the age and perceived wisdom of veterans permeated Smith's online activities. Despite being an unconventional veteran in his views and persona, he was able to create similar reactions as the last Great War veterans, bemedalled and participating in commemorations. As Dan Todman noted of the last First World War veterans, 'the accident of longevity had given these men the chance to play the role of elderly family members to the nation: they had become universal veterans'.⁹⁹ Despite being unconventional in his views and actions, Smith became a universal veteran on his own terms. As shown in Chapter Three, his legacy

⁹⁸ Bella Mackie 'Harry Leslie Smith was a gift. I'll miss him' *Guardian* 28 November 2018 accessed 27/03/2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/28/harry-leslie-smith-writing>

⁹⁹ Dan Todman, 216

continues in the Labour party campaigns, which continue to use his image and views.

Conclusion

Overall, while their motivations and uses of the web differ dramatically, the activities of Smith and Goldstein highlight the ways in which the internet can be used to share memories, and give veterans a greater agency in their ability to share their wartime experiences and views. These men created their own interpretations of what it meant to be a veteran using digital technology alongside other platforms. Their actions show the limitations of more 'official' spaces in which veterans are seen, such as during commemorative occasions or in documentaries. As shown in previous chapters, these platforms are either limited and selective or do not allow for alternative viewpoints to be expressed. By using the internet, Goldstein can share his memories as freely as he wishes, expressing himself in his own words. He is able to curate a digital legacy and share his memories in digital communities, where he has gained status as a computer literate Second World War veteran. Meanwhile, Smith was able to use his veteran status to publicly campaign for certain political and activist views. The web and social media enabled him to publicly assert himself as a pacifist veteran, who was against some of the common rituals associated with veteranhood. Smith gained online status and fame as a political campaigner, and used his identity as a Second World War veteran to promote his views by comparing the past with the present.

The first chapters of this thesis highlighted a stereotyped and limited representations of the bemedalled, marching veteran seen in political and commemorative culture. The actions of Goldstein and Smith emphasise a lack of uniformity in the actions of Second World War veterans themselves. The findings of this chapter align with what Johnson and the Rappports noted in the 1970s, that there is an assumption of 'an unrealistic homogeneity' among the elderly and researchers must view 'people in the later phase of life in a less stereotyped and more differentiated way'.¹⁰⁰ Smith and Goldstein's activities provide just two examples of how elderly veterans have used alternative platforms to create extended veteran identities which give individuals greater control over how they are represented.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson 1976; Rapoport and Rapoport 1975: 312, cited in Paul Thompson, "I don't feel old" Subjective Ageing and the Search for Meaning in Later Life' in *Ageing and Society*, Vol. 12 (1992):

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to uncover the place of the Second World War veteran in the collective remembrance of the conflict in Britain and to understand how this generation of veterans have perceived their own identities. The findings of this project have shown the growth in importance of the figure of the veteran in commemorative and political culture over time, as a result of changing attitudes towards the memory of the Second World War, the life cycle and other political and social factors. These portrayals have provided the context to understanding how veterans have been discussed in British culture and the limited and selective narratives surrounding this generation controlled by political motivations and the media. By then exploring the individual and group attitudes of veterans towards their wartime experiences, this project has suggested that there exists a spectrum of identities present amongst veterans, which are largely absent in the dominant representations. Exploring the attitudes and actions of veterans themselves has demonstrated the varying motivations of veterans in choosing to share memories or remain silent about their experiences, and the forgotten efforts of veterans themselves to reunite and commemorate.

Section One contextualised how Second World War veterans have been imagined and represented in British commemorative and political culture. The first three chapters traced the evolution of some of the most dominant images of this generation of veterans and highlighted the place of Second World War ex-servicemen in British culture. In annual commemorative events, they have been imagined as part of a larger group who are shown as successors to the Great War

rituals of Armistice Day and the Poppy Appeal. Anniversary events dedicated to certain campaigns of the war were given media coverage and government backing and while others were forgotten. This unevenness in official public recognition, has meant that not all veterans are portrayed with the same level of media coverage or given opportunities to attend large-scale commemorative events. Similarly, high profile events which have been taken over by the government and media caused shifts in veterans' own agency in organising commemorations. These findings show a complicated portrait of this generation, which is based on the antagonism between political and cultural interests and the agency of veterans themselves. Political representations show how the place of the veteran has evolved in British society. In the post-war decades, veterans were mostly marginalised and seen only in practical political actions aimed at providing for the whole nation. Since the 1980s, governments and other politicians have increasingly used veterans as sought after individuals to promote political endeavours and as they have aged. Each of the chapters illustrates the unequal and sometimes contradictory representations of Second World War veterans. These images have provided the blueprint for how veterans have been discussed, but they fail to show the diversity of attitudes and experiences present in the veteran community.

Patterns in how veterans have been perceived can be observed in all three chapters, including the dominance of narratives surrounding patriotism, heroism and the consequences of political bodies championing certain narratives about this generation. In all three chapters, veterans were less visible in British culture in the early post-war decades and have gained greater cultural status as they have aged.

This can be explained by the changes in attitude to war, memory and commemoration, the increasing interest in veterans as they age and political motivations in commemorating and referring to the Second World War in Britain. All three forms of representation fail to take into account the wishes and attitudes of veterans themselves and ignore the low-key activities that have been conducted by veteran groups.

The second section uncovered the complex relationship between public and private memory in identity formation. There appears to be a spectrum of identities that can be adopted by Second World War veterans. On one side of the identity spectrum, lies those with a complete detachment from wartime experiences and towards identities based on other events such as work, family and hobbies. These veterans, like Harold May, or those who remained silent altogether may well have been widespread. It is a shortcoming of this thesis that more examples of this disengagement were not located. Further research could seek to uncover accounts of these silent veterans, who did not connect to their wartime experiences whatsoever. Those in the middle of the spectrum can opt in and out of a sense of identity relating to being a veteran. They perhaps only connect to their wartime memories when with other veterans, when being asked about their experiences or when attending commemorative events. Finally, there appears to be those who connect strongly to being a veteran and create strong personas around their wartime achievements. Ron Goldstein could be viewed as an example of this type of veteran. While this thesis presents a very small study into these identity formations, both the interviews with veterans and other examples cited, suggest

that there does exist a range of ways that this generation have connected to being a veteran.

This thesis has built on the work of Alistair Thomson, who discovered how ‘memories are risky and painful if they do not fit the public myths, so we try to compose our memories to ensure that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable. Just as we seek the affirmation of our personal identities within the particular publics in which we live, we also seek affirmation of our memories’.¹ Both memories and identities can be seen as being influenced by the dominant narratives surrounding conflict and its legacy. As shown in this thesis, veterans frequently adopt elements available to them in popular culture as markers of identity, such as wearing medals or attending commemorations to create a sense of self as a veteran. Meanwhile, others such as Harry Leslie Smith, openly rejected patriotic narratives, but he aligned his own life story with other publicly established narratives, specifically the legacy of the welfare state and the service vote and the plight of refugees.

This research has added to our understanding of the collective remembrance of the Second World War by focusing specifically on the image and experience of the war veteran. While other studies have focused on the memory of particular wartime campaigns, or outlined the various ways that memory of the war has been shaped by politics and culture, this thesis has added to this field by charting the

¹ Alistair Thomson, *Kindle Locations 543-544*

image of veterans of various backgrounds and campaigns within the commemorative and political culture surrounding the Second World War.

As the introduction to this thesis outlined, few scholars have examined the memory of the conflict from the perspective of the veteran or explored the identity and views of veterans in a thorough analysis. While studies have begun to explore the representations and attitudes of veterans themselves, they have been limited in scope, as they have only examined specific groups of veterans. These include works by Francis who examined the image of pilots or Tinker's study which charted the role of D-Day veterans in commemorations of the Normandy Landings. Similarly, scholars such as Oliver and Makepeace have charted the efforts of Far East prisoner of war veterans themselves in sharing or dealing with their wartime memories. This thesis has taken a broader approach, which has compared the differences in how veterans who fought in different arenas or endured different experiences have been represented. This approach has enabled the discovery that diversities in wartime role and where a person served can impact upon whether a veteran chooses to talk about wartime memories and how they connect to their experiences.

This thesis has also added to the understanding of how Second World War veterans have made their own efforts to share their memories and connect to one another. As Dan Todman discovered of Great War veterans, many 'recollections remained privately rehearsed' and some activities, such as those in Old Comrades Associations 'have left little trace on the historical record'.² The same assessment

² Dan Todman, 188-189

can be made of the activities of those who served in the Second World War. Largely invisible in the media, efforts of veterans themselves to record, commemorate or share their memories with each other provide an important insight into how this generation connect to their experiences. Section two of this thesis has helped to uncover some of those actions that do not readily relate to the dominant representations of veterans, including the low key activities of veterans associations and British Legion branches and clubs, attending local commemorations or sharing memories with comrades, family members or local school groups.

The findings of this project raise further questions surrounding the impact and organisation of low key forms of commemoration and activities organised by veterans themselves. Veterans' associations in particular have received little attention, and this thesis has acted as a starting point to uncovering the identities and communities formed by examining two of these groups as case studies in chapter six. While most of the organisations have disbanded as veterans have aged, there is still opportunity to explore the importance of these groups in local communities and the role they provided for veterans themselves. There is scope for research to be conducted into the formation and purpose of many more of these groups, which can provide further opportunities to uncover the actions and activities of veterans at a private or local level.

This research has strengthened the notion, also voiced by scholars such as Allport, that veterans were not treated in special ways upon their return to civilian life in the 1940s. Even many decades later, veterans could remember the indifference

shown to them by the British public and government when they were demobilised. This, in turn, impacted upon whether they shared their wartime memories and how far they became engaged in veteran activities in the decades following the end of the war. This thesis has also uncovered cases of dissatisfaction amongst ex-servicemen and women surrounding their wartime experiences. It builds on the work of scholars such as Grafton, who cited attitudes of veterans and civilians surrounding their wartime left-wing politics and negative feelings when remembering wartime service. This thesis has explored some of these attitudes in much greater depth, showing the range of views held by veterans towards the importance of their wartime experiences and instances of pacifist and anti-establishment views amongst veterans.

The findings of this research has shown how age impacts upon how veterans are perceived. Alongside representations of veterans being influenced by political, social and cultural change and to the evolution of the memory of the Second World War, aging has influenced how veterans are portrayed and how they relate to their wartime experiences. Being 'the last' or 'oldest' are common themes in the representations of veterans and can be traced long before the Second World War generation began to age. From recruitment posters, to the British Legion journal 'personalities' feature, old age and veteranhood have long been praised.³ As shown in section one, as veterans have become fewer, their profile and perceived importance increased in commemorative and political culture. This has had an impact on how veterans perceived themselves as they gained greater status

³ 'Legion Personalities – Legion's Senior Guest' *The British Legion Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (March 1952) E.80 / 258 *Imperial War Museums*

and praise after retirement, just as they were more likely to recall memories or participate in veteran activities. These findings highlight the significance of old age and the life cycle to the image and identity of the veteran. These findings also raise questions surrounding the ways in which the elderly are perceived and treated in society. As the most recent debates surrounding the D-Day commemorations and the TV licence fee suggest, there is a difference between how this generation are treated in contexts relating to the war and remembrance and in non-commemorative settings.⁴ While some veterans publicly backed the licence fee cut to over-75s, one D-Day veteran starkly remarked, 'it's only two days ago they were patting all these old people on the head and calling them heroes... This generation which has saved the world while on the other end, they're robbing the piggy bank'.⁵ There is clearly a perceived difference in the treatment of elderly veterans and non-veterans. As this thesis has suggested, some of the veterans interviewed for this project believe their veteran status is what separates them from being invisible as an elderly person in Britain today. As chapter four showed, identifying as a veteran and visibly wearing medals enables a process of identification and recognition in public. Recent debates surrounding the TV licence further emphasise the difference in the ways the elderly are treated depending on the context. In both studies of cultural gerontology and those examining war veterans, there is scope to explore this difference further and to ask questions surrounding the cultural perception and treatment of the elderly.

⁴ 'D-Day veteran backs BBC scrapping free licence fee for over 75s: "There's plenty of rich pensioners"' *Metro* 12 June 2019 accessed 05 July 2019 <https://metro.co.uk/2019/06/12/d-day-veteran-supports-bbc-licence-fee-plenty-rich-pensioners-9924307/>

⁵ *Ibid*

Despite the diversity present in the attitudes of veterans towards their veteran identity, there are commonalities relating to the life cycle amongst many of the veterans interviewed or quoted in this thesis. Many veterans began engaging in their wartime memories upon retirement and in later life. It is also clear from both dominant representations of veterans and in their own recollections, that ex-servicemen and women were not given special treatment or privileges in the post-war period. This had a major impact upon how veterans saw themselves. While some attempted to forget about the war in a culture of indifference from fellow citizens, others created their own events, held reunions and reminisced amongst themselves. As veterans began to age and retire, this coincided with political and social changes in the attitudes to war and memory and a new found respect for veterans emerged. This caused an increased cultural interest in Second World War veterans and some choosing to recollect their experiences for the first time. While there is no uniform veteran experience, these patterns can be seen in the previous seven chapters.

On both a personal and a public level, veterans have been central to the legacy of the conflict, whether as figureheads of annual remembrance activities, symbols used to promote certain narratives or agendas or in the low key and local level efforts of veterans themselves to honour their comrades and share their memories. The findings of this project also emphasise the importance of acknowledging silence as a concept. As Dessingué and Winter stress, ‘silence then is not the same as a total absence’.⁶ This research shows that remaining silent does not always mean a total detachment from wartime memories. In this thesis, exploring silence

⁶ Alexandre Dessingue, and Jay Winter, 451

has generated deeper understanding of the attitudes of Second World War veterans themselves and uncovered a range of veterans who are selective in how they engage with their veteran status. Silence must be seen as a valid form of communication and something which may be more common amongst ex-servicemen and women than representations convey.

As this thesis has highlighted, as Second World War veterans have become older, their status appears to increase given their scarcity and longevity. These findings raise questions surrounding younger generations of veterans and how they will be portrayed as they age. There is scope to explore this as the last of the Second World War generation passes away. How are Korean War veterans, or those who served in the Falklands conflict or in the Iraq War depicted in comparison to their predecessors? What will happen when the last Second World War veteran passes away and younger generations become figureheads of remembrance traditions? The Korean War veterans are now reaching their eighties. Yet, as Grace Huxford's recent book on the conflict reveals, the Korean War has been largely forgotten in British memory and has been 'eclipsed' by the legacy of the Second World War.⁷ As Huxford notes, 'the 1939–45 war was a constant reference point for both soldiers and civilians. For British servicemen, particularly those national servicemen too young to have served during the Second World War, it provided a constant yardstick of experience. For civilians, it characterised how they viewed war, with some wondering whether they would have to rebuild their air-raid

⁷ Helen Parr, 'Book Review – The Korean War in Britain – citizenship, selfhood and forgetting' by Grace Huxford' *Contemporary British History* Published online ahead of print 25 May 2019 accessed 27 June 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2019.1621171>

shelters in the summer of 1950'.⁸ The dominance of the Second World War, even as the Korean War took place, has meant that it has been overshadowed in British collective consciousness. Veterans of the Korean War have been 'disgruntled' by their lack of recognition.⁹ Recent press articles have served to highlight their experiences, which implies a change in how the conflict is remembered.¹⁰ As those that fought in the Second World War pass away and Korean War veterans take the place as oldest on parade at Remembrance Day, will the legacy of the conflict and the public awareness of its forgotten veterans change? As this thesis has shown, despite the cultural dominance of the memory of the Second World War, veterans were not necessarily always visible or treated in special ways until recent decades. It will be interesting to observe whether Korean War veterans cause a similar shift in the treatment and image of that generation of veterans.

Fundamentally, this thesis has uncovered that the Second World War generation of veterans have held a complicated and ever evolving place in relation to the legacy of the war. It has shown a spectrum of different experiences and attitudes to being a veteran, from those who disengage with memories of the war, to those who see being a veteran as central to their sense of individual identity.

⁸ Grace Huxford, *The Korean War in Britain – citizenship, selfhood and forgetting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018), kindle location, 286-289, kindle edition.

⁹ Helen Parr, 'Book Review – The Korean War in Britain – citizenship, selfhood and forgetting' by Grace Huxford'

¹⁰ Heathcliff O'Malley, 'The last British veterans of Korea: the Forgotten War' *Telegraph* 31 October 2018, accessed 28 June 2019 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/photos-british-soldiers-korea-forgotten-war/>

Appendix 1

Ron Goldstein

The interview took place on 7 November 2016 at the interviewees home.

Ron Goldstein was born on August 16th 1923 in London and was called up in October 1942 and served Wireless Operator in Light Ack Ack in the UK. He later served in North Africa, Sicily and Italy and was later re-trained as a Loader/Operator and ended his wartime career in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars as a Corporal in March 1947. After the war, Goldstein worked for his Father's clothing company and later became a Manager for other clothing companies. He is Jewish and joined AJEX after war.

HB: Did you ever think of yourself and of your comrades as heroes?

RG: Never, ever, and I still get slightly embarrassed...have you heard of the heroes return lottery scheme? I was very embarrassed by the name because...I wanted to make use of the site, it is very good and financially they helped, and I was able to go to places that I might have had two thoughts about going to...but the name itself heroes return was a bit...gosh...when one went into the forces, you literally did what you were told and you never had...I don't think you had much of a chance to think about the grandiose outer scheme, but certainly no[t] heroes...but there were heroes. I've got my own particular heroes.

...I don't think there was anything heroic about it, there were too many of us, we just did what we had to do and did it with a bit of grace if you like and that's it. So, certainly no, I don't think many servicemen would regard...In fact I doubt if you would ever get a serviceman to admit that what he did was heroic.

HB: Do you feel you were treated like heroes when you came home?

RG: Um, No, certainly not. As a matter of fact it was the reverse I think. Imagine if you will, this influx of people, tens of thousands of people descending on the labour market, all hopefully looking to re-claim the jobs that they had before going to war, [and few] of them did and so I went back into the clothing trade, into my father's factory where I knew I would automatically have a job and then I sought to better myself in that.

HB: Did you ever talk about the war when you came home?

RG: Not really, no, I don't think so. I was not to write about the war until the BBC...when the BBC started I think that was in 2004, the BBC started this archives called BBC People's War and I was tempted to write on that and I started writing and I wrote about one hundred articles and that opened the box if you like.

From the time I was demobbed in 1946 to 2004, I never wrote about the [war]...I must have bored my wife [with] stories of the war...I did nothing positive about it not until 2004.

HB: Obviously, you talked about [the war] with your family...

RG: Mainly I used to talk about things to people I had been in the forces with...but not a question of stopping somebody in the street

HB: Do you remember the ways in which veterans were portrayed after the war?

RG I think what used to happen, immediately after the war there must have been a general writing about people and their war stories... then there was a bit of a hiatus, then it started on the anniversary days...and people such as myself were in demand by the BBC or by Newspaper columnists to say something about the war...

At my present age which [I'll remind you] is 93, we are getting less and less, because of our rarity we become more in demand...even to the extent that you are interviewing me today...There is less and less interest in the war and less and less people recognise the veterans badge...I always wear a veteran's badge, because I think I look reasonably young for my age...to let people know where I am coming from if you like.

HB: Do you ever remember films which depicted post-war life and what it was like to be an ex-serviceman or woman in the post-war world?

RG: No, other than my interview and I've sent you a list of the interviews I've done...and I've got those. If we have time and you want to, I have the interviews on disc [HB: that would be great] then I could tell you more about them...my major objection to interviews on TV is that usually they take hours, and it's cut down to two or three minutes sometimes. So you understand, that can be a bit frustrating, particularly as when in my younger days, they used to come here and literally take the place to pieces...all they were interested in was where they were going to put the camera and they shifted furniture and all the rest of it and my wife used to despair...

[HB: It does take a long time doesn't it when they're setting up and things...]

RG: I can understand it but it's frustrating...and in one particular case, I think I mentioned it to you in the list I sent to you...I was sent by [name of producer]...I was picked up and taken to White City and [name of interviewer] interviewed myself and a Polish hero for a want of a better word, and the thing was never broadcast because the next day was the general election...so everything took over the gen election so it was never broadcast...

HB: Did you join any veterans associations?

RG: I never joined the British legion for whatever reason...I joined AJEX...and I still am a member...I pay a fee every year to stay a member...and once a year the week after the main British legion march in Whitehall, where the Queen attends, a week later we always have our own parade...one reason why we've kept the parade and kept it separately, is at the parade we say a Kaddish, which is a Jewish

prayer for the fallen – we are not able to say that one the one that meets at the Cenotaph.

...So I keep that up...as you know I lost a brother [pause]...

HB: Were you ever tempted to join the British Legion?

RG: No really, I got married soon after the war as you know...I got married in July of 1947, and it would never occur to me to spend an evening away from my wife, if you like, as strange as it may seem. Also, I was always working in factories, starting early finishing late, and I was too tired to go out in the evening [so I never bothered]...even with the AJEX to which I belong, I have never been to the local branch. What I do is, I pay my dues by going along and marching with them...on the march to the cenotaph once a year...that is always one week after the main service.

HB: A lot of scholars have said that your generation are not as keen to get involved in the commemorative traditions...[many joined the British Legion perhaps for the social aspects]...

RG: It depended on what you want...people by and large are selfish, people do things for their won betterment, so it didn't suit me, it didn't suit me and my way of life...and certainly I would never dream of taking my wife out with me...it's only now, recently that I lost my wife this year, in March this year, I've started going in for things that take me away from the home... for instance I have joined the local bowling club...but I would never have dreamed of doing that sort of thing when my wife was still alive.

[Discussion about other veterans enjoying the drinking culture]

...It's a question of individuality...I wouldn't like you to think...I have to remind you, all you're doing is interviewing me for my personal thoughts...I cannot speak for others

It never occurred...I never wanted to...

I've made up for it I think slightly by the fact that I write a lot...I write an obscene amount...On the WW2Talk sites I have got 8000 postings which is an obscene amount...

Only because I have kept up computing, computing was something I could do, separately from my wife without leaving the home...

HB: I totally agree, every person is completely different of course...

RG: So I can't be a...If you are hoping I would be a representative of the forces that is not so...you are speaking to one particular individual and my writing has been largely influenced by my own requirements [if you like]...

Also, I have to mention...I want this to go on record if you like...I finished up most of my life in the clothing trade and I was soon in management...I was a young manager and I started working for larger companies as a manager, it used to be soul destroying in terms of time...I'd start early in the mornings...and I'd be working until six, seven in the evening and invariably have a long drive

home...Saturdays as well. I had little or no time for AJEX activities, I was glad to get home and put my feet up.

HB: ...Have you ever participated in the Sunday Cenotaph Service?

RG: Yes I have on three occasions...I think twice I walked...cos AJEX themselves had their own particular unit within the celebrations at the cenotaph where the Queen was...

...I found it particularly in later years very demanding...Horse Guards is near Whitehall near where the actual march takes place. All these types of ceremonies you are assembled on Horse Guards and there is a large amount of waiting around...

With the AJEX one...because of the constraints of time...sometimes you can stand around literally for half an hour, to three quarters of an hour...before the ceremony starts...then you have the long walk...

...it's extra tiring...as one gets older, the demands are too much. I have various videos and photos of me walking along Horse Guards... I find I can't stand [over] much now... It is enough for me to do the AJEX parade...so that's the reason and it's purely a physical thing...

...I also have to tell you, because of the large amount of troops that assemble before, the march past, all that you are watching...they put some screens up there, you can see the screens, so you don't see the Queen at all, but see her on TV so you might as well be at home...literally.

HB: When was the first time you participated?

RG: I think about 2013, so about three years...It must have been...twice I did the march at the cenotaph, now for the last two years at least I haven't done, I find it as much I can do is the march with AJEX which is a less tiring march.

HB: Do you feel like Remembrance Day...do you feel it has changed over time?

RG: No, in fact part of its appeal is... I think the public have been more drawn into it now, particularly the charitable side. And also particularly since the Second World War...there have been all these other wars in Iran and Iraq and places like that...and so the public have become more conscious of what the British Legion do, the charitable side and they are more drawn into it.

... I find this now there is more of an interest in veterans as such... I always wear my veteran badge... so that... I consider that I look fairly youthful, people are quite surprised to find that I am 93, I sometimes get surprised myself...

HB: Do you ever get a response from wearing it?

RG: Yes...sometimes...you can go years without people doing it and this year more people seemed to have noticed...the other day...I was shopping in my local Sainsbury...and a shopper asked "is that a veterans badge"...I always keep a small little folder with photographs of myself from my Army days, I find it simpler...rather than listen to my war stories... I keep a little folder with

pictures...And he was calling over the staff "hey come and have a look at this"...it was genuinely funny, it was quite amusing

Yes, I think people do but for years people never recognised the veterans badge...have you seen one before? [HB: No...]

I was forever losing my veterans badge and I went online and found the exact same badge for sale so I can wear them on different coats...
...so we go through spasms where is not recognised and there will be an anniversary...or something of that nature...or they've seen or read an article on TV...

HB: I have been reading a lot about the First World War generation...do you feel...that generation influenced the ways in which...

RG: No. That was a quick answer. I pay homage to the FWW in as much as my late father in law who I never met, who died before I was married...[made a memorial photo display with medals]...I abhor the huge loss of life...but it has never influenced me...but I never consider it in the same breath as my thoughts on the Second World War...I was born in 1923 and the war finished in 1918...I can remember as a young boy [phone call interruption]...I remember beggars on the streets of London...limbless beggars...I can still remember those...and also I was amused that my wife had various relations who were born and were young enough to be involved in the war and whenever they used to meet they used to talk about the war and I used to think what are these old fogies talking about the war...but funnily enough...when I met my wife it was 1949, how many years was that after the first World War...here am I doing exactly the same...the people who took part in the First World War must have had exactly similar feeling to myself...

But because of the internet...the veterans of the Second World War are in the best position to share their memories...

HB: [Discussion of the last FWW veterans] Do you remember seeing that at all [the coverage of the last First World War veterans]?

RG: Yes, yes of course but...I've Never felt any connection' other than I made that frame, but that was for my wife...

HB: Have you taken part in many anniversary events?

RG: I have been asked to speak to a Jewish primary school, to speak to children only between five and ten I think, about my experiences...but I found that of interest...

HB: That is lovely. I think I saw a photograph, did you attend the VE-Day 1995...

RG: I did. Yes, that is an interesting...did you ever see that on the BBC? They took me to a local park, and interviewed me. But again, its so frustrating, because...not unlike this interview if you like...and I have so much to say, and

then they cut it down, to two minutes, three minutes, I find it frustrating. And sometimes because of the cutting...for instance if you saw the BBC one...I mentioned that I learned to be a tank [driver]...I mentioned that at the time I was trained on Sherman Tanks, so the footage shows Sherman tanks going along...but I was never on the Sherman Tank in action...but my tank was a... turretless tank [completely different] but it would give the person listening to it the thought that I did my fighting on a Sherman Tank, this wasn't the case.
...When I see it I realise...I understand their problem...I realise why they have to cut...it makes one feel that one had a little chance to have some say in the editing that now that doesn't make sense...

HB: So you've done a few interviews...[RG: I've done a lot of interviews]...do you feel you have less freedom?

RG: You have no freedom. You have no freedom whatsoever...in as much as I have to say for the purpose of the interview, the same applies to anything that you will write. You will be constricted, you might have to increase your coverage...to fill your PhD...but...you have to in effect cut. So therefore, I might be similarly disappointed...I am not saying I will be. I might feel you have picked up a wrong [bode?].I trust you implicitly...

To go back to the original question, one usually feels, after one has spent anything from an hour to two hours...that you get a fair crack at the whip, and it hasn't always been the case. In fact its usually not the case, usually the best parts [find themselves] on the cutting room floor.

HB So back to the anniversary events...

RG: I've been interviewed by Italian TV as well...
[General discussion about interviews]

...they will manipulate the information that you give them...to fit into those purposes.

I am at the mercy of the people portraying the programme...once you agree to take part...you have to inevitably leave it to them...it is the luck of the draw how much of the interview you agree with...

HB: Do you feel that veterans are correctly portrayed in these situations?

RG: Yes...it depends what the programme is... for instance if the programme is called "One of the Heroes of Monte Casino" for arguments sake. So, I was at Monte Cassino...for a month, it was one of the most terrible parts of my army career...I hated every minute of it.

But if they want to...if they are looking to portray all the people who was at Monte Cassino as being heroes, [that is basically nonsensical] they look to find an aspect of something I said or something that is portrayed to make their points...at the end of the day

The requirements of the people making the programme take first place...every time so they will decide it's probably not even the person who takes it... its probably his boss.

Once I've agreed to be interviewed, then I understand their requirements...I can just hope I get a fair crack at the whip.

HB: Do you feel veterans [of campaigns you lived through specifically Monte Cassino] have been represented and commemorated in the right way?

RG:...I buy an awful lot of war books...I've got some of the best writers...yes...if they've stood the test of time...I read the stuff that appeals to me...some is more accurate, some is as dry as dust...

HB: Do you think of yourself as a veteran?

By now I have, because I feel...by the virtue of my past...I have experienced things that other people haven't experienced...I don't know how many millions of others did exactly the same, I...by virtue of what I did when I was young, I feel I am different. Therefore If that constitutes what it means to be a veteran then I do think of myself as a veteran...

HB: What do you feel the role of a veteran should be?

RG: I have never stopped to consider what the role of the veteran should be...Do you know...I have written on WW2Talk about a poet who wrote in the twelfth century...

He is known as Master Wace and he wrote a poem 'on the chart of Harold F. Umstott'

What he is saying is...the fact that this poem has remained and survived since those days prove his point...nothing is remembered unless someone writes it down.

I believe a person doesn't truly die until his name is not mentioned again. Something has to be written down...and he proved his point.

This is why, I am being completely selfish when I write such an awful lot...by doing so I buy myself a few more years even though I am no longer around...

And you in turn...When you finish your thesis...it will buy you [slash] me, extra time as well because somebody will read it...

Another poem I like is called Vigil by Jeremy F. Robson...it was written by a Jewish person at a German railway station...

I sincerely believe that a person buys time for themselves...you can pass away...but as long as your name is mentioned you buy yourself extra time.

HB: Do you remember when you first heard the term veteran?

RG: Veteran is a new term to me, we were always known as ex-servicemen...I think veteran is an American term...we used to be known as ex-serviceman... but veterans...I've seen them using it on American [web]sites...I think it's an Americanism...

HB: At what point did you begin to share your memories?

RG: 2004. It started with the BBC...but having said that, I had already made plans and I had already put onto the...I had already started blogs...I will have to find out which came first...I have always been a belt and braces man...I don't trust one thing on its own, I always need to have something to back it up. Particularly when the BBC... betrayed us by packing up the site and didn't keep it up in the way that it should have been kept up, I decided to back it up myself and I started creating blogs to hold that material. So...one of the blogs I've got, I've got two blogs, one's called 'Ron Goldstein's Album' and another one called 'Ron Goldstein Actual Album'. The actual album is a physical copy of every page of my album.

HB: So when did you make your album?

RG: ...The album itself was in 1946. What happened, this is the situation...I'm at Trieste, the war finished for me soon after we moved into Trieste and we were keeping the peace between the Yugoslavs and the Italians who were both trying to occupy the same area, and I realised I was going to be stuck because of my age group...my age group was 48, that was the number that the army allocated us, 48 was the number allocated to me which was formed by a conjunction of my age, how many years I'd been abroad, how long I'd been in the army...they said after group 47 had been released then we'll come to your group which is 48. So I knew I had a long way to go...I reckoned I'd be at least a year or so, in Trieste. And I decided, it's a good idea, to gather all the bits of ephemera that I'd accumulated, including pieces of my diary, and put it all in one place. So I bought this album, on my first leave back in England, I bought this large album, and I started sticking things in it. I did some stupid mistakes, I stuck entries from my diary and literally stuck them into the album so you couldn't read the second side. I did silly things like that but I wasn't to know, but I gathered together...what I did do correctly, on my leave in London, I gathered together all the photographs I'd sent from Italy, home, and saved them and stuck them all in the album and so I was able to preserve those. So that's when I created the album...in the year I was in Trieste. And subsequently I gave it to the Imperial War Museum.

HB: So it does sound as if you've always been the type of person...to record your experiences...

RG: Yes, that's right. I suppose so...but it wasn't an original idea. What started it, was going home on leave for the first time, one of the chaps in my railway carriage had worked for one of the army newspapers, and he'd had an album given to him, that was given to him as a present from the people who he was leaving...and it consisted of page after page, each page was a different member of the team...with their photograph and "best wishes" and all the rest of it, and the next page...and at the end there was a photograph of them all standing at the office door all waving goodbye...very nicely done. I thought "that's a good idea" and so this is what started me off...but what I did, before I handed it to the IWM...see this is my problem, I've got five grandchildren, two daughters and five grandchildren, who do you give the album to? You can't do it, you can't split it. So I decided the fairest thing to do is to give it to the IWM If they considered it important enough to accept...but before I did it, I made a copy. So I made a duplicate copy, a physical duplicate, literally copied every page of the

album...and built another separate album which I still have, ok. And I did something further because it was 'belt and braces', I created a blog. And the blog has got every page. So I knew what I was doing and I accept that not everybody did, because if not the IWM would have said to me "thanks all the same but we've got so many of them...".

HB: I mean obviously it is your nature to record...I mean having kept a diary in itself...not everybody had a diary...

RG: You weren't allowed, you realise that? It was forbidden, you could get shot for that keeping a diary because it was...suppose you were captured...but what I did, I used to have wishful thinking I suppose, I thought to myself "If I ever get captured, I'll throw away my diaries" and I also had, round my neck was my identity disk, and it had Jew on it. Right, and that was open sesame to my captors, to do away with me as a Jew. And you must have read the story, cos I wrote it on World War Two Talk, about my discussion with somebody in the SS, about what would have happened to me if he had taken me prisoner the week before...no? It's on WW2Talk...

HB: So were you aware that other people had diaries?

RG: I never stopped, I was selfish probably, never stopped to think about it. Too much was happening to me, I felt I had to write it down. And in my album I have actual pages of my diary...I wasn't alone, other people did that as well. Looking back it was foolhardy and dangerous.

HB: Yes, but it is a good job you did. Just to make the army album as early as you did, is so interesting, it suggests that you have always been aware...

RG: I must have felt it would be of value to future gen[erations]...I must have had foresight, I must have had some sort of idea that, but, I think it's part of my...without even thinking about it, I've adopted over the years and I certainly feel it now, I feel it to be 100% true, that a person is not, dead, until his name is never mentioned again.

HB: Yeah, and I think obviously you were saying about the rest of your family...they have also written their...their memories.

RG: Yes, yes, the family book.

HB: Is that like a family tradition then?

RG: Well my eldest sister, who is no longer with us, she was the historian...the historian of the family. She encouraged us to do this and at the time seven or eight of us contributed and wrote 13,000 words something like that. But you are talking mostly about my army days... Subsequently, the grandchildren wanted a similar book, so there is a second book written, and by that time I was computerate, and I put the disk together so we had a second family book of the younger generation.

HB: So, going onto the internet then. So, you say 2004 and when you retired, you did a computer course...

RG: That's right, I did, all these things happened together. I retired. I was 63. I'm 93, so that's thirty years ago. I had to decide, it was a conscious decision whether or not to retire completely or do something else, cos for the past twelve years I had my own company. And for twelve years it had been profitable, it was a good company, I was proud of it and then circumstances were such that the company no longer, there was no longer need for the company...it was being flooded with garments being made in Europe and the countries were looking to get dollars...they were operating at losses but it didn't matter, they sold the stuff and dollars came flooding back into places like Poland, like Yugoslavia...so the company was no longer viable. And I was no longer enjoying it and I was no longer making money, two very good reasons to pack a company up. So I packed it up and I then had to decide do I want to carry on, what do I want to do with the rest of my life if you like. So I started off doing consultancy, to some extent for people who'd used my services before. Then I decided I'd take retirement. I'd built up a pension fund. It was that pension fund that provided my pension so I was able to carry on living. So I didn't physically need to work. So that is why I retired at 63, which is considered young today.

That happened at the same time as computing came about. I got interested. My accountant sent me a computer and said "Ron, I am no good at manuals...they'd brought out a cheap computer, I think it was around £30, £60...it's cheaper than a typewriter, if you could, I know your interested in these things, work out how to use the computer and then come and teach me". So he had the computer sent here...and I was fascinated by it. So I phoned him up and said "you'll have to buy another one, sorry you're not getting this one back". I sent him a cheque for it and I got sold on computing. So I joined evening classes...miles away from where I was living. Subsequently, I became the secretary of the group...

[Discussion about early computer programmes]

...my pity is that computing came out too late to use it in my business...

HB: Do you think It was an organic thing to start using a computer to write your memories?

RG: Yes, yes, I couldn't have done one without the other.

HB: Obviously before, you had written the album...had you written anything in between [1946 and learning to use a computer]?

RG: No. I wrote one piece of fiction [which is] on 'Lulu' about my life in the tanks...based...I will show you...

It was...terribly written but it's a novel based on a tank trapped...below enemy lines. Using all I knew based on my own life in tanks...It was hard work but I enjoyed doing it...

I sent a copy digitally to [an academic] and he wrote the review.

HB: Have you ever been approached by publishers?

RG: No, except at the drop of a hat... people of a certain type, at the drop of a hat, write to me and want to interview me. Purely for selfish reasons, I am not suggesting for a moment that your...I am glad we've had this opportunity. When I get emails, I put them into different folders, I have got one folder headed, 'Messers and Bluffers'...I have lost track of the number of times...from...the BBC or ITV... wanting to interview me...simply because of my age, nothing special and they can find me on google...

At the time when they are ready do the interview they have found someone who lives closer to them...sometimes I don't even give me the courtesy of...seriously...

HB: When did that sort of start then...

RG: Look, if you put Ron Goldstein WW2 into google...it picks up every article, every reference...and we are getting fewer...

HB: So have you had more requests has time has gone on...

RG: No, they seem to save themselves for days...like anniversaries.
...When I had my own company, I used to put an advert in the trade paper every week and put "messers and bluffers do not apply" because it used to be a waste of my time and effort, you know, people...I used to advertise my services, I was once known as a maker up to the clothing trade, people used to send me bulks of cloth and I would make them up into...I've done menswear, children's wear, womenswear...so I was very experienced at the time. I was pretty good as well at what I did. I used to plan stuff and never let people down with dates...
...what I've loved about it, one of my pet loves, is when I've written about people, officers I've served under and the relatives...

[story about officer who he didn't like who he wrote about]

...without giving a thought that he would see it in later years, or his relative would see it...one day I got a letter from "Hello, I'm Major [name]'s son"...so here I was being confronted by his son...so I said "look, the BBC site is still open to alteration, at that time, if there's anything that you want amended...I'm quite happy to...he says "no, far from it, you've got him off to a T, it's just how he was"!

HB: That is amazing. I've read the other one...where someone remembered you from when she was a child in Italy...I remember thinking "that was amazing"!

RG: Yes...what happened, I still do it occasionally, I put my name in, "Ron Goldstein WW2" [into google]...quite recently I was quite touched. I have only written one poem in my life, one about Adrano, that's a thing in itself.

...how did it come about? I just keyed in my name...and a letter came up in Italian, from someone who mentioned the name Goldstein, and said "I was a young girl..." something like that. "I went to see this opera, and there was a

fellow there by the name of Goldstein and I stood next to him..." and I thought "what the hell is this?"

So I wrote to the site...and said "I am the very soldier you have written about" and it turns out to be that this was a child, she was 11 or 12 at the time, and it was a production of Carmen in Trieste and her father, had suggested to her that she goes and stands for safety sake...next to a soldier...she must have asked my name at the time...All these years later... I was able to correspond...

One thing I'd like to tell you, I have written about this on WW2talk...I've only written one poem. About Adrano, in Sicily. I was so impressed...this is the first time I'd seen...in North Africa I hadn't seen any warfare. In Sicily we saw warfare for the first time, and we passed through this place called Adrano and it had been pulverised, there was very little left of it, and what fascinated me most of all was there was...almost every doorway there was a body, being left in the doorway. What it was, the infantry troops used to do house to house fighting, and when they found a body they'd take it outside, so that the grave people could seize the body, bury it and all the rest of it...and in the sun, the heat, the Italian sun, the bodies swelled up so they were like travesties of what people really looked like. And imagine this effect it had on a young person who had really seen nothing like it. And so...but I wrote this poem. Only poem I've ever written. Years later, only last couple of years, a photograph appeared on the IWM website, of Adrano as it was then and it's exactly as I remember it.

HB: Just to sort of clarify, did you upload your scrapbook before working with BBC on the People's War project?

RG: No, I...when the BBC announced they were going to pack up. It lasted about two years from 2004 to 2006. So then I created a blog so on the blog I duplicated the album...although my blogs are strictly insular, no one ever writes on them... Then I saw the value of it so I did other blogs, I did my coin blog, I collect ancient coins...I made five blogs all together.

HB: So how did you get involved in the People's War project?

RG: That's a very good question. Let me think of this...there must have been, there *was* an announcement on the internet, that the BBC were looking to collect war stories and I was probably one of the first people to reply. As I started writing more and more stories, they recognised, here is somebody they could use and they asked me to be...they were called in those days, a BBC Researcher. Strictly voluntarily. And I joined, and so did [another veteran who was active on WW2Talk until his death].

...and then when we heard that the BBC was going to pack up the site, Peter started his own site called World War Two...I couldn't keep up writing on [both WW2Talk and other site], so I concentrated on WW2Talk.

HB: So in a way, sharing your memories on other websites came about because...

RG: It started in a strict sequence. The BBC was the first one...When I realised the BBC was going to pack up, I then started my own blogs, and I started looking for an alternative place to write and that was WW2Talk.

HB: So do you feel the BBC, given the fact that they...

RG: Yes...the fact that they pulled out earlier than [possible?]. . .one of the things they failed to do as well, and I like to consider myself a bit of a historian, they never had a facility for people to contact people who'd written on the site. They might have been bound by privacy laws or something like that...but they could have done it, they could have made a contact without revealing who the person was and then leave it to the person to decide whether...so what would happen is you'd get two stories on the site, obviously both people in the same regiment, and they wouldn't even put the two of them together, I thought that was terrible. Whereas in WW2Talk, because of the facilities for private messaging and all the rest of it I am able to give someone like you my email address without it becoming public knowledge.

HB: And I suppose, World War Two Talk, it gives you more freedom doesn't it? Because you can write about whatever you like, you can answer people's questions, you can ask your own questions, you can start your own discussions...is that what attracts you to it?

RG: Yes, I suppose so. I've also got a certain amount of...I have, if I am not being immodest... or not being modest, I've also got a certain amount of cache being a veteran. There's so few of us around now, that I get brownie points purely because I'm still alive...right, quite apart from anything else, and so I get, I get people...kind enough to...I get lots of, so and so likes this article... All I...have... to [do is] write anything, with no value in it at all as far as I am concerned, and somebody...[it will come up with] so and so likes this, they press a button that says that they like it and I am also in well with the...both bosses of both sites [names of site owners].

HB: I mean I think...without sounding...[RG: Ask away] Do you almost...are you flattered by the way people-

RG: I honestly don't like the fact that that people talk about heroes. We discussed this [I think] before...there's not many people who can earn that title. I just happened to be born at the right time. I had little or no option, I was called up, so I went into the forces willy nilly...but I've met heroes...

HB: ...I mean clearly sharing your memories has brought a lot with it...[meeting people, being asked questions, being responded to as a veteran etc]

RG: Of course, I've got an awful lot out of it, I still get...your visit here...I am not seeking to flatter you but your visit here has brought a fresh part of the story.

HB: ...By using the internet in the way that you have, you've kind of brought attention...even without realising, you've brought attention to yourself as a veteran and I think those that don't use the internet or share their memories don't get these chances...

RG: of course, your right one hundred percent, apart from my war years, I've led, I think a fairly uninteresting life. Alright, I was successful in business...and I've got, that's another story for another day sort of thing, but certainly I've been put in contact even when I was in the fourth Hussars, so the officer in charge of my squadron, I wrote about him, and his family wrote to me – it was his birthday party and they wanted to say nice things about him...

HB: That is so lovely. I suppose it give you, it has opened doors hasn't it?

RG: Of course.

HB: You've met new people, you've been interviewed, you did a Remembrance Day interview...did that come about because of the blog?

RG: Um, no...I have lost track...[not sure]

...I've dredged my memory in order to think up fresh stuff to write about. I've used my diaries, and I also contribute a lot to 'On this day'...I write on that. All I have to do is go to my diaries and look at a certain day and if I think it's of interest, I publish it. Because I've written so many of these stories, it's rare that a person asks me a question on site that I haven't already written [a post] on, and I go back and use the search link, to go back to a previous article and I either give them the link or publish the article...what I am saying is I've dredged my memory, and I think I've recorded almost everything I did in the army, in these 8000 stories.

HB: I mean it's an amazing resource isn't it. I can tell that the reason why you've published stuff is because it's a legacy isn't it?

RG: Of course it is. *Exactly*. That's exactly, it is a legacy, it is a legacy. But it's coupled with my earlier thing when I went on a bit, that I think a person, my reward for that, is that I'm thinking and I'm hoping, that what I've written will be there and be read about in many years to come.

HB: I'm sure it will be...there are some veterans who share some quite radical views, maybe anti-war views, not necessarily radical but some anti-war, openly, I can think of others, [name of particular veteran who shares stories]but in relation to his goal as an activist. What do you think of these veterans who have other roles? Have you ever been tempted [to be politically active or become a veteran activist – to assume multiple roles]...

RG: No, I don't think I've ever, what I'll do sometimes...I might go as far to say "in my experience" or I make a statement and say "I as somebody who has served four or five years"...for instance when people...when it comes to looting...[story about looting in the army] there have been several threads on both the BBC and on the WW2Talk...where people have said looting is stealing and there is no excuse for it...but it was commonplace in the army and never considered... sinful... [story about looting].

In fact, it was humour that helped us survive, if not how would you live? As I said one of the nastiest sites I saw was Adrano. On another occasion, we were in Sicily

and we stayed for the night into a small village park...I'd been seeing bodies all day long and if I can be vulgar, bodies have a certain smell...I can remember the smell now. As I parked up, I went over a bump and I could smell this horrible smell...[was convinced he had driven over a body] but it was a pile of horse manure...my mind convinced me it was another body...

HB: Not everyone can talk about their memories. Do you think for some people it will be because of the trauma?

RG: People had far worse wars than me. I survived, I wasn't wounded at all. I lost a brother, true, but it was only one of five of us...
...I had what is known as a good war... I survived...I was lucky.

HB: That is the thing I suppose, as we said earlier, every person has a different experience... A lot of studies I have read have said... sharing memories was therapeutic...and they were encouraging it. Do you agree?

RG: Yes, but it's back down to the individual. You have no option but to lump me in with the other soldiers but you can't really, because I am an individual, I got the most out of my experiences...if you are stuck with a lemon, make lemonade. I believe you have to play the hand with which you are dealt...I dealt with the same situation, but there were some really nasty moments, really frightening moments...

Everybody...is an individual and individuals usually find a way to solve their own problems. I don't think I've buried anything. There were certain aspects of the war I hated. I'll tell you something about death, when you're fighting in a battlefield and you smell something nasty coming round the corner you don't know whether it's a man or a sheep, because in death they all smell the same in the baking heat of the sun. I don't want to shock you but bodies putrefy...you don't know what you're going to see, you're tensing yourself, you don't know what you're going to see

Appendix 2

Harold May

The interview took place on 13 March 2017 at the interviewees home.

Harold May was born in 1918. He began his armed service career in the Pay Corps before joining a Royal Artillery Field Regiment. May became one of a four man Observation Post party and served in North Africa and Italy. After the war, May worked for the Co-op. He began work in the accounts office and later became the Regional Manager of multiple stores across the North East of England. He is a dedicated member of the local Rotary Club and the Magic Circle.

HB: Do you think of yourself as a veteran?

HM: No, not really. Not really. I don't really think of it. Sometimes, I think "well I'm a veteran" ..."well you wear a veterans badge" and then you probably go to a wedding or a funeral somewhere, where the present military are there, you know with their friends...and you think "where did you get all the ribbons from?" They look like an American General, rows and rows of ribbons. See, I've got about five stars... I think they did a fortnight there, three weeks somewhere else...well that's fair enough, things change.

But, no, not really, I mean I was once asked if I'd like to join the Eighth Army Veterans, you know...and I said "no, I'm not". I was quite...I mean later on I was quite proud to have been in the Eighth Army...but in a veterans organisation you are waiting for the next one to die...whose going to pop off next, that's all it is, and when the last one goes you have to scramble it so why...what good does it do?

HB: Do you think of yourself as a hero?

HM: No, no...um...the funny thing about heroes...when you're in a war situation, there is only a few of you at the front line to keep you supported there...but if you are in a front line situation you don't think of heroes [or whatever]...you don't really think about it, you don't think a lot really. You go into action, some people will get killed, it could be you, and you feel well, if it's me, it's me...it's sort of power for the cause. If you're going to get killed, you're going to get killed, you signed up for this risk, you know it's there all the time...you do not want to be maimed...that was the big worry, it was then...not so bad now because you've got prosthetic limbs [and that sort of thing].

Normally you're not frightened, the noise in the battlefield can be horrendous...you hear guns...you don't know which direction they are going but you never worry about being killed you just do what you're trained to do [Memory of nearly being killed in Italy].

HB: If someone called you a hero, how would you react?

HM: No, no more than anybody else...you see some people would get honoured for their heroism, fine, but in a fight situation if you're a front line situation...don't

forget you're not fighting everyday, you know, there are long periods where nothing happens...

HB: I notice you had written in the Rotary Club Book "I wasn't a hero but I was surrounded by heroes..."

HM: That's right...you see...feats of heroism in action happen every day, everywhere...men just do things, they don't think they are going to be heroes...[say you want to go and help someone] it's done automatically... You don't think you're being a hero, but someone sees it and reports it, and it goes down the line somehow or another you become a hero. ...I am not decrying that in anyway, but there are thousands more, *thousands* more, who've done that *and more* who have not been recognised. People don't realise..."Oh he got the V.C. for this...a bloke a quarter of a mile away did the same thing, but nobody saw him"...

HB: Were you treated like heroes when you came home?

HM: No...you came home and you get your suit etc...and you hand in all your other stuff...

Everybody was pleased to see you [but]...[you settled into a civilian form of life] there was no sort of hooray hooray...

[Discusses buying a house, decorating and fixing the house]

HB: Obviously you were so busy with your life and your job and you were trying to deal with the house and...you probably didn't have time to think about the war?

HM: That's right, that's right you didn't, you were thinking about living, getting on with your life, because we weren't on high salaries...

HB: What did you do as a career [after the war]?

HM: My career was...where was I...we bought the house in Eaglescliffe...[Discussion about buying a bigger house in Middlesbrough for £2000]

Well you come back after the war, they give you your job back that you had before the war, I joined the army in 1939...I was twenty years of age...coming up twenty one and I'm 98 now, you know, you come back to the same job, well when I joined up I was in the accounts office, I was in the Co-op...checking invoices that sort of thing, when I came back same job. That was six...seven years ago...

[Discussion about pay, gaining qualifications to move up the career ladder]

...I was studying accountancy and secretarial practice... hours and hours I did, hours and hours [probably] because of my background of a lack of education starting at seven years of age...

[Applying for better jobs, not looking old enough and not being taken seriously despite having qualifications and ability...]

[Gained a job as the company secretary of the Co-op Middlesbrough] I advertised...I had all the qualifications, I had the experience, I knew the area and I knew everything...so I just walked into that job...I'd made it I had arrived.

HB: You were so busy studying and move up the career ladder...did you ever reflect on your experiences of the war?

HM: No. You're too busy living! Or trying to live...you know, everybody is more or less in the same state that you are..."I don't want to stay down there I've got to get up there [career ladder?] somehow"...[I knew] I got to get some qualifications so I thought *right* and that started it. So that started my studying, fortunately it all paid off...I was the secretary of Middlesbrough and then Middlesbrough amalgamated with all the others.

...I had two thousand employees in the end...never had any trouble with any of them but there are so many different trades you see [Farms, funeral parlours etc] and you need to be able to go in and talk to these people on their level...so learn not just the correct terms for things...

HB: Do you think the two generations of veterans [First World War and Second World War] were portrayed in similar ways?

HM: Yes, I do...see after the First World War they came back and they were forgotten about and see the Second World War they came back and were forgotten about...

HB: Obviously you've written in the Rotary Club book have you written anything...have you written your memoirs?

HM: No, no, no, no. I haven't got the time!

HB: So is that the only time you've ever written anything about the war?

HM: Yes, yes.

HB: Were you asked to do that?

HM: Yes, ask to do it...I tried to get out of it, [laughing] they twist your arm...

HB: So why did you not want to...

HM: Didn't want to be bothered!

HB: Did you ever join the British Legion?

HM: No, I didn't. I would have done and I would now. Where do you find the British Legion?

HB: Was there a club...a local club or...

HM: I think there is one down town somewhere like a pub or whatever it is...but as an organisation, brilliant! [It should have] more publicity...it's now fragmented...if you are doing anything in small bits, none of which has enough capital to do anything big...its like companies...

HM: Did you know anyone who joined?

HB: My late father-in-law was in the British Legion in Leicester, and when we came up here he joined the British Legion here.

HB: Were you not tempted to go with him?

HM: Not really...no, it was like a drinking club, and I'd never been a big drinker...I've only been drunk twice in my life and they were experiences.

HB: Did the drinking culture put you off?

HM: Probably, it probably did. I probably would have done...like working men's clubs and that sort of thing.

HB: Are you a member of any Veterans Associations?

HM: No.

HB: Were you not tempted to join...

HM: No. They wanted me to join the Eighth Army...

HB: What put you off then?

HM: It's a dying organisation, the British Legion isn't, Help for Heroes isn't, if it's an association, all these associations die off as the members get older and older and older...

HB: So what do you see as the purpose...

HM: I don't know what they do... if it's friendship well that's fair enough...if people are feeling lonely and lost and want to talk about it a lot...some are probably more involved with their regiments more than others, so a lot depends on the individual...it gets you out and about and gets you mixing with other people.

HB: Do you march each year in the parade?

HM: This year I didn't, I have been previously...

HB: When was the first time?

HM: 197...something.

HB: What made you decide to participate?

HM: Two years ago last time I went. I don't what it was this time, I just didn't go. I probably had to get up too early in the morning [laughing].

HB: You mention that you started marching in the 70's, what made you decide to start participating?

HM: Well, it's the Rotary...the Rotary started it really, they had a wreath...and somebody had to go with the wreath so two or three of us went with the wreath.

HB: With the Rotary then, do you feel like that...do you think if you hadn't been in the Rotary, you would have wanted to be in the British Legion?

HM: Probably not. I probably wouldn't have thought about it...I don't think I would no. Because of this sort of...I didn't want to go down to the town into a sort of a pub and drink beer so I never bothered.

HB: Are you not tempted to get involved in the media...have you been approached by any TV companies or anything like that to do interviews...would you do them if you were?

HM: No, no. I don't know about that.

HB: Some veterans are very keen to engage with the media and tell their stories in a very public way...

HM: It wouldn't bother me...I just can't be bothered...I've been on the media...'This is your life' with Paul Daniels, because Paul was a friend of mine...

HB: So is it that you just don't feel...would you not want to talk about the war in that sense...

HM: Oh I'll talk about the war, that doesn't bother me in the least...it doesn't upset me or whatever...I just don't talk about the bad bits.

HB: No, so you just don't feel you would want to engage with the media or...write your memoirs?

HM: I can't see what good it would do...what good would it do?

HB: I know some veterans feel that it is part of their role almost, to do that...and obviously every person is totally different. I am just curious to kind of know...

HM: Well there are so many thousands of people involved with it, if they all had to do that what a mess it would be...we'd be running out of paper. Some people like to talk about it more than others, Some people live in their wartime...or their regiment during the war...they still quarrel on about that...which is fine, if they are happy doing that...

HB: There are a couple of veterans who are quite prominent in the media who share very anti-war views and they have fashioned themselves a role in the media as anti-war activists...do you think that is a good thing?

HM: It won't do any harm, it will make more awareness of how bad war is [when you go through a war] you see an awful lot that you don't want to remember...but you know that is going to be repeated in war anywhere, and its *nasty* and a lot of good innocent people lose their lives for no reason...generally political. They don't want to be there, most of them...I mean you get the fanatics of course [but] that's not like war, as such, but other than that, there's no point having a war...

HB: Have you participated in quite a few other Remembrance events...apart from the ones in Middlesbrough?

HM: No, if I am around. I have been down to London of course...

HB: Oh right! So how many times have you been to Remembrance Day in London?

HM: Yes, Remembrance I've marched in that one. ...I think I did that twice...

HB: What made you decide to do that?

HM: That's a good question...I don't really know...[was invited], a friend of mine organised it, and it was a few days in London it included the Remembrance Celebration and included Lord Mayors show. They are both the same day, so we could do them both together and we had a really nice time.

HB: How long ago did you march in London?

HM: I think the last time would be...mid 90s I think.

HB: Would you go again do you think?

HM: No, no I don't think so. I don't do London as such. I think you're best kept out of London.

HB: But you still march in Middlesbrough when you can?

HM: Yes, of course...it can be a long walk, that's the only trouble.

HB: What makes you decide to march? [pause] Do you march to honour your dead comrades?

HM: Just as a commemorative event that's all...just to participate with other people who feel the same way. Nothing specific.
It's a celebration of sorts...

HB: The idea of a veteran seems to have expanded to include women and civilians do you think that is right?

HM: Yes, I think women are excluded from far too many things even now...they are taking over more and more senior posts. ... when I was working...
[discussion about female embalming teacher] ...

HB: Do your family members ever ask [you] about the war?

HM: I haven't got any family.

HB: What about neighbours? Close friends?

HB: Yes, just chatting like I am to you now, they will sit and listen and ask me questions...

HB: Did your wife ask ever about the war?

HM: No...[it never entered the situation?] the war is finished, now let's get on with our lives...

...You don't want to remember it. You remember the funny side, that's different...

HB: I know it wasn't allowed but did you keep a diary?

HM: No. I often wished I had, yeah. Cos [half the time?] I didn't know where the hell I was. You're just out in the country somewhere, you don't know where you are...

HB: You have so many amazing memories...

HM: It's picking them out, picking the amusing ones out...that...that takes the horror out of things.

HB: You were in both the North African campaign and in the Italian Campaign, do you think they are given enough acknowledgement in the media?

HM: No not really, I don't. Mainly it's on the D-Day Landings and that lot. The others, no they are forgotten about...

HB: So why do you think that is?

HM: Don't know...it's down to the media. Purely.

...a lot of men got killed and it was a nasty one to fight...and you were up hill and down dale all the time...always having to take another mountain...or another river because there were rivers across the country as well.

HB: Do you feel that they should be given the sort of commemorative coverage comparable to D-Day?

HM: Oh yes, it should be comparable, it's only being fair really...they get Monte Cassino on occasionally and you'd think that was the Battle of Italy...

Appendix 3

George Meredith

The interview took place on August 7th 2017 in the presence of Elsie Johnson (Elsie) and Nick Beilby (NB) at the interviewees home.

George Meredith signed up for active service in London aged 17 and initially served in the Rifle Brigade. He later became a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps and landed in Normandy on June 7th 1944. When he was demobilised, Meredith worked at the LNER Depot at Stratford as a Fireman . He then moved to Norfolk where he became a lorry driver and continued in that role up to retirement. In later life, he lived in Lincoln and Scarborough. In retirement he was very active in the Pickering wagon group, restoring wagons on the North York Moors Railway. He passed away on September 3rd 2017, aged 92.

HB: Do you think of yourself as a veteran?

GM: No, not really, it just sort of comes and goes. The only time really I think I'm a veteran is when I'm dressed up. [Elsie: When you're in your medals...] Then I know I am!

HB: Do you remember when you first heard the term veteran?

GM: [Elsie: When you came out of the army?] No...it wasn't until I joined up at Lincoln...that was when, I lived at Lincoln at the time and that's when I joined the veterans. I had to give the chairman papers and everything to say that I was a veteran like, before they'd accept me.

NB: How long ago was that George? Twenty years or more?

HB: Was that the Lincoln NVA?

GM: Yes, that's when I joined, when I found out there was [an association]. I went to the British Legion and he said "no, you can join us as a British Legion he said, but you've got a...club of your own". So of course I then had to go and find a club of my own and the chairman made me tell everybody, I had to stand up and stand up in front of the meeting and tell everybody who I was. My name and number and then he signed me in. He made it so it was well run. That's the first time I ever went to the veteran [association] he said "have you got any medals" and I said "No, I haven't got any medals" ...He said "well you should have some"...I said "Well I ain't got none", so I had to write away to the [War Office] and ask them if I was entitled to any...and a week later I got a box with about five medals in it.

HB: Had you not wanted to send for them before that?

GM: I'd never thought about it. I mean I just came back into life and got a job and went off to work. It was only when somebody spoke to me about it that I got joined into it.

HB: When you came back from the war, did you feel like you'd been part of something extra-ordinary?

GM: Well no, I just come and got a job and went to work and that was it. It wasn't until they was talking about joining the British Legion and that...that's what I said, I'm going to join the British Legion but they put me onto the [NVA] so I never joined the British Legion. I finished up as a Normandy Veteran.

HB: Did you ever go to any British Legion clubs or anything like that?

GM: No, no...

HB: What made you want to join the British Legion [even though you didn't join in the end] in the first place?

GM: Well, someone I was talking to was going on about going overseas to see the war memorial and I said "well who does that?" and they told me it was the British Legion...

But yes, I never thought about it, not until then and I have been going overseas every year for twenty years.

HB: When you go to Normandy, how do you feel you are received?

GM: We get better received out there because the French still appreciate what we've done. Of course then, when we got the legion... d'honneur, oh even young ones, like this one that wanted a photo, and a bloke come up and shook my hand. He said "well you don't get legion d'honneur for nothing... you must have been somewhere to get one of them". I got one of them [laughs]. I've got two medals that I don't know [where they are]...I lost them somewhere when I was moving house, but I've got enough, I've got five...I've got another one when I worked for the ARP before the war...

HB: When you came back just after the war, do you remember how ex-servicemen were treated?

GM: We wasn't treated no...I never got treated [specially] we just come home and we had two weeks leave and then I found a job and went to work and that was it.

HB: So do you think it was later that veterans were treated differently?

GM: [Elsie: Definitely] [HB: With the media too?] We've been treated differently because nobody wanted to know, if you spoke to anybody just after the war, nobody wanted to know. It's now come out that what we done, they wouldn't have been here if we hadn't have done it. So now this is what they do...

HB: Did you talk about your wartime experiences when you had just come back or was it not until later...?

GM: No, oh it must have been ten or fifteen years later after we'd been home...[nobody asked]...It was only when somebody decided that it was good for the schools to know and one or two of them went to the schools and spoke to them in the schools.

HB: So was that the first time you spoke about your experiences?

GM: Yes, yes...

HB: Did you ever write anything down about your memories?

GM: No, no...

HB: Have you written anything since?

GM: No...

NB: It's been done for you hasn't it?

GM: Yes...

NB: It has been written down for you hasn't it?

GM: Yes.

HB: So when you joined the Normandy veterans Association, what made you join, was it because you wanted to go to the commemorations?

GM: I joined because I wanted to go back to Normandy...it was somebody I was talking to about it and they was going to Normandy and I said "well where do you get a ticket [or the ability to go] to go to Normandy", and he said "oh well you have to be in a club, that'd be the best thing" and so I went all around...and I write to get my medals and I wrote a letter to them [Ministry of Defence] about the medals and I had a letter back that said I had to wait for them and it will be so long...and I wrote back and I said I can't wait that long, [laughs] because I want to go to France. So I had a phone call and the young lady on the end she said "what's all this about" and "well I am going over to France and I'm told that I can't go unless I've got my medals" and it's next week. So she said "they'll be in the post on Monday..." so it was in the post and I got my medals...

HB: Do you feel a sense of pride wearing them?

GM: I do now. Yes, yes. I was not so sure about putting them on in them days...

NB: But you are now...

GM: Well I have to...there's always a little bit on the bottom there [in meeting and NVA information correspondence by Nick Beilby] that says "wear your medals" [laughs].

HB: Have you ever been to the Remembrance Day services in London?

GM: Yes, I went twice to the cenotaph. Marched passed through the cenotaph and...I had two years I went down there but they [unclear]...I thought it was better going abroad than it was going down there. There was a lot of them... I mean you see it on the telly, there are thousands of them...

[Elsie: You got more of a fuss made of you when you go over there, yes I know...and kisses]

NB: Yes we know that don't we!

HB: With the one in London I've heard there is a lot of standing around and they have very set procedures...

GM: Yes, it's a long wait and you have to be there to get anywhere near to the cenotaph and you have to que out then you march through the cenotaph...

HB: So when you go to Normandy, is there a similar sort of...is there a commemorative service?

GM: Oh aye, yes we always go to Bayeux and that's the main cemetery and we always go to Bayeux, then we go round, but we always have the day, a day at Bayeux.

[Discussion of photograph of veterans on the wall which shows veterans stood along a zebra crossing in France]

GM: The French...I mean...[Elsie: there was crowds of them] There was crowds of them [taking photos]...

Elsie: They get more of a fuss made when they go over there, than they do in York.

GM: They appreciate...the Dutch are the worst...they think you... [laughs]

Elsie: He used to ride a motorbike when he was in the army...what was it called?

GM: A D.R., a dispatch rider...

Elsie: You nearly got shot by one of the Germans...

NB: And bumped into a tank...

HB: So how many times have you been to the commemorations in Normandy?

GM: Oh my yes, fifteen or twenty.

HB: What does it mean to you to go back?

GM: Well it shows appreciation that we are still here and they give their lives for us. That's how I look at it.

NB: It means a lot to you to remember those who didn't come home doesn't it?

GM: Yes [visibly moved].

Elsie: Yes, it's sad...

HB: Do you feel that D-Day gets enough recognition in the media and in commemorative culture?

GM: Well it does now, but it didn't years ago. After the war, if you mentioned anything nobody wanted to know. It's only this last ten years, before that nobody wanted to know. Some of ours when I was at Lincoln, we used to go to the schools and sit and talk to them...I mean some of them...when we went we said if they don't want to come in and listen or hear, don't force them. They come in because they want to come in. They said "well send..." and I said "no, if they don't want to listen, then don't [make] them"...so that's what we done and they used to split the children up "Do you want to go or don't you?"...

HB: So what sort of questions did they ask you?

GM: [laughs] Oh all sorts..."what did you do"..."I rode a motorbike", "what sort of motorbike?"...all sorts, some to do with the war but [others], I mean it's a motorbike but to them, they wanted to know what make it was like you know...

NB: They always want to know what you're favourite food was and it's...

GM: Tins of baked beans. There was always baked beans in the packs. We used to cart in boxes, I am not sure if it was 12 or 14 but enough for 14 men. We used to take them with the lorries and dish them out. Of course there'd be cigarettes in there as well. Half of them wanted cigarettes and some didn't like...so we said well share them out. There was only bit that I found out that I wasn't very pleased with. It was morning and it was thick frost on the floor and we was camping out. He was a doctor, he'd come to have a look round. [wanted a drink] "Well there's a gallon of rum in the back there" so I had to go out...I ain't never seen it, but he said go and fetch it. I didn't realise I was carting over a gallon of rum around...

HB: Do you think all the events of the war are given equal coverage in commemorations?

GM: They are now. They are even doing the First World War now...

NB: Of course in two years time, they will have a monument for you in Normandy. Won't they that they are going to build...a very special one soon. 2019. So put it in your diary, you need to be there, 75 years.

GM: A special coach...

Elsie: It will be nice that...

HB: I have seen that you have been interviewed about your experiences...have you done many interviews...or been in documentaries?

GM: Yes, five or six interviews and they come and ask funny questions [laughs]...

HB: So do you enjoy all that?

GM: Well yeah, I mean I don't mind it, it's...it helps you and other people find out what we really did do. I mean some things we do tell you and some we don't...

HB: Do you think veterans are valued in society?

Elsie: Yes

HB: Do you think you are shown enough respect and acknowledgement?

GM: Well I mean, if no one knows who you are, I mean you're just a common bloke, a common old man...well if people don't know, I'm just an old man.

Elsie: They still come up and shake your hand when you've got your uniform on...

GM: Oh aye, yes, but even kids out here, chase me up the road.

Elsie: When he's got his blazer on...They come up asking him questions [living history?]...even young ones.

GM: Yeah they do. There was two or three of them there, oh a few months ago wasn't it, we was coming [Elsie: crowding around you] we'd been out, out somewhere and we got the bus home, and we were walking back from the bus and [laughing] the kids come up and chased [us] down the bloody road...shouting and telling somebody else and of course they were running down the road wanting to talk to us and so I had to stop [Elsie: Impersonating children "he has got all his medals on"], and spoke to them like...[Elsie: They were asking what you got your medals for...]

HB: It's so interesting. A lot of my research looks at how the figure of the veteran has become so iconic and kind of recognisable. People, even the kids, instantly recognise the medals don't they and that is the thing that draws them.

Elsie: Draws them yes it does. I notice when he's got his on and we go out. One young [man] came up and shook hands with you didn't he? I was really surprised you know...

GM: Have you got a veteran's badge as well because I know some veterans were sent these little veteran badges as well...

Elsie: Yes, you've got them on your blazer haven't you?

GM: Yeah, well it's only a little thing... [discussion with Elsie about jackets] I've got one that's pinned on and I have got two jackets, one I've got my legion d'honneur and on the other one I haven't. I never took that one off, it was pinned on by the Brigadier, can't remember his name...he pinned it on and that's how it's been [since then]...

HB: What did it mean to you to get that medal?

GM: Well we'd been waiting a long time for it, the French waited for the seventy years before they'd give it to us. I thought it would be earlier but there you go...they gave us a medal every four or five years but, all different badges...

HB: So I've heard about this play that you're all involved in, "Bomb Happy", how did you get involved with the play?

GM: I don't know, they wanted to make a play of it so...[discussion about how NVA paid the writer some money to help make the play]...

HB: What do you think of the play?

GM: Well I haven't seen it yet.

NB: You heard the reading of it though...

HB: So is someone playing you?

GM: Yes, yes a young lad he is. I don't know if he's old enough to be in the army but he's a nice bloke because I spoke to him. I said "would you be doing that if you was old enough" and he said "I don't know" [laughs].

HB: Do you think it's a good idea the play?

GM: Well Yeah, if somebody wants to make it like that. I mean it will be a good thing because it will show what we used to do. That's what it's supposed to be and it's showing what we used to do... [we used to nick a tin of beans out of the back?] [laughs]

HB: I have interviewed quite a few different veterans and I have heard some who are very political and some who are very anti-war...what you do feel about this, do you feel you are anti-war?

GM: Well I don't really approve of it. Not any war, but we thought it was... well we weren't very old... I think I had turned 16. [Elsie: Joined young didn't they?] There was three of us, all mates... the eldest one was 18 so he was ready to go in the army and we went with him and we was all the same size so they signed us all on [laughs]. He didn't ask how old we was or nothing our Sgt Major the regimental Sgt Major, "you are 18 aren't you"... "yes we are 18"... "sign here" and we just signed on. We went... I always remember we went to Westcliff High School for girls but there weren't no girls there... they'd shut the school up. [All laugh] That's where I started my army [career] and we come back up to London and we went to Winchester then and I had nearly 12 months at Winchester in training... but I was a good boy, if you was best dressed when you were on parade you got stick man, if you got the stick you didn't do guard and made sure everyone else done it. So I had a friend who was a tailor so my jacket was well done all the creases... he sewed the creases in so you couldn't lose the crease when you was wearing it like. So I got stick man twice...

I mean these talk about going abroad... I don't want to go abroad and I said I don't want to go abroad, last time I went it took them five years to fetch me home. Because they always reckoned that I had a week at home, they fetched me home... I can't remember ever coming home, so as far as I know, I was out there for five years. I thought, when it takes that long I'll stop in England [All laugh], until they started this French [thing]. I had to go over then, the bus took us, we always had our own bus.

HB: It must be nice when you all go back together... when you're all on the same bus...

GM: Yes, well that's what we did, we always had, we hired our own bus because if you've got more than twenty people you can call it your bus... of course we had 34 people. So we used to go where we wanted to, where *we wanted to*. We had a Historian who used to come with us [HB: Is that Paul Reed?] Yes, yes. [Elsie: Yes, well he comes every time and meets you]. So we had the Historian and them other buses didn't get nobody. [All Laughs]

Appendix 4

Ken Cooke

The interview took place on August 7th 2017 in the presence of Nick Beilby (NB) at the interviewees home.

Ken Cooke was born in 1925. He served as an Infantryman in the Green Howards (Yorkshire Regiment). He landed on Gold Beach on June 6th 1944. After the war, Ken returned to York and worked for Rowntree's for nearly fifty years.

HB: So first I'd like to ask, do you think of yourself as a veteran?

KC: Now then, yes, yes. I am a veteran. But where the word came from I do not know.

NB: How long have you felt or thought you were a veteran?

KC: This last 10 years, been in the Normandy Vets for about 18 years now...so I'd say 18 years.

HB: Do you remember when you first heard the term...[had you heard it before joining NVA]?

KC: No, not really. I think it [NVA] was one of the first to call themselves veterans. You had the British Legion which covered all the veterans sort of thing...army, navy, airforce...I think we are the only ones that call ourselves veterans, Normandy veterans.

HB: So as you were being demobilised, did you have the sense that you were part of something extra-ordinary?

KC: Not really, because it was all...I won't say, new to me...but there were things that happened I'd never experienced before. So it was all new, including getting demobbed all that was new to me you know, you just more or less, a chap said "do this, do that...go"...so and so, and so we did, we more or less obeyed instructions. We saw these things, say, never been on a ship before. It's a natural thing for kiddies to go on a boat or an airplane, but this to me, was like a big adventure...first time I'd been on a ship. I told some kiddies once, when we were children, there was no such thing as Benidorm, Disney World or anything like that, we had to make our own entertainment when we were kiddies. There was nothing like there is today...

HB: When you were coming home, how were ex-servicemen treated?

KC: Well we just went back into normal life, I mean I came home I had two weeks leave and I went back to my job at Rowntrees, you know natural sort of thing.

HB: At that point, were you treated like heroes?

KC: No, I don't think so...no...

HB: Did you talk to people about your experiences when you came home?

KC: No, not for a while but as I say, what fifteen, ten years ago, these stories started to come out from veterans. They had been keeping it to themselves all this time. You've probably read it in the papers or on the telly, "oh I didn't know my Dad was so-and-so, I didn't know my Uncle...was in such-and-such regiment, or my Dad was in Burma" or "He never told me anything about that". You've got all those sorts of stories, they are all coming out now...there is one I think it's in today's paper, a chap in Burma he's just died 97...he was on the Burma railway and he said he'd never told anybody. Well you can understand Burma lads...

HB: Do you remember when you first started talking about your experiences?

KC: Now then, oh there was an article in the local press, [looking for] anybody with any experiences of D-Day...now unbeknown to me my wife she rang the press up, next thing I know there is a reporter on the door step with a photographer. It was in the following nights press, a photograph of me.

Phone rang, My son rang 'what's this about me Dad in the army?' It just happened like that.

HB: Did this prompt you to tell your family?

KC: Yes, you know, gradually stories now and again...I was maybe reading a book or paper, or watching the telly and something would come on...and I'd say to my wife, "I remember that"...

Sometimes when I am sat by myself, something will click that will take me back to those days...

HB: Do you member the ways in which veterans were portrayed just after the war?

KC: Not really...[discussion of war films]

HB: Did you join the British Legion?

KC: I did for a while and I found out there was a fiddly diddly going on so I packed in.

HB: Really?

KC: Yes, I went to one meeting, Treasurers Report, "one of our members has passed away he was in the RAF, he was an officer, and his widow has donated £50,000 to the Fulford Branch of the British Legion". They had been on about getting a new lamp outside the church at Fulford...so they decided to try and get a big lamp...the British Legion Headquarters: "you are not allowed to touch that

money”. So we had an argument about it in the meeting and a couple of weeks after there was a letter in the paper...the Doncaster Branch had been left £5000 and they got the same treatment from the British Legion, they weren't allowed touch it. It had been donated to the branch.

So I said, “that's me finished, [with the] British Legion”

HB: So when did you originally join the British Legion?

KC: Oh I can't remember now...about 25 years ago...

HB: Was there a particular reason why you joined originally?

KC: Well it was just to get to know different people you know. See you knew that they would be veterans as well. Have a chat and a pint of beer something like that, we went down to Fulford Barracks. That's where they held all their meetings.

HB: I can understand why you were shocked by that [the donation to the branch being taken away]...

KC: [That's what happened] and I've told Nick, about the British Legion, over the years, they collect every year, start in October, they go out with their poppies, right? Now every year they say “Can we beat last year's record?” so they try and beat last years record. Now when it first started, it was good thing for the First World War forces, now there's none of them left now and there is hardly any of the Second World War left. So, what are they doing with all that money? They don't need as much to look after the Afghanistan people or the Iraq war who got wounded or whatever there's all that, yet they still carry on with all that “can we beat last year's record”...and they're worth millions the British Legion. I mean they are doing a what do you call it now on television, this Poppy Bingo...same as normal bingo...they are trying to get money on that lark now...

HB: There is clearly a disconnect between... what the branches want to do and what the Head Quarters thinks they should do and that is something I want to explore in my thesis...

KC: This last what say five or six years they've been advertising in the local press “the British Legion meeting will take place...” before that they didn't have to do that...

HB: Was the social aspect ok?

KC: Yes, used to enjoy going. Having a chat, having a drink, meeting different people, telling your stories, telling their stories, [we] used to have a really good laugh about it. “Where was yours...so and so...oh what did you get up to...” all different stories.

HB: So when did you join the NVA?

KC: Now then, maybe 18 years ago now. There was a barbeque at the barracks and my wife and I went and we met up with some Normandy vets and one of them said “why don’t you come and join us” so I did. That’s where it all started... We’ve had some good dos’ haven’t we?

HB: Do you feel you get the social aspect with that group as well?

KC: Yes, oh yes, we’ve had some fun [laughs].

HB: You have been back to Normandy haven’t you?

KC: Yes, quite a few times.

HB: What does it mean to you to be able to go back?

KC: Well we go back to remember the chaps who didn’t get to come back. I mean we go over there to pay our respects sort of thing and also we get contact with other people that [are] there...and there is millions [that] go, we’ve been speaking to Americans, Chinese, Japanese, Russians, any people you could mention, we have met them all...

HB: How many times have you been back?

KC: I can’t remember [HB: Quite a few then] yes quite a few times yes...we have been to all the main [anniversary] things, fortieth, fiftieth, sixtieth, seventieth, and in between we’ve gone you know...

[conversation about the death of another veteran between Nick and Ken]

HB: Have you ever participated in the cenotaph commemoration in London?

KC: No, no, we do all ours here at York at the memorial gardens we go every year in November... I missed last year because I had my appendix out.

HB: When you go to Normandy, how are you received by the French people?

KC: Very well. Especially earlier on, it’s gradually weaned off a little bit now, but the fiftieth I’ve never got over that. Every yard or two yards “would you like a drink, take a photograph” drove you crackers.

NB: [Laughs] You don’t like publicity do you?

[All laugh]

HB: So have you ever been interviewed for the media?

KC: Interviews? I am going to Hollywood next week! Oh dear, [we’ve] been on Romanian television, American television... and German...you get people over there walking about with cameras and all the television stuff...

HB: Do you find that flattering?

KC: No I don't...[it's fun] to tell our stories like...sky tv, [Look North...]

HB: Have you ever written your memories down?

KC: But I've got some articles... [gets book full of paper clippings]
[shows clipping of locomotive named after him at museum]

HB: Do you enjoy the publicity?

KC: Well yes...I don't get paid for it though, that's the trouble...

[All laugh]

I'd be worth a million now...if I charged for all the photographs I have had and all the rest of it...

KC: That's the first notification when my wife sent that up to the press...

...That's from my Grandad and Grandma when I had been wounded [newspaper clipping wishing him a speedy recovery].

HB: It's lovely how you've kept all these as well isn't it?

KC: Yes, yes.

...that's my original dog tags...that's the original rope...you could hang yourself with that couldn't you?

...that's my paybook...sizes of your clothing, what you got issued with...injections and needles...[reads height and weight etc...]

...Got fed up with having needles so two or three of us did that ourselves, wrote that in...

[started in Green Howards...then posted to Scottish Highland Infantry]

'I collect all these I don't know why'

...the year before...VE Day...there was nothing going on in York so we decided to put our medals on and go walk in York and we got the press out...the photographers taking photos for the press, must have taken hundreds, when the piece came out it there's a piece about that and a little photo about that...same with armed forces day they don't do anything in York really...

[shows photo of collecting the medal]

HB: What did it mean to you to finally get the legion medal?

Well it was a surprise to us that we got it because we was on [was it 70th anniversary?] the last day, we was getting ready to come home...we had a lady courier with us besides [historian] and she was French. We all got on the coach and she got on the coach with a pile of papers. She said "I've got these application forms because the French president has award all you D-Day veterans the medal...can you fill them in, so we filled them in and she took them back and that was the last I heard of that for two and a half years.

It was Ministry of Defence's fault I think, in fact I am sure it was them...because other people were getting them and the first one was in the French foreign office in London, held a ceremony for some veterans...French embassy, champagne and all the rest of it...we thought oh we'll be going down there, Nick here was going to book a train to go down there...anyway it all fell through because they lost our addresses or something.

The MoD only put one person this side of the channel to distribute [the medal], the French people and their people doing all that and yet only one person this side collaborating with them.

HB: I mean that's a long wait isn't it...

NB: Too long. We even wrote to Prince Charles didn't we?

KC: Yes.

We got them through the post, we didn't get presented with them. They came through the post I'd just been to our meeting...when I got home I had my lunch, the doorbell rang, postman "can you sign this?" and that was it. So later on, we arranged with a chap we know in Leeds...had him present [us with them].

[shares some further clippings of being presented with medal in Elvington]

HB: How did you feel when you were finally awarded with it [even though you had already received it in the post?]

KC: I was proud to get it like you know, we never expected anything...I mean our lot, the air force had a struggle to get any recognition, they got a clasp at the end of it and the Bomber Command, their statue in London that was done by the public who bought that for them...the Burma lads have never had any recognition, the Arctic Convoy people, they had to fight for theirs, the Russians presented them with a medal...the MoD said "you can't have it". So they had to fight for it, they eventually got it but they had to fight for it but they shouldn't have done.

HB: I mean do you think veterans are not shown enough respect and recognition?

KC: I don't think they are recognised as they should be, not really, not nowadays, I mean we go on parade and I mean we go to something what Nick has arranged, all different things, and a lot of people just walk past and we're there with our

medals on and all that you know and people just [walked past]...they don't recognise us sort of thing, why I don't know.

Oh a couple of years ago, we were collecting at [a supermarket] and we have a demonstration, a board, with all the details of D-Day and some books and papers, and this young man came up and said "what are you collecting for?" well, I said we've got our notice on the top and [we are] Normandy veterans...[he said] "Normandy veterans...what's Normandy?"...well what do you say!

HB: Do you think you are better received in France?

KC: Oh yes, yes, oh they fall over themselves sometimes...[was it] Utah beach last year, and this lady came up to me [and said] "can I shake your hand"...a French lady and she gave me a keyring in the shape of the Eiffel Tower.

That's the freedom of the city of York...that's when we got...[the council] wouldn't let us in different places that year it was a right shambles we had all our routes planned for the week we were there each day...they decided to close different roads...

The following time we got moved up to mobile escorts...we caused that much fun we got police escorts next time.

[Nick discusses French reaction]

KC: Yes there was four of us...[at a cafe]...Ken [Smith] and me were sat there talking and I don't know if they were Chinese or Japanese [tourists] "can we take your photograph"...an hour and a half before we got our lunch...and Ken and me were stood talking and this young couple with a camera came up "can we take a photograph"...turned around there were about fifty or sixty!...

That's our parade at memorial gardens...after all these years we are still at the back...

...we were clearing out some rubbish upstairs one day and I found these two letters and I said [to my wife] "shall I throw them away"...she said "no...get our [son] to get on his tweeter or whatever, and get some information to see if she's still alive"...anyway he got organised and we found out where she was living so we went up to see her...and we had a cup of tea and we had a really good chat, I said "do you recognise these letters"...she said "yes, I remember recognise my writing"...and a young lady came in and she was her carer and [we told her the story] and she told her the tale like, why we were there, she said hang on a minute, she goes outside gets on the phone and a Scottish paper sent a photographer and a reporter...

[Starts discussing wartime experiences]

...we went down to Southampton, got on the ship, never been on a ship before or anything like that...to me it was a boy scouts adventure feeling...never been on a beach before apart from half a day at Skegness with my Dad with the Miner's Welfare, they had a trip out to Skegness...bucket and spade [playing at the seaside] next time, I am on this beach...no bucket and spade.

NB: Tell Harriet your experience...about going ashore on D-Day.

KC: When people say "what was it like"...well I said, you hear the stories of people being sick and getting blown up and everything like that...well we were woken up at half past three in the morning and went down to the mess, mug of tea, scotch porridge...corned beef sandwich and a tot of rum, next thing on with all your gear...into the landing craft, sets off and you could hardly see the coast because there was that much smoke and...anyway I [was] resting on the side of the landing craft watching all the fireworks, enjoying it...bangs, rockets, different things, some people were sick [but] I never noticed that sort of thing...

HB: Have you written down your memories?

KC: No, no I've collected this sort of stuff [clippings] different things...I've never written anything down..

HB: Do you enjoy going into schools?

Yes, oh aye some fun! We've had some questions and I am not kidding you, there was some beauties...when we've been to schools with the children asking questions...one little lad he said to me, [whispers] "I said I beg your pardon"... "did you meet Adolf Hitler?" [All laugh] What can you do? [laughs]

HB: When you are in an association like this, what do you think the best thing is about being in a veteran's association?

KC: Well it's meeting the people you know sort of thing and there is always somebody with a new story and there are quite a few honorary members now, including Nick, and different people talk and somebody will say "what happened then?" and somebody else will say "I was round that area" and you get a story and you know, you get stories banded about. It's good, it's good.

HB: So there is like a social aspect but you are also sharing your memories with each other aren't you?

KC: Yes, oh yes...and when you go to Normandy or say, to Eden Camp, [there is a parade there in September] and you meet people there...

I've been going to these functions for years, and I've never met anyone from my Battalion, regiment, all that time except...was it the seventieth, or sixtieth...we was at the statue of the piper, we'd been to see that, we were stood talking and somebody tapped me on the shoulder and I turned round and this young man says "was you in the Green Howards" I said "yes" he said "what battalion" and I said seventh...he said "would you like to meet my Father?" I turned around and his father was with him, and he was in the same battalion as me. I didn't know him like...but that's the only one I've ever met...

HB: Do you think many people stayed quiet about their memories...do you think it was just what a lot of people did?

KC: I mean a lot of them won't talk about it, it's the top and bottom of it. They've seen some funny things like you know, they don't want...you know...

I mean you see some *funny* things as well, I mean we went to a farm house and went to the cellar and found all these bottles of Absinthe...I am afraid if they'd come the war would have been over for us...

HB: Do you think all events of the war are commemorated in the same way. [KC: What do you mean?] Do you think D-Day gets enough recognition?

KC: D-Day no...D-Day hasn't been publicised as much. A lot of people don't seem to be bothered about it.

HB: Do you think the interest has grown over time?

KC: I don't know, you are getting such things...in 2019, they are building a memorial to the D-Day veterans in France. Right, the American one was built in 1956...the difference of what...and millions upon millions from all over the world have seen that one on Omaha beach for the Americans...but there is nothing for us...so when they build that one how many of them will see that? There's hardly any veterans left for a kick off and I don't think there will be all that many people interested...I mean they sent us a newsletter about it and I wrote a nasty letter back..."Don't you think it's a bit too late" It's the MoD again...

HB: Tell me a bit about the play, Bomb Happy that you are involved in?

KC: Yes...

...Eleanor [playwright], we've told her all the stories and that's how she got the play going...

Appendix 5

Bert Barritt

The interview took place on July 25th 2017 in the presence of Nick Beilby (NB) at the interviewees home.

Bert Barritt was born in 1925. He was conscripted in 1943 and served with the 2nd Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment. He landed on Sword Beach at Normandy on After the war, Barritt trained as a teacher and later worked teaching deaf children in Africa.

HB: Do you think of yourself as a veteran?

BB: Oh yes, yes, I am interested in identity, I am a Christian so we've have been talking a lot about our identity as Christians, it comes up a lot.

HB: Do you know when you first heard the term veteran?

BB: When I came to York. I think so...yes, we never used it before...they talk about the First World War but...

NB: When did you come to York Bert?

BB: That's a good question...I am very vague about my movements.

NB: I guess it must have been twenty some years ago, because you have been in the veteran's York group a long time.

BB: I am number two on the list. Well there was 63 of us or 67 of us that actually signed up for the veteran's [association], because the war had finished and we were all out of the army, so we all thought it was good fun...

HB: So when you were being de-mobilised, did you feel that you had been part of something extra-ordinary?

BB: Oh yes, well you got a suit! Oh yes, well they treated you well and you were in the papers...oh yes.

HB: Did you feel that you were treated like heroes?

BB: I think that came later, not so much immediately after, everyone was hero after the war...

HB: Did you talk about the war after you came home?

BB: No, no, I regret my father was in the First World War, he completely went deaf, he had a weakness in his ears, so he never got a pension...if you had something prior, you could never get a pension which was fair enough...but anyway, no I don't know I was expecting to train as a teacher and I was studying

as much as I could...looking back I am sorry I didn't talk to my Dad more, I mean now I wish he was a alive, I've got lots and lots and lots and lots to ask him, but at that time I was trying to move on but...

HB: Did you ever talk about your own experiences?

BB: Yes I did, oh yes.

HB: To family members?

BB: In the main, other people weren't interested [laughs]...I don't think they were...

HB: Do you remember how veterans were portrayed at this time in the media and in films?

BB: Yes, well they did their best, the authorities they were going to portray you or record you, they did their best I think yes...

HB: You may have heard the description of the 'greatest generation', what do you feel about [your generation] being called the greatest generation?

BB: I think the First World War was the greatest generation! I think so yes...

HB: If someone called you a hero how would you feel?

BB: Well, our branch of the Normandy Veterans we've been in the press every month or something...we're a bit used to it.

HB: So you were one of the first people to join the [York] NVA...what made you decide to join?

BB: Well, they were looking for people who had come out of the forces...

HB: But was there any particular reason that you decided to join?

BB: Well, it was an advert in the local paper...it was in paper, they were thinking of starting a group and would they meet in the working men's club...so we did. There were quite a number of us, but a few of them didn't want to meet in the working men's club, but it suited the rest of us so off we started...

HB: When it first started, what sort of things did the group do? Was it a social group only?

BB: Well it was an odd group because we [laughing]...it was like a business meeting, so we went through business every month when we met...and that went on for years. It doesn't happen now...

HB: So did you do commemorative activities then?

BB: ...We would always be...at the end of the war and remembrance and not being far from York and whatever that was doing at the York Minster we'd get involved in that...

HB: And have you been to Normandy for the commemorations?

BB: Have I, [laughs] many times, many times. Well the government were paying for it...

HB: How do you feel about the reception you get when you go, has it changed over time

BB: I think its got better in France...yes much better

HB: How do people treat you?

BB: Well people shake your hand and think you're wonderful.

NB: You are real heroes to them aren't you?

BB: Oh to the French definitely...

HB: Is it different to how the British perceive veterans?

BB: [laughs] I think it is a bit yes...

[discussion of the scooter club]

HB: Were you a member of the British Legion?

BB: No, no... we had quite a bit to do with the British Legion in one way or another yes...

HB: Was there a reason you decided not to join?

BB: Well there was enough going on as a veteran in different ways...I mean we were meeting...in the Normandy Veterans we met, we had a Christmas lunch... St George's Day which we kept, we still keep it...so we met from time to time...

HB: So there's a sociable aspect that you already had...

BB: Yes we met in the working men's club and when we started there were some older veterans who liked a pint, so we met at 10 o'clock and at 10 o'clock they had a pint [laughs].

...oh yes, see well [name of friend in the association]...[he] has been dead for say 10 years...[found out recently one of the ex-Lord Mayors in York had [his] remains and they were scattered during a service a few weeks ago]...

HB: What do you see as the purpose of veteran's associations? ...there is the social side?

BB: Well, not exactly a social aspect...but yes, I think so social aspect yes, that's part of it isn't it...that's part of it yes...

HB: And the commemorative aspect?

BB: Well that's it, we don't...well we are doing quite a bit aren't we? See we've got a stone that we paid for ourselves in the memorial gardens and so every year we have a little ceremony there... and we were there recently for the scattering of these ashes... but that's once a year definitely...

HB: Have you ever been to the Remembrance Day parades in London?

BB: Yes, yes, I am a Londoner, my children [are] living there now as well...but yes I went for a I think about three years really

HB: How did you find the ceremony in London

BB: Well its quite exciting really...but you've got to get there and find your place...

HB: Yes, I've heard there can be a lot of standing around, it can be a long day...

BB: At one time, we were lined up, I think there were three lines and we were one of them, and then another line marched in from the outside of us, that meant that the last line on the other side that was pushed out, I mean that was a cheek...there could have been a fight...

HB: Do you feel like it has changed over time?

BB: Well of course Remembrance Day takes in more things doesn't it now, so there's always new ones coming in. So if you were in the army today you'd be drawn in and if you are not in the army and you're still remembering and you're serious about it you can still turn up...

BB: I mean going down to London for the cenotaph, I mean that's a huge day. We were lined up on the horse guards parade and then we marched on...lined up there...but you were hanging about a bit before...

HB: It always looks very moving...

BB: Well it is really yes, and the Royal Family walk in from the war office or something, they walk across the road...and then walk out and say "thank you very much"...I don't envy them..

HB: Have you ever written your memoirs?

BB: In bits and pieces yes...

HB: When did you start writing those?

BB: [unsure] I'm trying to look for some...I will find them.

HB: Well it sounds as if you've written things down...

BB: Oh yes, I have written quite a bit...

HB: It sounds like you've been interviewed for the media too...do you...enjoy is the wrong word but are you willing to participate in things like that?

BB: Yes, yes I would. I was trying to look for one of the episodes in France...[talking about] the [Chateau de la ?] I was in the East Yorkshire Regiment, the third division, we landed on D-Day but then I was wounded three weeks afterwards, we weren't actually fighting but they said we were going to go into some kind of action today so we lined up and we marched off. As we started to march off the Germans were mortar bombing us, and I got a bit kick in my hand and I've got two lots of shrapnel in there. So I walked that way and the officer said "I think you've got to go that way [laughs]"...

BB: I've worked with deaf people a lot, my parents were deaf...[discussion about friends who are deaf]

HB: Would you say you had anti-war views?

BB: Well war is a terrible thing isn't it? I suppose in some cases you are either going to fight or your not...

When I was in the army I got wounded I never fired a rifle in France, Holland or Germany, but I had to but I mean if I had to I expect I would have I don't know, but I am glad I didn't...

One of our men he used to fire machine guns, and you just press a button and you could kill a lot of people...he was in some big battles...so yes, I always think it's significant when he left the army he was on his way home from the army and he called into the first church he found and apologised to God for everything and I think it still worries him...

[NB: Your faith has always been strong in everything you do]

BB: But...as I say I never fired a rifle, so there were never any enemies, there were enemies out there but they were never firing at us, so I never had any need to fire back or anything like that.

HB: Do you think your faith got you through the war?

BB: Yes a lot of people hold onto God...I'm not like that. There's faith and faith, faith and real faith. So I went into the army as a young man, but a young Christian and I've never changed from that...

[discussion about faith and family life]

HB: So Nick was telling me, you've been involved in this production, 'Bomb Happy', can you tell me a bit about that and how you got involved?

BB: Well we got pulled in [laughs] they don't ask we're just in it... my name is in it, there is an actor playing me

HB: Did you have to share your memories with the actor?

BB: Well actually we've been writing our memories for sometime really so...I don't know if he has used those memories...[Helena came to talk to us] and the York Archive...the York Archives must be pretty big because a lot of people did interviews. Helena has done a good job...

[discussion of recently deceased veteran and his memories he shared with Bert]

HB: Do you think veterans are valued in society?

BB: Well it depends what your society is I think...

HB: Well in France it sounds as if get a good reception...

[pause]

...What does it mean to you to be able to go back to commemorate in Normandy?

BB: A bit of roughing it again [laughs]...well we go back together and it's only four or five days so not long, and we've been back together quite a few times...

HB: It's good that you can go together...that's what the York NVA gives you...

BB: Yes, exactly that's right

[NB: The bond that there's only four of you is strong isn't it]

BB: Yes, yes...

[NB: You're all very special aren't you?]

BB: [laughs] we're waiting to see whose going to be last!

HB: Do you think D-Day is respectfully commemorated?

BB: Yes, I think so, I mean some people have no idea what D-Day is? But I've had people not connected to the army asking me "which beach did you land on?"

I didn't know there were [different] beaches at one time...I landed on Sword Beach but people are more aware of it...

BB: This film has just come out...Dunkirk...

HB: Yes, I've seen it...it was very powerful

BB: Yes, those war films are...yes, the one I remember most I suppose was the band of brothers, did you remember seeing that one? Which I thought was terrific, Americans of course but they put a lot into the war.

HB: Do you think it is good that they make these films about these events?

BB: Oh, I think so on the whole yes.

HB: There was Saving Private Ryan as well...

BB: Yes, that was...good, it gave people an idea what was going on...

HB: Do you remember any other associations, have you ever joined any others?

BB: No...we haven't had need to. We joined the scooter club...

HB: As a D-Day veteran, do you think the campaigns in which you served in define the way you see yourself?

BB: Well as far as I was concerned it was Normandy right through to Germany, yes.

See I, you know, we mentioned identity already today...my identity...my first identity, I'm a Christian, but then I've been a soldier in the war.

Appendix 6

Ken Smith

The interview took place in the presence of Smith's wife, Gloria, (GS) and Nick Beilby (NB) and was held on July 24th 2017 at the interviewees home.

Ken Smith was born in 1925 in Leeds. He worked as an Apprentice Draughtsman with Thomas Green and Son, a Mechanical Engineers. After being called up, Smith served as a Signaller in the 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. He landed on Gold Beach on June 6th 1944. Following the war, Smith worked in the insurance business with the Prudential until retirement.

HB: Do you think of yourself as a veteran?

KS: Well certainly, certainly, the most important years of your life, 18 to 23, are taken away from you as a conscript, no case of a volunteer, you're purely a conscript, well I was anyway...the majority of the men who went over on D-Day were conscripts, no choice, you just had to go...

HB: When you came back, when you were demobilised, how were you treated?

KS: I never had any leave from Normandy and I didn't come back...I came back as a casualty, so I flew home...from Brussels airport...in October and went into hospital in Wales and they hey didn't give us any leave at all, my parents if they wanted to see us had to come down.

HB: So when you came back and you were demobilised, were you treated-

KS: No, there were so many people in uniform, if you didn't wear your uniform they thought you were dodging the army and if you wore it they thought, well, that you're showing off, so there was nothing spectacular in walking about...

HB: Did you always talk about what you'd experienced.

KS: Until about 18-20 years ago, very few veterans spoke about anything. People come up to me when we're on our stand and say "oh my grandad was in [served] during the war, but he didn't talk about it". Well that's changing now because people realise that there is so much ignorance about the war...one lady came up to me at the station and asked me whether I was in the First World War or the Second World War...I said "well I'm doing alright for 120 madam!"

[All laugh]

HB: So before 20 years ago did you never talk about what you'd experienced?

KS: Well, when my medals came from the government 73 years ago I put them in the drawer in the bedroom and they've stopped there for nearly 60 years...then I

got involved in the Normandy veterans Association and I started thinking about it more.

HB: What made you join the Association?

KS: I'd never heard of it before and I was walking through Sainsbury's car park and a chap stepped out of a caravan and he had a camping club badge on and I am part of a camping club so its more like a fellowship, you get up and talk to them...he told me about the Normandy Veterans Association and told me where they met and I went along...

...there were 65 members and now we've got four so it must have been twenty years ago.

HB: When you came home and were demobilised, do you remember how veterans were treated then?

KS: Well people you worked for were forced to take you back but I was in the middle of an apprenticeship and I just couldn't pick it up after five years absence. So I had a change of occupation...but no there was nothing, the British government they made no fuss, bother, anything and nobody else did either, the war had finished and that was it. It is really only the last [twenty] years that things have changed.

HB: Are you a member of the British Legion?

KS: I am a member ...but I am not...an enthusiastic member because they are very difficult and not very helpful to the veterans...

HB: When did you join the British Legion, was it straight away [after the war]?

KS: Oh no, no probably eight, nine, ten years ago...

...the veterans do a lot more than the British Legion do, when they are meeting, and they are meeting once a month, its over in twenty minutes and that's including a couple of prayers...

HB: With the York Normandy Veterans Association, do you participate in a lot of commemorative activities?

KS: That folded about two years ago, the Normandy veterans, they dropped from about 38,000 members to a few hundred so it was not viable to keep it going but we carried on in York as if it was still going, just changed the name...

HB: Have you been to Normandy for commemorations?

KS: Yes, we've been every year for the last ten, twelve years, we've been about twenty five times altogether...

HB: Are you flattered by the response [in Normandy]?

KS: Not quite the right word. I like to be recognised, especially by the British because they tend to be very reticent...the Americans are the ones who make the biggest fuss...yeah, I suppose we are flattered really because there is not much left in life now for us is there?

HB: So what you think of the description of your generation as the Greatest Generation or description of you as heroes?

KS: No because, I've said this many times...the real heroes are those that never came back, they've been there 73 years longer than we have, we've had 73 years longer...I don't like the word hero, most of those men would say they'd done their duty...

Appendix 7

Douglas Petty

The interview took place on July 24th 2017 the presence of Nick Beilby (NB) at the interviewees home.

Douglas Petty was born in 1923. He volunteered for the RAF aged 20 as a Flight Engineer. He worked on Halifax and Lancaster bombers, serving with Canadian 429 (Bison) Squadron at RAF Leeming in 1944 and 1945. After the war, he worked in civil aviation for some years before taking a job as Mechanical Engineer with the Forestry Commission in North Yorkshire. Petty was awarded the Legion d'Honneur in 2017 in recognition of his participation in bombing raids which assisted the successful completion of the Normandy Landings.

HB: During the war and as you were being demobilised, did you feel you were part of something extraordinary? ...

DP ...well I will tell you one of the reasons why I think its important is because about twenty years ago or thereabouts I was contacted by Leeming, which is where I served and they had an officer there who had started forming a museum and he was looking for information on wartime activities at Leeming...anyway I contacted them and they immediately said would I like to go up there and talk to them etc and I said "of course I will" so for at least twenty years I have been going backwards and forwards to Leeming and they are always very pleased to see me and of course now I am probably the only person who'd served there during the war, because they majority were Canadians anyway and out of the British flight engineers there can't be many left...if any who served at Leeming, so they look upon me as part of the station now.

HB: Yes, it must be really special to go back as well...

DP: Yes, and I did help them to a certain extent to form the museum as well, by giving them a lot of information on various things...what is nice about it, is the Squadron Leader, the chap that started it all, he and I are still good friends and whenever there is anything on there, I am always invited to go to Leeming, and I've been back on two or three occasions in the past...what they started to do...the previous seal was very keen that the young air men and air women on the station got to know the history of the place, so I was often invited back to talk to them to tell them what happened on that station all that time ago. So it was nice, it was nice to be able to do that and nice to be recognised there. And in fact, when I was awarded the Legion d'Honneur, having flown from there, the French ask you how you want it presented, and normally what they like to do is have their representative in North Yorkshire do the presentation, a Frenchman you see, and I think I disappointed them when I said "no thank you, I am going to have it presented at Leeming". So I did, and the station commander, he was the one who presented it to me and they were thrilled to bits because they hadn't had a Legion d'Honneur ever there before...

HB: Did you talk about your experiences when you came home?

DP: Not a great deal, no...I think what prompted me to do something about it [to tell people] and to make sure my records were available both at Leeming and at Elvington...was the fact that my father had been in the First World War, and there was a bit of a coincidence between the two of us because he was a farm labourer's son, and he decided to join the army in the First World War and he did very well and he very soon became a Sergeant, and very soon became an Officer. I think he was quite proud of the fact that I had, in a sense followed in his footsteps by becoming an Airman, then a Sergeant and then an Officer...and for him it was a bit of pride I think that at least one of his sons...had followed in his footsteps and had been really successful in the services.

...It dawned on me that I was prepared to let people know what I'd done in the Second World War, I thought it was only right to do so that there were records available, but I realised my father had never told anyone about the First World War at all, even my mother I realised afterwards and my brother knew very little of what he'd done, except my mother married him when he was an Officer, but he never told her anything about the First World War, "oh it was something I did" and that was the end of it...and I found out by digging into his records how he'd done so well in getting promoted and he'd been gassed and sent back to England in hospital and back on the front again within two or three months...he'd been in quite a number of the well known First war battles and had survived them. But he never, ever talked about it and it was after he died as I say, I inherited all the stuff that he had that I found his medals and quite a lot of things that he had kept...I decided not a case of bragging...I might as well let people know what happened to me and so there is a record of the future...I hope other people did it as well, it is silly, not to be bragging about it, but it's silly not to let people know what happened in the past because it's part of history isn't it?...

HB: Did you join the British Legion?

DP: No.

HB: Is there a particular reason why you chose not to?

DP: I think I was more keen in being involved in organisations directly connected with Bomber Command and the Airforce, rather than a general organisation.

Appendix 8

Jack Millin

The interview took place on October 3rd 2017 at the interviewees own home.

Jack Millin was born in 1924. He served as Wireless Operator and Air Gunner with 12 Squadron, South African Air Force in Italy from 1944 to 1945. After the war, Millin changed careers from working in the painting and decorating trade to leisure equipment hire and sales, relating to skiing and outdoor pursuits. He also taught painting and decorating on a part-time basis. He is the former President Chairman of the Manchester Branch of the Air Crew Association and the current Chairman of Tameside Armed Forces Community.

HB: When you came back, did you feel that you'd been part of something extraordinary?

JM: No, I didn't feel I was extraordinary, I felt that I'd volunteered and that was it because I volunteered on the strength of my time of life and also the fact I wanted to fly and the fact that we'd been on the receiving end of air raids and everything and all the things that we knew what had gone on in Nazi Germany at that time...

HB: How were you treated when you came home?

JM: Well I felt a bit like fish out of water to a degree because some of my contemporaries were still civilians of course for various reasons it took a little bit of fitting into the local community again, but I was only away for three years because of my trade, I was in the building trade, and the building workers and the teachers were sent home early...I then had a deferred apprenticeship but that is another story...

HB: Did anyone treat you like a hero at that point?

JM: No, no. In fact there was a complete change after the First World War it was get them home forget everything, [injured?], suffered at all it didn't matter, people without limbs etc the system didn't work as compassionately as it does now. My father was born in 1896 and when he was 18 he volunteered for the First World War in September 1914 and he served in the Royal Engineers and he was wounded in the Battle of the Somme, sent home, hospitalised and then instead of being sent back to France they sent him to Greece...[discussion about Father's service].

He served five years in the First World War so I mean I knew what it was all about...and his younger brother was on the war memorial and my first wife's two uncles were on the war memorial as well in our village so it was all part of it, we were brought up to remember...and of course there wasn't a long time from 1919 when he [Father] came out of the forces to 1939 when the war started again. So twenty years later, and then of course in 1943 when I was eventually called up to the Royal Airforce having volunteered...then my father of course joined the Home Guard and organised the local platoon in the area.

[Discussion about First World War veterans]

...I mean all of a sudden...I mean I'd travelled to Australia and America and saw how well their veterans were treated, Americans are gold plated, you can go to a base and get medication and everything, they get extra special treatment the veterans there and so they do in Australia. But the thing is, all of a sudden they decided that they ought to look after veterans and by coincidence I happened to be chairman of the Armed Forces community in this area because I am a Second World War veteran whose still on his feet, still surviving and can conduct meetings. So I am chairman of that group. We've got people who've just come out of the forces, just got married, has a young baby...up to my age and people of 100 who survived that time. So we're looking after veterans and the idea is that no one whose been in the armed forces should suffer at all from not having health, accommodation, schools whatever it is, they should be treated, not special, but should be made sure they don't suffer as a result of it. That's what its all about the Armed Forces Covenant which every local authority should be signing, they have here and of course we've signed up the hospital and various other parts of the area...

HB: At what point do you think veterans have started to be treated differently?

JM: Well, I don't know what it coincided with...it was probably about twenty years ago. There were people who had been in the forces becoming members of parliament and realising the comparison with what we did...

HB: Since you came back from the war, have you always identified as being a veteran?

JM: Well no...as a child, every remembrance day I was taken to our local war memorial, part of our Sunday school where we used to have this service and the two minutes silence on the Remembrance Sunday...I remember being at school and we used to have the silence...on the eleventh at eleven o'clock in the morning. Only realising that when...people [sort of] respect you when you are a veteran, but the thing is you've got to push that in every community so that people don't forget...to make sure they know what place in the local community a veteran takes...and what they can are able to contribute to the community.

HB: Did you talk to your family and friends about your experiences?

JM: No, because nobody seemed to want to know. I didn't want to tell them [but I've talked since to my contemporaries]...and to Rotary which I am a member of and round table and 41 club and [I've] shown photographs and told them about the particular aircraft that I flew in...so I don't push it but I make sure that they know of it, that I am a 93 year old air crew survivor...

HB: So at what point did you start talking about the war?

JM: Well only when I was asked questions did I start talking, when somebody asked “can you tell us about it”...

HB: Did you join the British Legion?

JM: No, because I was a member of Rotary, round table, the scouts and member of the Air Crew Association and I am the president chairman of the Manchester branch of that...and now as chairman of Tameside Armed Forces Community which is our local area...so the British Legion no...so you can't do everything.

HB: When did you join the Aircrew Association?

JM: That is interesting [pause] before my first wife died, but I found it was after I was on my own, it was an extra interest and the air gunners association I joined as well but of course you can only do so much...I would be in my fifties or sixties I think...

HB: Did you apply for your medals when you came back after the war?

JM: Well I got my medals listed to me and they came by post, except that I didn't get the defence medal, because I put myself as qualifying...you had to have three year's service in the armed forces or the civil defence. Well when I was 16 I joined the ARP, which became civil defence and I became a cyclist messenger, so I'd have got a certificate from the local authority to say I'd joined on such a day until I joined the forces, so I qualified for the defence medal...so I finished up with four instead of three [laughs]. I also give people application forms for their own because they haven't applied for them, because you can print them off the armed forces websites, that's it, it's not you that wants them but your grandchildren will.

...some are probably embarrassed about the fact that that they were... not in at the sharp end, not in an infantry regiment and they were just somewhere behind not doing very much and didn't want to push it against the people who were there getting killed...they had an easier role and this is what happens...

HB: Do you remember the ways in which veterans were portrayed just after the war?

JM: Well they were only portrayed the fact that they dusted off their medals for Remembrance Sunday and went to the local war memorial, that was as far as it went...or they joined an ex-service organisation and they just met privately there but they were not a full part of the community until the local authorities decided that there was money to be had from the Ministry of Defence to promote this sort of thing, so grants were available and that's what started it all off again...the armed forces community and they encouraged the local government to sign the armed forces covenant which says what they should be doing regarding treating the armed forces.

HB: When did you get involved with the armed forces community?

JM: It so happened that there was this meeting of people who were interested, so I went to this meeting, and all the various people stood up and said that they “why can’t I do this?”, “Why can’t you do this for me” etc so in the end I got up and said “I think we’ve got it all wrong it is what you do for the community’ and that we should be thinking in its broader sense. Then I got an invitation to become chairman but you see I’ve been a magistrate for 25 years and that is sort of a link with the local community...I’ve been a member of Rotary for 53 years and that is part of serving the community...

HB: How did you get involved in speaking to schools?

JM: When you are part of the armed services community they are promoting these things and people in schools who are studying the history of World War Two [they ask] “can someone come and talk”...then when they advertise they see that these people [veterans] are able to come into schools...my daughter who has been a schools advisor edited my history...and put it in a PowerPoint so I just go plug that in and photographs come up...and you get a group of children who are so intelligent and want to know and they are so quiet they want to listen...I take a kit bag which I had originally at Lord’s cricket Ground and I pull out an aircrew blouse [with] medal ribbons on it...I am also doing another thing...The Imperial War Museum has a programme “meet the veteran” so I also go there for the day...it’s amazing who you talk to...

HB: The two groups that you are part of linked to veterans, what do you see as the purpose for you, what do you get out of it?

JM: Well I get satisfaction in achievement in what we are doing. We are building something...we are building it up for someone else’s benefit and I share it with other people. I am now in the process of [digitalising photographs]...I go through them at different times and find people who’ve died and widows who are still living and I can send them photographs by email. I do that as a sort of hobby, when I am going through it I can send out to somebody...I’ve made contact with the South African Air Force in South Africa, we visited there and with Rotary we’ve been to Australia and American and made contacts there...and also been to the B 26 historical society ...I’ve been three times there [to the States]...I met the South African ambassador of the United states at a lunch there and I got a very nice letter from him saying how delighted he was to represent somebody who’d been part of the South African Armed Forces.

These sort of things are very satisfying...and not just going to sit on a beach and do nothing they are an achievement.

HB: Do you ever attend Remembrance Day Services?

JM: Oh yes, when I joined the Aircrew Association there was an annual parade in Manchester at the cenotaph...so I took part in that. But before that I just attended my local one, as a civilian not as armed forced [veteran].

Appendix 9

Pat Evans

Interview held on October 31st 2017 at the interviewees home.

Pat Evans was born in 1923 and joined the WAAF in November 1941 when she was just under 18 years old. She worked as a Radar Operator during her wartime service. She served at various stations including Cranmore and others across Britain.

HB: During the war, and as you were being demobilised, did you feel you had been part of something extra ordinary?

PE: Yes, yes I think so, I think we all felt quite proud that we'd been a little part of the final outcome of winning the war. It was only a small part but it was a contribution but it was quite a valuable one really because the Radar unit that I was on was really at the base of guiding pilots to targets for bombing...

HB: Did you talk your experiences to anyone when you came back?

PE: No, I don't think so. I don't think...it was almost shut off once you'd come back, you'd been through it and it was over and you got on with the next phase of life.

HB: So have you ever spoken about your experiences to anyone?

PE: No, very briefly I suppose if anyone wanted to know something about my youth I might have just said what I'd done...but on the whole people are not interested in hearing about it really.

HB: Have you spoken with others when you've had reunions?

PE: Oh yes, then you'd talk all about the way you lived and where you worked because you made some very special sort of friendships...

HB: When did you start to hold reunions?

PE: I think the 70s or the 80s when we had the very big reunions, those were just Radar reunions, all the Radar stations...people came from overseas.

...hundreds of RAF people

HB: Did you have smaller reunions as well? I know you mentioned earlier [before recording] that you had private reunions...

PE: Yes, much, much later well early nineties I suppose, a few of us who had been together, working together on small stations during the war, found that we lived within commuting distance of each other and could meet for a day in a local

pub or hotel and just have a day together, and we did that for several years until everybody died off...

...it was just people bringing literature and memories and souvenirs of their time during the war...

HB: Do you have any medals from your wartime service?

PE: Yes, well the two that everybody got I think...I've got them upstairs...

HB: And do you wear them?

PE: [laughs] No

HB: Have you ever worn them?

PE: No, they are in the box that they came in. [HB That's really interesting] No, because pause] it would almost... I don't know...look like showing off, well here now, supposing I went shopping with medals on my coat, I think I'd be laughed at...

Appendix 10

James Mason

The interview took place in Mr Mason's own home on November 6th 2017.

James Mason was born in March 1926 in South Yorkshire. He was called up in 1944 and joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He then made his way through Holland and Belgium to Germany (Dusseldorf in particular) and took part in the victory parade in Paris. Prior to being called up, he worked as a coal miner and was a member of the Home Guard.

HB: When did you start parading?

JM: Not only until I was getting on a bit really...I didn't join the British Legion at all...

HB: Was there a particular reason why you didn't join?

JM: I just didn't feel...I belonged sort of thing.

HB: Did you join any other veterans' associations?

JM: No, I am not in any at all.

HB: When you parade in the local area, is that something you've done yourself or do you join other veterans?

JM: There's not many left now...I always attend because I had a friend when I was a school kid, and this friend was a Catholic who we didn't go to the same school you see...he got killed in Normandy, so I attend the cenotaph in his memory.

HB: When you were demobilised, how were you treated when you came back?

JM: Oh I don't think we were treated any[thing] special because there was so many people like me...

HB: Were you surprised you were called up [to fight] when you were in a Reserved Occupation?

HB: Did you talk to people about your wartime when you came home?

JM: Not a lot no, not a lot, because they just think you are showing off some people don't they?

HB: Did anyone ask you about it?

JM: I don't think they realised, the people I was working with I don't think they realised how near to being killed as I were...

HB: Was there a point at which people started to ask you about your experiences?

JM: Not until very recently really...we go and have a meal in a place...I get talking to people who are in Heritage Groups that sort of thing, that's when I've talked about it, other than that I haven't talked...

[Discussion with JM's wife about being one of few conscripts into the army from village]

HB: Were many of the people you worked with...did a lot of them stay [during the war]?

JM: I think because a lot of people were in Reserved Occupations, so apart from Home Guard...you didn't talk about being a soldier.

HB: I see you've got your medals there, did you collect them straight away?

JM: No, no, it were a long time afterwards

HB: What made you not collect them straight away?

JM: I didn't...just feel like it

HB: Before you collected your medals, did you parade then?

JM: No, I got the medals and then started parading...

I could have paraded without them but it makes people know if you've got medals, you've actually taken part you see.

[JM goes through box of memorabilia]

...I got things like that [Nazi songbook etc] when the war ended we'd find ourselves billeted to former Nazi's houses...

[JM sings in German]

...I tell you how I got this song book. When we were in Dusseldorf we lived in a leafy suburb...and I got friendly with a girl...she lived on a barge that was tied up on the river Rhine and we were trying to teach each other our own languages...so she brought this book out...

[Continues talking about wartime memories prompted by items in box and then goes onto discuss career]

HB: Have your family asked you about your experiences?

JM: I don't know that they have much really...

HB: So this box of memorabilia [recently loaned to a school], have you been into schools yourself and talked about your experiences?

JM: I'd seen in this local newspaper that this school was interested in the Nazi era in Germany so I thought well "I've got some memorabilia" that I'd like to pass onto some whose going to look after it and I thought at the same time, while I am doing that they'd be asking me questions...school kids you know...[but] it didn't come about [that I could go]...

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Fig 12 - Ken Smith wearing his campaign medals and Legion d'honneur
Appendices 1-10 - Interviews with Second World War veterans

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