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**Warrior heroes and little green men: soldiers, military training and the  
construction of rural masculinities.**

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Hugh Campbell.

## **Warrior heroes and little green men: soldiers, military training and the construction of rural masculinities.**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines how a particular rural masculinity, termed here the ‘warrior hero’ model of military masculinity, is produced through the process of military training in the British Army. The paper outlines how the concept of masculinity is used, and argues for the utility of the notion of ‘rural masculinity’ in the examination of the interaction between social constructions of masculinity and rurality, before outlining the salient features of the model of the warrior hero identified in the literature on militarism and gender identities. The paper then goes on to examine how this warrior hero is constructed in the process of military training, and argues that the rural as both location and social construction feeds into the development of this model. The paper concludes by questioning the political consequences, both for rural life and for the armed forces, of this hegemonic model of masculinity.

## **Introduction: masculinity, military masculinity and rural masculinities**

This paper examines soldiers, military training, the construction of military masculinities and the role of the countryside and rurality in that process. Soldiers are not born, but made. They are fashioned through their training in specific ways, for specific ends. In the UK, this training takes place with reference to rural space and place. In this paper, I look at that training process with the aim of demonstrating how ideas of both rurality and masculinity intersect within it. I argue that becoming a soldier means being moulded according to a specific model of military masculinity, and I argue that this model could be viewed as a rural masculinity because of its location and because, at a more abstract level, rurality (as a social construction) influences the form(s) of military masculinity produced in the training process. There is nothing new, of course, in an exploration of the ways in which gender identities – what it means to be male or female – impinge on soldiers and military life. What is perhaps less obvious, and the central focus of this paper, is the significance of place and space in the formation of military gender identities.

This research started with a hunch which grew whilst addressing a wider research agenda exploring the various relationships between the armed forces and the countryside in Britain. As I have argued elsewhere, the significance of military peacetime activities in rural space, the dominance of the armed forces as employers in particular localities, the presence of soldiers in rural localities occupied by military bases, and the cultural links at a number of levels between rurality and the military in Britain make the army a pertinent subject of inquiry within rural studies (Woodward, 1996). As part of this wider research agenda, in 1997 I conducted a piece of research on military training in protected landscapes (Woodward 1998, 1999). This research

required a long period of observation of Army personnel during a public planning inquiry. Long and often tedious sessions during this inquiry were sometimes enlivened by senior officers launching into passionate and heartfelt accounts about why it is so absolutely necessary for the British Army to train on the bleak, wet, windy moorlands of northern England, rather than resorting to the relative comfort of computer simulation or overseas training areas. National security, it seemed, relied on men (yes, men) conducting their training in one of the more inhospitable rural environments that the British Isles have to offer. Then, during coffee breaks, these same officers could be overheard talking of their own fitness regimes and training activities and their locations. Also at this time, I began reading cheap paperback books produced for a mass market hungry for real-life accounts of soldiering exploits. These books would frequently make reference to the significance of place in the training process, in the formation of the soldier, and in the conduct of military engagement. The hunch suggested a set of relationships between masculinity, militarism and rurality, with an earlier paper looking more generally at the connections between the countryside and the construction of military masculinity (Woodward, 1998). In this paper, still guided by that hunch, I take a more direct look at the processes by which models of military masculinity shape the training of the soldier, look at the role of the countryside and rurality in that process, and the question some of the implications of this for both rural areas and the armed forces.

An initial hunch indicated what to study and prompted the collection of empirical data on military training and its locations from eclectic sources. Five principal data sources were explored. First, the recruitment materials produced by the Army for all Regiments and Corps in Combat Arms and Combat Support Arms, plus supporting

services, were examined. This material is primarily information on careers on the armed forces and selection procedures sent out to potential recruits, who are mostly male, mostly white, mostly aged between 16 and 24 and mostly educated only to Secondary School levels. Some further information was also supplied directly by the Army Training and Recruitment Agency. The second data source consisted of publicity information about military training produced by the armed forces and Ministry of Defence for wider publication. This included Ministry of Defence press releases, and searches through back-issues of *Soldier*, 'the magazine of the British Army', and the Royal United Services Institute Journal. The third data source was materials used directly by the Army during the period of basic training that all recruits undergo, including the videos *Train Green*, *Its Plain Sense Too*, and *Room to Manoeuvre*. Fourth, I scoured many of the aforementioned mass market 'true life army story' paperbacks, an expanding genre in which former soldiers tell their stories of active service to a (mostly young, male) readership eager to learn how it really was (see for example Ballinger 1992, McNab 1993, Ryan 1995, Ramsey, 1996, Spence 1997 and 1998). Also illuminating in their own way were books and magazines purporting to explain to the novice the secrets of combat and survival (see for example Lewis 1997). Fifth, television documentaries on military life, such as Carlton's 1999 series *Soldier Town* and the BBC's 1999 *Soldiers To Be* provided ideas and insight.

None of these materials from which empirical data was drawn were produced with social science research in mind. The generation of research data relied on a close reading of these texts, with reference to analytic methods drawn from discourse analysis. The primary goal of such methods is an exploration of the systems in which meaning is granted to objects and actions, and in which relationships between entities

are constructed (see Fairclough 1997, Mills 1997, Van Dijk 1997). In short, these five data sources were explored with the intention of uncovering the discourses in which military training, gender identities and rurality were constructed.

The use of discourse analytic techniques in turn rests within a conceptual framework which views masculinity and rurality as socially constructed entities. Lack of space precludes a full review of the literatures on both, but the salient features of current conceptual approaches to the construction of gender identities and rurality are worth highlighting because they provide the conceptual framework for this paper.

The salient points are these. First, this paper follows the arguments of most contemporary scholars of gender, of what it is and what it means to be male or female, in viewing gender identities as socially constructed. We act according to social rather than innate biological prescription.(Butler 1990, 1993; Connell 1995). Gender identities are the tangible outcome of conscious human action. Second, and following from this, gender identities are fluid and changeable. We have the capacity to endorse, reproduce, change and subvert norms of behaviour prescribed by social convention. Third, our abilities to do so are often enabled or constrained by the contexts in which our gender identities are played out. Fourth, these gender identities are not monolithic but show infinite variety according to the contexts in which they are produced and reproduced. Fifth, they are also relational; some are dominant, others subordinate. Sixth, gender identities are constructed in space, with reference to place, and through the relationship of the body in space (Rose, 1995; WGSF 1997). Finally, gender identities are both culturally and temporally specific.

Armies and military activity have long been recognised as important sites for the construction of masculinities. Militaries have variously been termed masculine, patriarchal and androcentric (Cnossen, 1994). There is now a considerable literature on the relationships between masculinity and military activity (Addleston and Stirrat 1996; Barrett 1996; Cohn 1995; Connell 1993, 1995a, 1995b; Cooke and Woollacott 1993; Donaldson 1993; Elliot 1996; Morgan 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997 Chapter 5; ). The salient points of this body of literature are as follows. First, there are many forms of military masculinity; indeed, it is the relationship between different models of military masculinity that underpins the basis of much military organisation. For example, Connell (1995a) notes how in contemporary Anglo-american culture a masculinity celebrating a capacity for physical violence, yet subordinate to orders is dominated by one celebrating organisation competence. Second, different cultures have celebrated or derided different models of military masculinity at different points in time. For example, the publically derided Tommy of Kipling's eponymous poem indicates the low social esteem accorded the rank and file soldier in Victorian England. Third, there are parallels and connections between, on the one hand, the values and attributes of what Connell terms hegemonic masculinity (aggression, capacity for violence, aggressive heterosexuality) and on the other had the dominant model of military masculinity, the warrior hero (see Dawson 1984, Newsinger 1997, Parker 1995). The warrior hero is physically fit and powerful. He is mentally strong and unemotional. He is capable of both solitary, individual pursuit of his goals and self-denying contribution towards the work of the team. He's also a bit of a hero with a knack for picking up girls (I'm being ironic here) and is resolutely heterosexual. He is brave, adventurous and prepared to take risks. Crucially, he is possessed of the abilities to conquer hostile environments, cross unfamiliar terrain and lay claim to



dangerous ground. He appears, for example, as poster-sized centrefold in a recruitment pack sent out to aspirant soldiers. He wades waist-high through a river, leading a patrol of followers, weapon ready, camouflaged against the backdrop of reeds and branches, captioned by the words 'ACTION YOUNG ON-THE-MOVE SORTED WELL-TRAINED' (Army Recruiting Group undated).

The warrior hero is a model of military masculinity, not a tangible reality. But he provides an important starting point for analysis, first because this cultural icon informs the production of many of the discourses of masculinity evident in the datasources outlined above, and second because (as with all ideal types) he is open to subversion and contradiction, as well as reproduction. He is also useful to follow because he, of all military masculinities, engages with rural environments. He is, after all, an Infantryman (an occupation from which women are barred in the British Army).

The idea that there might be distinct rural masculinities (one of which might be military) seems at first sight a strange one, perhaps another cry from rural studies to draw attention to its sub-disciplinary specificity in an increasingly post-disciplinary social science. However, there are both strategic and epistemological reasons for framing this exploration of the construction of military masculinities across space with reference to rural masculinities. Strategically, talking of rural masculinity signals two conceptually important points. The first is an explicit recognition of the importance of space and place in the construction of gender identities. As outlined above, masculinities are produced with reference to their both real and imagined locations. Talking explicitly of rural masculinity re-enforces that point about

locational significance. The second strategic reason for talking of rural masculinity is that it makes explicit the importance of gender identities in the construction of rurality. There has been, of course, a significant and illuminating debate within rural studies in the 1990s on the meaning of 'the rural'. One outcome of this has been an increased emphasis on rurality as a social construction (see Cloke and Little 1997; Halfacree 1995; Jones 1995; Milbourne 1997; Murdoch and Pratt 1993 & 1994; Philo 1993; Pratt 1996). Talking of rural masculinity emphasises both a conceptual allegiance to this 'social constructionist' approach in rural studies, as well as making an explicit statement on the centrality of gender in the structuring of rural social relations and social life (Little and Austin 1996).

There are also epistemological reasons for studying military masculinity within a conceptual framework suggested by the notion of 'rural masculinity'. Although the study of rural masculinity *could* be taken to mean the mapping of different types of masculinity onto different types of rural space, a rather more interesting approach is an interpretative one looking at rural masculinities as social constructions. This involves an examination of the ways in which rurality and masculinity connect or bounce off each other, looking for connections and discontinuities. It also entails looking for the consequences, particularly of the politics and power relations implicit within discursive formations in social life. The power relations implicit in gender identities do much to shape the social structure and culture of particular localities and institutions. Where they are unequal, discriminatory or destructive, this needs critical assessment. Where they are positive, they suggest progressive mechanisms for social change. Viewed from this perspective, the study of rural masculinities becomes not

only the assessment of the construction of spatialized masculinities, but also the examination of the implications and consequences which flow from this.

### **The countryside and rurality in the construction of military masculinity**

There is nothing essential about the linkages between masculinity and rurality, nothing inherent in rurality that determines an automatic role for it in the construction of military masculinity. The point about the connections that I am drawing is that they arise through circumstance and are reinforced through social practices. A good place to start unpacking and examining this process is with the promises made to potential recruits in literature aimed at attracting them to life in the armed forces. The purpose of army recruitment literature is simple – to present a picture of life in the army in such a way as to attract recruits with the attributes suitable for moulding into an identified finished product, the competent soldier. Although recruitment literature is aimed at a fairly tightly defined group (young men and women in good physical health), the range of occupations open within the army is broad, and the literature has to cater for this diversity. Accordingly, the army produces a range of brochures, posters and booklets specific to the different branches in the army (such as infantry, artillery, engineers, signals). The ones I draw from here are for infantry training. Infantry training is significant because, as one of the combat arms it is closed to women.

To the civilian academic, what is immediately striking about this recruitment literature is the emphasis placed on the totality of the experience of military life. Being a soldier, this literature states, is all-encompassing. Becoming a soldier requires complete commitment and determination. The trade-off for this commitment, it

seems, comes in terms of the rewards this brings. In the words of one brochure, joining up brings 'Training for life, unbeatable rewards, excitement and adventure, a great lifestyle, a job worth doing'. Being a soldier entails a whole new lifestyle. 'Training for Life' is central to the production of military masculinity. It involves the transformation from civilian to soldier. As part of this process, the values and attributes associated with the 'warrior hero' have to be inculcated in the individual; gender identities have to be changed. This change, I would argue, is produced through the process of military training.

Military training is the acquisition and development of a collection of physical and mental attributes required in order to undertake the tasks required to wage war. The process requires the shaping and moulding of individuals according to a uniform template for appearance, behaviour and attitude (see Beevor 1991, BBC 1999). The countryside as location and rurality as social construction are quite fundamental to the development of the requisite physical and mental attributes. For a start, rural areas provide the location and backdrop to most army training. All recruitment brochures make use of this backdrop. For example, an Army Recruiting Group brochure combines text describing the routine of infantry training with a series of photographs in which men and women load mortars on a hill side, crouch camouflaged in woodland and run full tilt down a fell (Army Recruiting Group, undated a and b). Another brochure on *Getting Fit for the Army* uses similar illustrations with text explaining that:

Being a soldier is an active, outdoor life whichever part of the Army you join.

You have to be able to think fast, keep going and do your job even when you're tired and working in difficult conditions. (ATRA 1999, npn)

The rural location provides the backdrop, but is also constructed as a challenging location against which the recruit is pitted. It is at this point that we see different constructions of rurality being drawn upon in the representation of the training process. For example, the artillery firing, exercises in camouflage use and fell running take place in a bleak moorland landscape spread out under lowering grey clouds (ARG, undated b).

In order to deal with the challenges of both training and its location, the recruitment literature places great emphasis on the particular physical attributes that are needed.

First and foremost, the soldier has to be, literally, 'fighting fit':

The Army operates in all sorts of climates and terrains around the world and its men and women have to be ready to take up that challenge at a moment's notice. From steamy jungles to snowy mountains, you will be trained to carry out your specialist and military roles quickly and effectively. You will become fitter and stronger than you have ever been and you will learn to think on your feet and respond to rapidly changing circumstances. (Army Recruiting Group undated a: npn)

This physical fitness, then, is a quality needed for mastery of a variety of terrains. Again, a rurality creeps in; note how fitness is needed for jungle and mountain terrain. Presumably, training for foot patrols on the streets of Sarajevo or Nicosia does not have the same allure. Above all, this physical fitness is central to the type of

masculinity promoted as a desirable (possibly necessary) attribute of the infantry soldier. Physical fitness is absolutely essential to the role of the foot soldier, and thus is celebrated as a defining attribute within this particular model of military masculinity. It is also necessary in order to transcend the environment in which the soldier finds him or herself. This is as much a valued attribute of the warrior hero as it is for the soldier in practice.

In order to work towards this peak of physical strength, recruits undertake a period of Basic Training. The rural location for this is important; this is not just fitness training on an athletics track but fitness to tackle nature. Recruitment literature draws heavily on rural as location and as construction in spatialising or grounding this element of training. After a first week of drill skills, map reading and instruction in health and hygiene, a second week of Fieldcraft puts recruits straight out into the open air of an Army Field Training Centre in order to get to grips with the countryside:

You'll learn camouflage techniques and have your first taste of night training. That means using your eyes and ears in a different way — exploring how to identify noises at night, and how to see more clearly using off-centre vision. On your first night exercise, you and your battle partner operate in a buddy/buddy team. You'll build a shelter, which you'll sleep in, you'll cook your rations, and look out for each other. (Army Recruiting Group undated b: 15)

Training is about the development of both physical and mental attributes. In the above quotation, we see how this includes the acquisition of a new way of being in the countryside, which involves the use of camouflage and night vision, and reliance on the senses. For many recruits, this will involve quite a fundamental shift; senior

military personnel frequently complain about the lack of outdoors experience amongst a largely urban-based army intake (BBC 1999, Beevor 1991). The rural in the above quotation is about more than just physical location. The rurality constructed here is matched to the task; the great outdoors is a place for survival, rather than pastoral contemplation, a place of potential hazard and danger rather than a leisured landscape. It is certainly not the rural idyll of community and nature in harmony, perhaps imagined by a largely urban body of recruits.

A new way of being in the countryside requires a new way of seeing that countryside. The inculcation of environmental awareness in recruits is entirely necessary, given the urban backgrounds, lack of education and lack of affinity for the natural environment of many of them; the task of training videos, for example, is 'to turn a recruit with a disregard for the environment into someone with a stake in the countryside' (Coulson, pers. comm., 1998). One such video, *It's Plain Sense Too*, sets up a vision of the countryside as the object of legitimate military concerns. This vision is carried forward in a discourse which establishes the scope of military activities in the rural training estate as a balance between effective training and environmental disturbance (see Woodward, forthcoming for a critique of this discourse). A new way of seeing the countryside comes packaged in an ethos which emphasises the specificity of the military vision of rurality and its use of the training estate; '[T]he last thing we want to do is give the Greens any reason to try and curtail our activities' (Army Department 1996). It is made more palatable to the perhaps disparaging recruit through the use of humour, provided by the actor Tony Robinson (the Baldrick character in the *Blackadder* television series, and presented of the archaeology television programme

*Timewatch*) dressed up as variously Ancient Briton, Roman Legionnaire, Civil War Royalist and First World War recruit. An example:

Us ancient Brits were very fond of [Salisbury Plain]. We always had respect for the environment though, even in the heat of battle. Once I was locked in mortal combat with the local bully, Snogbag the Swine. I was just about to deal him a deathly blow with my club when he shouts out “Look out! An orchid” and there beneath my feet was a rare and delicate flower that we were about to trample on. Forgetting our blood lust for a moment, I bent down to savour the beauty and fragrance of this tiniest of nature’s miracles. Snogbag, a warm smile creasing across his fearsome face, then stabbed me in the leg, the bastard. Still, those were the days. We led a simple life, harvesting our crops, raising our cattle, shagging anything that moved, which more often than not was our cattle. But they do say that whatever you take out of nature you should put back in again, so that was probably quite a green thing to do really.

Space and danger of wandering off-topic precludes a detailed analysis of the politics of the humour; suffice it to say, as Beevor notes, the British soldier has always survived on a sick sense of humour, doubtless a form of self-protection in stressful battle situations (Beevor 1991). More central to the paper is the point that military discipline, that essential attribute in an organisation with the monopoly on legitimate violence, includes the discipline to consider the impact of military training on the natural environment; as the closing video caption states, ‘Train and Preserve, Preserve and Train’.

This new way of being in the countryside also requires new ways of being in a group. Again, we see the values attributed to a model of military masculinity being developed



as part of the training process, and we also see the role played by the rural in this process. The tension between individualism and teamwork is one of the hallmarks of the warrior hero model of military masculinity; the warrior hero needs both. Teamwork is required to enable group survival in hostile environments. Adam Ballinger (1992) and Sarah Ford (1997) both make the point during their accounts of Special Forces training when they describe the rotas for sleep, guard duty and eating required during night patrol; the mistakes of one individual can mean failure for the whole group on the course. Individualism outwith its appropriate context is discouraged. The warrior hero needs to support his or her mates. The importance of the development of teamwork as a soldierly attribute is also evident in the quotation above. The key point here is the portrayal of teamwork as necessary ('you'll look out for each other') but fun; cooking, eating and sleeping in a 'buddy/buddy' team are activities associated with camping as much as with military training. The rural location here thus provides novelty and excitement, as well as being a place for survival against the elements. Survival of the great outdoors is obviously important as a test separating the men from the boys, but it's also exciting and adventurous.

The model of military masculinity also celebrates individualism and lone independent endeavour. Again, this is a quality required by the soldier and trained for in the recruit. The emotional challenges of Week 9 of Basic Training, when Adventurous Training begins, involve developing and testing the ability and aptitude in the recruit for solitary work:

You travel to one of the camps in Wales, Scotland or on the South coast.

Whilst much of the focus of the previous weeks has been on teamwork, this week is about your individual development. Through exercises such as hill

walking, orienteering, canoeing, and abseiling, you'll face excitement, fear and challenge, and learn how to control and use your emotions effectively. (Army Recruiting Group undated b: 15)

Needless to say, the rural is celebrated in the accompanying photography as both backdrop to these activities, and as part of the necessary context for training in these activities. It is the latter which is particularly striking in this example, with the rural as context for the provision of circumstances in which emotions – excitement, fear and a sense of challenge – can be stimulated and then overcome through the acquisition of the necessary mental attributes. Again, visual images of a bleak, open, inhospitable moorland landscape accompany the text, and again, I would argue, we can see the rural as the medium through which specific values associated with the model of military masculinity are transmitted to the soldier.

The three emotions highlighted in the above quotation - excitement, fear and the sense of challenge - figure strongly in soldiers' own accounts of the military training process. For example, Ballinger's account of the selection procedure for recruitment into the Special Forces illustrates the sense of excitement well when he talks about survival training in terms of a boy's own adventure story (Ballinger 1992). This is a highly gendered discourse; a high ranking British General talks in his memoirs of organising adventurous training weekends along army lines for his son and friends, and defines them as strictly boy's activities, excluding his daughter from participation (de la Billière 1994; see also Woodward, 1998).

Fear, the second emotion, is critical in training. Fear, a natural reaction to battle, has to be conquered for the infantry soldier to perform his or her tasks on the battlefield.

Much of the Army's justification for the use of large training ranges rather than reliance on simulation for battle training rests with the need to inculcate fear as well as an ability to transcend physical discomfort into soldiers as part of their training. As one publicity video puts it:

If they are to perform the tasks we ask of them with any confidence our soldiers must get dirty, wet, tired and scared. This is the absolute bottom line of all military training. (SSVC 1995)

Being afraid of that landscape and of one's own security within it is a prominent theme in soldiers' accounts of their own training, and again, conquering that fear is an essential step for these would-be warrior heroes. Fear is experienced but controlled; this model of military masculinity admits fright but conquers it for use to the soldier's advantage. As McNab's *Bravo Two Zero* illustrates, the use of humour helps, with sick jokes cracked at tense times. The books' heroes laugh in the face of danger,

The third emotion (or more accurately, attribute) that seems central in Adventurous Training is that of facing up to or meeting a challenge, be it physical or mental. The sense of sheer physical and emotional challenge faced by trainees, be they raw 17 year old civilian recruits or hardened elite soldiers, is articulated well by Ballinger. He talks of endless, punishing weekends spent out on the hills.

... we walked, climbed and ran in our squadrons for nine hours without a break. We rarely used paths and never roads. We went from A to B, usually on a compass bearing. At the end, high up in the hills of North Wales, Scott [an officer] stopped us and each man sat on his bergen [pack], grateful for the rest. We sat in a curve, two or three rows deep, around him. The wind

whistled over the ridge, and our smocks, soaked with sweat, flapped against our skin. (Ballinger 1992: 57)

Spence describes one such 30 km hike at Penn-y-Fan in the Brecon Beacons, Wales: ‘These things are done at a hell of a lick and are, frankly, gut-busters.’ (Spence 1997: 14). The recruits become exhausted, cold, wet, tired, hungry and injured, but still they carry on. And throughout, urged on by superior officers, their identities as men are made. The sheer physical challenge of route marches and mountain running is presented as a test of one’s manhood. The warrior hero must be fit enough to conquer landscapes; indeed, he is literally made in the landscape of the army’s training areas. This process of meeting a physical challenge is coupled with the development of mental aggression sufficient to drive the soldier forward. Aggression, a hallmark of the warrior hero model of military masculinity, is cultivated on the wide moorland landscapes of military training areas. Ballinger recalls one conversation where he and his fellow recruits realise this is happening.

‘Are you enjoying the course, Avery?’ I asked.

‘I wouldn’t say I was enjoying it, exactly,’ he said, [...] but it does give you a chance of distinguishing yourself physically.’ [...]

‘Besides,’ he added, after a pause, ‘Selection has totally changed my outlook on life.’

‘What, already? In what way?’

‘Bullshit,’ he said. ‘I can’t take bullshit any more. Also I am much more aggressive.’

(Ballinger 1992: 65)

As I noted in the Introduction, masculinities are often defined in opposition or relation to other masculine or feminine gender identities. Looking at the oppositional ideas drawn into the construction of this model of military masculinity is indicative in showing what the warrior hero is and is not. For the warrior hero, to falter is female. Ballinger (1992) tells of endless insults shouted by superior officers to recruits unable to finish each specific element of the selection and training course, couched in terms which equate failure with effeminacy. “What’s this? The Girl Guides?” shouts one. Aggressive heterosexuality accompanied by a fierce homophobia matches this fear of the female, and is also a hallmark of this model of military masculinity. “Are you queer?”, “are you a fairy?”, shouts the Sergeant Major at faltering recruits. Femininity is despised when encountered in the landscape. Ballinger talks of the failure of one recruit to climb a mountain in terms which suggest the recruit’s seduction by the beauty of the landscape is the cause of his downfall. In another section of the book, he quotes a commanding officer’s description of the darkness of a moonless nighttime Welsh moorland landscape through the use of the simile ‘As black as a witch’s tit’. The labelling of attributes as female, and the subsequent denial of their place in the lifeworld of the soldier, is a key component of this model of military masculinity.

In summary, the rural constructed in military training is matched to the masculinities exemplified in the strong, brave, hard warrior hero. Training takes place in dangerous territory. This is not the green and pleasant idyll but rather bleak, hostile wilderness of nature red in tooth and claw where only the tough survive. The exception is the bucolic, pastoral rural is constructed by the army as the object for military protection; the harsh, bleak rural is constructed as the location that makes the soldier. By

dominating this landscape, through passing the physical and emotional challenges set by it, the recruit passes the selection process and the soldier is made.<sup>1</sup>

At the centre of this exploration of the construction of rural military masculinity sits a big question. Why is rurality so important (as I suggest it is) to the construction of this model of military masculinity? Modern warfare is, after all, a technological affair relying more on a soldier's ability to master the use of complex equipment. (This is itself a site for the creation of further military masculinities as Barrett (1996) describes.) With the exception of some of the British army's activities in Northern Ireland, the military activities the British army has been called upon to engage in over the past 50 years have been in environments far removed from the uplands and heathlands where this training takes place. So why is rurality so important in the construction of military masculinity?

There are three explanations. First, as this paper has discussed and convenience aside, rural locations are chosen specifically to construct and mould the soldier in specific ways. Training happens in cold wet hillsides for very good reasons; army officers believe that it produces better soldiers.

Second, there is the centrality of rural space as the primary location for much military activity in Britain. Most of the land owned and/or used for military purposes in the UK, some 2% of the land area, is rural. It is remote from urban centres, sparsely populated, devoid of pressures for urban development or intensive agriculture (though

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of wilderness is relative, of course. North American readers will equate wilderness with rather a different landscape (untouched, unpopulated, unfarmed) to the wilderness that British ruralities

farming does take place on training areas) or marginal in some other way. Although many central military administrative functions are located in towns and cities (the Ministry of Defence is located in the heart of London), the daily organisational and training functions that go towards the maintenance of a standing army are mostly carried out in rural areas. The British army's status as a predominantly rural institution is a consequence of its use of vast areas of rural estate, itself a reflection of historical requirement and necessity and a result of social requirements for the majority of the population to remain undisturbed by the sights and sounds of military activity, particularly training.

Third, a rural inheritance is woven into the very fabric of the armed forces. There would never be any possibility (even if there were the suggestion, which is unlikely) that these lands should be relinquished in exchange for the acquisition of training grounds more closely suited to the theatres of combat in which the army engages. Safety, expense and lack of available territory precludes it. It is also possible that landed elite from which the officer class is still largely drawn would also be reluctant to shift base to unknown territory (Strachan 1997). Ultimately, discourses of militarism and rurality legitimate the location of soldiers in the British countryside. These discourses operate on many levels within British (or often exclusively English) cultural life. See, for example, the construction of the rural as the legitimate place for the bearing of arms (farmers' shotguns or soldiers' rifles contrast with the illegitimate weapons of the urban criminal or terrorist). Or, for example, the strong symbolic link between rurality and nationhood ('England is the country and the country is England',

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denote as bare, tree-free moorland landscapes used only for extensive sheep-farming, grouse shooting and military training.

in Stanley Baldwin's over-quoted phrase) where national defence is constructed with explicit reference to rural imagery. In short, the rural as location and the rural as social construction are fundamental to military cultures, and to the gender identities which those cultures produce.

### **The consequences of rural military masculinity**

In conclusion, I return to the question raised at the beginning concerning politics of this particular rural masculinity, by looking at the implications of this model of masculinity both for rural communities, and for women in the armed forces.

One set of implications is the impact of this military masculinity on daily life for those in rural communities dominated by the major army field training centres and other large training establishments. In quantitative terms, this is not a huge problem for the majority of those living in rural Britain; the areas affected are relatively small. In qualitative terms, it is the impact of the military *per se*, rather than of military masculinities that is most often cause for comment. But for those areas dominated by this activity, there are occasional concerns. For example, one resident of a village adjacent to the Otterburn Training Area in the north-east of England confided to me during fieldwork there her fears for the social structure and 'balance' of the village, given the army camp with its transient military population up the road. Otterburn, she said, was 'too macho' as a result (see also Jacky Tivers' examination of the military landscapes of the garrison town of Aldershot: Tivers, 1998).

The second set of implications are those for women in the armed forces. I have implied in this paper that the British Army is a masculine institution, its members



moulded by social constructions of masculinity. I have also presented the warrior hero as a hegemonic model of masculinity amongst many. This model may be open for subversion as well as reproduction, but the point remains that it is dominant, it exists and it is resolutely male.

This leaves women in an unenviable position. There are only 7000 women in the army, around 6.4% of a total force of around 105,000 (DASA 1999). An on-going recruitment crisis in the 1990s combined with a social climate demanding equal employment opportunities for women resulted in the opening-up of many hitherto closed trades in the army to women in 1998. This has pushed up the intake of women to the army, who currently make up 14% of all new recruits, but on current estimates the proportion of women in the Army will not reach 10% until at least 2006. But military culture remains dominated by a model of military masculinity defined as aggressive towards women and hostile to the idea of gender integration and co-operation. Inducing cultural change is difficult at the best of times, and surely virtually impossible in the armed forces? As Sarah Ford notes in her account of training and action with the Special Forces, there seemed little point in trying to challenge an in-grained, deeply misogynistic culture from the inside; it seemed better to either ignore it or to quietly subvert it (Ford, 1997). Furthermore, most most soldiers probably benefit from this model of military masculinity. By being selected for recruitment, and by succeeding in training, they are marked out as distinct. If the model of military masculinity is indeed hegemonic, then to live up to that model in some way must bring with it privilege and status in the eyes of others.

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