

Institution: Keele University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA19 Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Enhancing understandings of soldiers' and families' experiences and memories of contemporary war: The Parachute Regiment and the Falklands conflict		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Sept 2012-Sept 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Prof Helen Parr	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Modern and Contemporary History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2004 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2018 onwards		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Parr's ground-breaking, multi-award-winning research into contemporary soldiers and the legacies of war, published in the monograph, <i>Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper</i>, achieved exceptional reach. This is evidenced by its reception in the press and amongst readers, and by multiple invitations for Parr to address diverse audiences. Her research brought deep impact to former soldiers, improving their wellbeing and mitigating personal harms. It changed the views of non-military readers about the nature of military life and combat, and it impacted current military training by shaping Army commanders' understanding of relationships between military training, identity and trauma.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Helen Parr carried out the underpinning research from 2012 to 2018. She conducted extensive archival work and in-depth interviews with many paratroopers who fought in the Falklands War, and with family members of soldiers who died. Parr also used source material and interviews to interrogate the death of her uncle, a Private in the Parachute Regiment, and her own family's responses to it. She was attentive to the writing up of the research, the mood and tone of the language in which her book was written. One of her book's major achievements was to translate military experiences into words understood by former combatants as well as by wider publics.</p> <p>Parr's research sought to understand the human stories of men from an elite infantry regiment who fought in the Falklands, and those of their family members, while placing those stories into wider historical contexts. This determination to put the participants at the centre of their own stories – to see history through their eyes – while reconstructing the settings of the experiences, led to work that was rich in emotional detail and attuned to individuals' experiences. The research aimed to understand the social and military contexts within which participants lived. This helped readers (including participants) to identify with the personal accounts relayed in the book.</p> <p>This original, empathetic approach enabled Parr to expose the emotional depth of combat experience, trauma and grief. It illustrated the ongoing, but changing, nature of memories for ex-combatants and for bereaved relatives. She argued that masculine and military identities were central to soldiers' experience of combat, and suggests this should receive wider public recognition. Yet she also sees military identity as a complex professional identity framing many of the difficulties individuals face after combat. Her work has been praised for bringing the interior complexities of military life into the public domain. Reviewing Parr's book in <i>The Spectator</i>, novelist Rachel Seiffert said it was: 'a history that is important to understand as so few people have personal experience of military service' (5.1).</p>		

Summary of research insights:

- a. To illuminate, and capture accurately, the intensity of combat experiences for these elite soldiers.
- b. To highlight the emotional depth and ongoing nature of memories of combat for many former soldiers, and their families. To focus on the experiences of grief, and post-combat trauma, in their historical settings.
- c. To analyse the construction during military training of masculine, soldierly, regimental identities, and to assess how those identities framed soldiers' experiences of combat and the aftermath of war.
- d. To illustrate the importance to individuals and institutions of relationships between Army and society, namely, the social backgrounds of recruits and how these mapped onto the hierarchies in the Parachute Regiment, also, the relationships between military families, a non-military public and the armed services.
- e. To emphasise key issues in the remembrance of contemporary war, and to indicate how greater societal attention to families, individual soldiers, and to personal pain has altered how Britons commemorate soldiers and war.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)**Outputs**

Parr's work was published as one, high profile monograph in September 2018. She opted to publish in this way to maximise the reach of the work, and because the research insights had most effect when brought together, rather than separated into different themes. Bringing the research insights together in this way enabled the creative, original, in-depth approach of the book.

Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper (Allen Lane, 2018) – Hardback published 6 September 2018

Paperback published 6 June 2019, and Audible Audiobook, 10 October 2019.

Funding

Parr's work was initially funded by a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Grant that enabled much of the interview and some of the archival research.

2012: British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Grant, no.SG120253, 'The Falklands War 1982 and its aftermath', £9,604

Subsequently, and as a mark of the reach of the work, Parr was awarded an AHRC collaborative doctoral partnership for a PhD student jointly with the Imperial War Museum:

2018: 'Surviving modern war: The experiences of British service personnel during the Falklands conflict 1982', AHRC funded collaborative doctoral partnership, £56,000

Evidence of quality of the research

The quality of the research is evident as Parr won three national book prizes: the Templer Medal Book Prize (April 2019), the Duke of Wellington Medal for Military History, administered by the Royal United Services Institute (June 2019), and the Longman-History Today Book Prize (June 2019). The book was also longlisted for the Orwell Prize for Political Writing (June 2019). (5.3).

On publication, the hardback monograph received exceptional media coverage. Parr's book was reviewed prominently throughout the national press. It was lead review in four national newspapers (the *Guardian*, the *Evening Standard*, the *Spectator*, the *Times Higher*) and was subject of a feature in the *Observer* and an article in the *Telegraph* (5.1). The book was also listed as one of ten biggest reads of the Autumn 2018 in the *Guardian*. Guardian journalist Ian Jack named it as one of his cultural highlights of the year, and Boyd Tonkin (former judge of the Man Booker Prize) listed it as one of his books of the year on the website Artsdesk. It was a book of

the year in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2018, and Lord Jonathan Sumption listed it as one of his books of the year in the *Spectator* in 2019. Parr was invited onto Radio 4's flagship cultural programme *Start the Week*, and her book was Book of the Day in the *Guardian*, the *London Evening Standard*, the *Spectator* and Book of the Week in the *Times Higher*. (5.1, 5.8).

Sales of the book led many people (c.60-70 unsolicited correspondents) to contact Parr directly, to leave spontaneous reviews on Amazon (100 ratings and 43 reviews to date; 8 reviews and 62 ratings on goodreads), and to Parr receiving invitations to speak to public and military audiences (24 talks in 16 months; 6 radio and podcast interviews). Many reviewers praised Parr's writing and noted the originality of the work: 'her book is deeply researched, but her approach to military history is also highly original' (Anthony Lloyd, *The Times*). Many former military personnel have remarked on how accurately she has captured their feelings. Chair of the Foreign and Defence Parliamentary Select Committee, and former Army officer, Tom Tugendhat MP said the book: 'opens up a world foreign to most... reveals many truths about the British Army that are essential to understanding our armed services' (5.1).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research:

- a) Brought deep and sometimes painful self-recognition to former and current soldiers, by expressing their experiences of combat and its aftermath: 'you have explained us to ourselves'. This enhanced well-being and mitigated potential harms to them. (5.4; 5.9)
- b) Impacted current training by bringing deeper understanding to British Army commanders of links between military training, identity and trauma, and of the aftermaths of combat (5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.10)
- c) Brought to public audiences an understanding of military life and combat experiences normally hidden from public view and poorly understood (5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.5)

Impact on understanding and well-being of former soldiers

c.40-50 former soldiers contacted Parr to express gratitude at the recognition her book granted them of their own lives. KHY said 'I found it very helpful and you answered questions about my own thoughts, feelings and behaviours' (5.4). KC said the recognition he felt on reading the book gave him 'a feeling of great relief' (5.4). Parr's work gave routes to understand their own masculine and soldierly identities, and thereby offered paths towards quite profound, intimate healing. JY said 'you made me look at the war in a different light, made me question how I have handled the consequences' (5.4). MB wrote to Parr about feeling he would die, his loneliness and the suicides of his friends. He said, 'But I have a little girl, who I love dearly and I will have to live until she graduates. I suppose what I am trying to say is Thanks, for remembering us' (5.4). KRF said Parr's research helped his youngest daughter 'better to understand who I am and therefore who she is'. He said it helped him to 'let go of things he should never have had hold of in the first place'. (5.4) An Argentine veteran said Parr's research made him see that British veterans 'are just the same as me' (5.9).

Impact on practitioners

Parr's research deepened current military commanders' understandings of the relationships between military identity and combat trauma; and the responsibilities regiments have towards the relatives of the soldiers they deploy (5.6, 5.10). A current serving officer said Parr's research made him reflect on his own experience of 'losing soldiers under circumstances of being in the wrong place at the wrong time' (5.9). Parr's book is now mandatory reading for officers in training at Sandhurst destined for the Parachute Regiment. The most senior person in the Parachute Regiment, Colonel Commandant General Sir John Lorimer, said it is 'the first book to try and succeed to get under the skin of the Parachute Regiment soldier'. Reading it will impact the 'future platoon commanders' understand[ing] of the soldiers under [their] command' (5.7). The current Commanding Officer of the Second Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, said Parr's work influenced his understanding of potential links between the inculcation of soldierly identity in

training and later reluctance to seek support for stress or depression; and that Parr's research 'compelled us carefully to consider our actions and decisions when placing paratroopers in harm's way' (5.6). The Commanding Officer of the First Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment, said that Parr's research had prompted much discussion amongst his officers about 'how we train for the next conflict... a legacy indeed' (5.10).

Impact on understanding and well-being amongst members of the public

Parr's research impacted members of the public by bringing attention to military experiences and changing people's views as to their nature and meanings. One Amazon reviewer said she saw for the first time the social backgrounds of the men who joined the army: 'we learn so much about the army, the para regiment, the people who served within it - and the people who love or loved them'. (5.2) Other respondents writing spontaneously to Parr said it changed their views of the army, and war. It led them to question how war is traditionally commemorated: 'helped me to see how memory speaks to who we are' (5.9, 5.5). They understood better why young men might join the army, and, often, the book gave them greater empathy for soldiers (5.5, 5.9). Parr's writing about universal emotions such as grief also impacted people and contributed to their own well-being. SM said Parr's book helped him come to terms with his father's death by making him better understand his mother's feelings (5.5). The emotional power of the research, and therefore its potential for deep impact, is plain from the number of reviewers commenting that they cried while reading it (5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Reviews of book in national press

Claire Armitstead, Interview with Helen Parr, 'The Falklands War retold', *The Observer*, 26 August 2018:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/26/falklands-war-retold-helen-parr-our-boys>

Ian Jack, 'Our Boys by Helen Parr Review' *The Guardian* (13 Sept 2018)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/13/our-boys-by-helen-parr-review-falklands>

Lara Feigel in *Prospect*:

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/helen-carr-our-boys-review-lara-feigel/>

Robert Fox in *Evening Standard*:

<https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/our-boys-the-story-of-a-paratrooper-by-helen-parr-review-a3934871.html>

Ian Jack in *Guardian*:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/sep/13/our-boys-by-helen-parr-review-falklands>

Anthony Loyd in *The Times*:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/review-our-boys-the-story-of-a-paratrooper-by-helen-parr-the-paras-warts-and-all-8hhwhnpzr>

Rachel Seiffert in *The Spectator*:

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/09/helen-parrs-intimate-portrait-of-the-parachute-regiment-our-boys-captures-the-essence-of-modern-britain/>

Tony Gould in *The Oldie*:

<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-oldie/20181201/281539406955695>

Andy Beckett in *London Review of Books*

Helen Parr, Essay in *The Telegraph*, How the Falklands War Defined my Family

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/life/falklands-defined-family/>

Boyd Tonkin, Best books of 2018

<https://theartsdesk.com/node/82455/view>

Ian Jack, Top Ten Cultural Highlights of 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/29/top-10-moments-2018>

5.2 Amazon and Good Reads Reviews

Reviews spontaneously left by readers:

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Our-Boys-Paratrooper-Helen-](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Our-Boys-Paratrooper-Helen-Parr/dp/0241288940/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=our+boys&qid=1571838360&s=books&sr=1-1)

[Parr/dp/0241288940/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=our+boys&qid=1571838360&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Our-Boys-Paratrooper-Helen-Parr/dp/0241288940/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=our+boys&qid=1571838360&s=books&sr=1-1)

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/38470189-our-boys>

5.3 Prizes

Templer Medal Book Prize, awarded by the Society for Army Historical Research, for the book that has made the 'greatest contribution to the study of the British army in any given year'

<https://www.sahr.org.uk/event-report.php?sid=a81b736722ca27b8a7925dcbbc0d9512&eventid=1000011>

Duke of Wellington Medal for Military History, awarded by the Royal United Services Institute, for the 'best writing on military history'

<https://rusi.org/rusi-news/duke-wellington-medal-military-history-2019-winners-announced>

Longman-History Today Prize

<https://www.historytoday.com/awards/longman-history-today-awards-2019-winners>

Longlisted for Orwell Prize for Political Writing

<https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/news-events/news-events/news/orwell-prizes-2019-longlists-announced/>

Chair Tulip Siddiq MP said that the longlists were testimony to the 'impact' of the author's work

5.4 Unsolicited email correspondence from former soldiers

5.5 Unsolicited email correspondence from other people (not former soldiers)

5.6 Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Matt Taylor, Commanding Officer of The Second Battalion, The Parachute Regiment

5.7 Email from Lieutenant General Sir John Lorimer, Colonel Commandant of The Parachute Regiment

5.8 List of public talks, including radio interviews and podcasts, and talks to military institutions

5.9 Feedback from public talks, and feedback from talks to military personnel

5.10 Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Thomas J Miller, Commanding Officer of First Battalion, The Yorkshire Regiment