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## **How (Not) to Sell a Military Memoir in Britain**

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### ***Abstract***

In this study, we look at all (n=15) military memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 in Britain about military participation in the Afghanistan conflict, to establish the factors that determine whether or not a military memoir becomes a better-seller (adjusted sales >15,000 copies). We look at three aspects of the book - content (i.e., type of plot), cover (e.g., whether rank or the award of medals is mentioned) and author features (e.g., rank, sex, co-authorship by another established writer, foreword by a well-known person) - and analyze data on these aspects, compared to sales figures, using SPSS. We find only two factors that correlate with higher sales: rank and the award of a medal.

### ***Keywords***

military memoir; book sales; soldier author; Afghanistan; publishing; autobiography; ISAF; OEF.

## ***Introduction***

Screenwriter William Goldman famously states in his book *Adventures in the Screen Trade* that ‘nobody knows anything’ (Goldman 2012 (1983): 39), referring to the notion that nobody in Hollywood can predict which films will become hits and which misses. In the book trade, the same uncertainty exists as to which books will sell and which will not (Ashok, Feng and Choi 2013: 1753; Thompson 2010: 203). So when the three of us (all social scientists specializing in contemporary military memoirs) were kindly provided with sales data on British Afghanistan memoirs by Nielsen BookScan, we found it an almost irresistible challenge to see whether it was possible to at least give some pointers on which military memoirs sell better than others and why that might be the case. What follows are our *Adventures in the Military Memoir Trade*.

Military memoirs – the autobiographical accounts by military personnel of their experiences of war and military participation – are a constant feature of literature of war. From the first known example, written in the fourth century BC by the Greek historian and soldier Xenophon (Lee 2005: 41), to the present in the United Kingdom, with over 150 military memoirs published since 1980 (Woodward and Jenkins 2012a: 352), they endure as a powerful and often very popular literary form. Yet there is great diversity within the form, not least in terms of public popularity. In this article, we examine this question of disparity among memoirs within one particular subset within the genre, that of United Kingdom memoirs of the war in Afghanistan. Basing our study on an observation concerning the very great differences between memoirs in this sub-set in terms of quantities of sales (from 1,681 to 96,369), we attempt to account for these differences in terms of the features of the memoirs themselves. Using a mixed-methods approach by applying both quantitative data analysis of features of the memoirs and more qualitative exploration of the

memoirs as texts and material objects, this article establishes which aspects of a published book appear to influence the volume of sales of the book. We conclude that there is a correlation between the authors' seniority of rank and sales, and between sales and the award of military service decoration (usually in the form of a combat valour medal). In our concluding discussion we discuss some of the wider contextual issues framing our analysis and comment on how the study of military memoirs can contribute to debates about militarism and culture in contemporary Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Any phenomenon as pervasive as the military memoir has consequently been studied extensively. Scholars have, for example, observed changes over time in terms of who writes military memoirs. Whereas in the premodern period, authors were primarily kings, noblemen and senior officers writing about their war experiences, from the mid-eighteenth century onward, more and more junior officers and common soldiers began writing and getting published (Harari 2007; Ramsey 2011). As Harari concludes: "Twentieth-century junior ranks' memoirs are some of the most influential historical texts ever to be written. The image of war dominant among the Western public today is probably shaped by these texts (either printed or filmed) more than by any other source" (Harari 2004: 19).

However, not all soldiers write, and studies indicate that contemporary memoirs in Anglo-American countries are predominantly written by combatants, such as special forces, infantry, and fighter pilots, and rarely by rear-echelon personnel (Jenkins and Woodward 2014; Kleinreesink 2014; Vernon 2005). Furthermore, talking about 'the author' suggests that a

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on two distinct research projects. The first (Kleinreesink) comprises a cross-comparative five-country study of the military memoirs of the Afghanistan war, 2001-2010. The second (Woodward and Jenkins) comprises a UK ESRC-funded study conducted in 2009-11 of the social production of the contemporary British military memoir, ESRC ref: RES-062-23-1493.

memoir is written exclusively by a single individual (i.e., the author who is also the protagonist of the story). However, this convention does not account for the fact that books are a product of a collaborative, social process (Becker 2008 (1982); Foucault 2001; Inge 2001; Jenkins and Woodward 2014), which is for example evident in the acknowledgements to other individuals that accompany the majority (61%) of western military Afghanistan memoirs<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, many U.K. books specifically credit a second person as a co-author, who is generally a novelist or journalist. A co-author may be indicated quite explicitly in the paratextual features of the book (see below), such as the cover and title page, or, more subtly, just through the colophon, the brief description of publication notes relevant to the edition right after the inside title page. In military memoirs, the question of authorship is never straightforward.

Scholars of the genre have also noted changes over time in the content of what soldiers write about, observing a shift from a premodern emphasis on eyewitness reports written to honour the people involved, to a modern focus on the stories of the flesh-witness dealing with the personal and embodied experience of war and what it reveals to the soldier undergoing it (Harari 2008; Harari 2009). Furthermore, and well-established in commentaries about the memoir, is the observation that while the revelatory aspect of memoirs may entail a positive growth experience, from the mid-nineteenth century we see the emergence of accounts by soldier-authors about their disillusionment with war (Bourke 2004; Fussell 1975/2000; Hynes 1997). Across the twentieth century, the nineteenth-century romantic image of war has been substituted by an image of war as hell, with soldiers less and less likely to portray themselves as heroes but rather as war's victims. This disillusionment is described by Herzog as a typical reaction of soldiers who "enter

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<sup>2</sup> 'Western' here refers to all military Afghanistan memoirs published in the US, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands between 2001-2010 in English, German or Dutch.

war with this sense of adventure and innocence shaped by cultural myths, an older generation's war stories, and society's beliefs about war as a rite of passage and a test of character and courage" (Herzog 1992: 4). While the shift to the disillusionment narrative is notable, it is not uniform, either within a particular national context, or across different contexts.

It is not just the authorship and content of the military memoir that is of scholarly interest. The content of these books has been noted as significant in terms of their representations of specific conflicts and in terms of their paratextual features (see, for example, Woodward and Jenkins (2012a and 2012b) on the Afghanistan war). The term *paratext* (Genette 1997) refers to all those elements that surround a text, from book covers, forewords and acknowledgments, in the narrow sense, to book reviews and interviews with the author, in the broader sense. Significant for our purposes here is the observation that the paratext of a book greatly influences the buying process, especially the cover of a book (d'Astous, Colbert and Mbarek 2006; Stokmans and Hendrickx 1994).

In terms of the scholarly analytic approaches taken toward military memoirs, it is striking that almost all studies in the field of (military) memoirs are qualitative in nature. Occasional examples exist of more quantitative analyses of memoirs, such as the number of military egodocuments in Dutch public archives between 1500 and 1900 (J. Blaak in: Baggerman 2010: 68-69), or the motives given by the writers in these archives (Dekker 1999). Analyses of a more quantitative nature are generally absent from the scholarship surrounding these books. This might be explained by the predominance of literary, cultural, and historical studies as the home disciplines of scholars studying memoirs, where quantitative analytic traditions are absent in

comparison with the social sciences. Yet certain key aspects of the military memoir are highly amenable to more quantitative exploration (Kleinreesink 2014), and are quite critical in contributing to our understanding of the wider social positioning and consumption of the genre. Significant here are the sales figures of military memoirs. Many of these books sell relatively modestly, but some go on to generate high-volume sales figures indicating a public appetite for these stories of participation in armed conflict (as well as financial returns to authors and publishers). This question of sales and readership is important because while many claims have been made (not least by Woodward and Jenkins) about the significance of the memoir for the production, articulation and circulation of public narratives about war and the military experience, there has to date been no analysis that accounts for the often significant differences among books in terms of their reception by the reading public<sup>3</sup>. While it is almost impossible to establish with certainty the range of responses these books provoke through the act of reading, what *is* possible is an analysis of the responses these books provoke as an item for purchase, as indicated by sales figures.

This article, then, is framed around a question posed by the differential sales figures of military memoirs of the Afghanistan war published in the United Kingdom between 2001 and 2010. Our question is this: *Based upon quantifiable evidence, what aspects of a military memoir influence whether the book will sell well in the United Kingdom?* In what follows, we explain the methodology underpinning our analysis, and then explore variables relating to the author, the book's content, and its paratext to establish which features are most significant in generating

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<sup>3</sup> Ashok et al (2013) have made a recent attempt to quantitatively indicate the success of novels, although not mainly based on sales data, but on Project Gutenberg downloads. They did not look at military memoirs, however.

high levels of sales. In the concluding discussion, we consider the significance of our findings for broader debates about the significance of the contemporary military memoir.

### ***Methodology***

This analysis draws on sales figures provided by Nielsen BookScan of fifteen military memoirs of experiences in the Afghanistan war published between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2001 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. The figures provided were of ‘lifetime sales’, which include every copy sold in the United Kingdom in both hardback and paperback imprints up to 23 February 2011. These figures do not include electronic versions of the books<sup>4</sup>. As books published later in this period can be expected to go on selling more copies, we applied a heuristic (“70-20-10”) to compensate for this effect. We expect books to sell most copies (70%) in the year of publication, but also continue selling 20% in the second year and 10% in the third year. With this heuristic, we arrive at adapted sales by multiplying the real sales figures of books published in 2010 by 10/7 and those from 2009 by 10/9. The full list of books in this sample, including (adapted) sales figures, is given in Appendix 1.

The sample comprises a subset of two different datasets. The first of these is an existing SPSS database of all 54 military Afghanistan memoirs published between 2001 and 2010 in seven Western countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands (Kleinreesink 2014). This database contains a range of quantifiable, descriptive variables on topics such as author, plot, and paratext. In principle, all data in the database are based on the texts of the books in the dataset, although in practice this has been supplemented by author inquiries, print- and web-based media sources, including

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<sup>4</sup> In this period, Ebook sales were still very modest; in the US in 2008, they accounted for just under 1 percent of total sales (Thompson, 2010: 315)

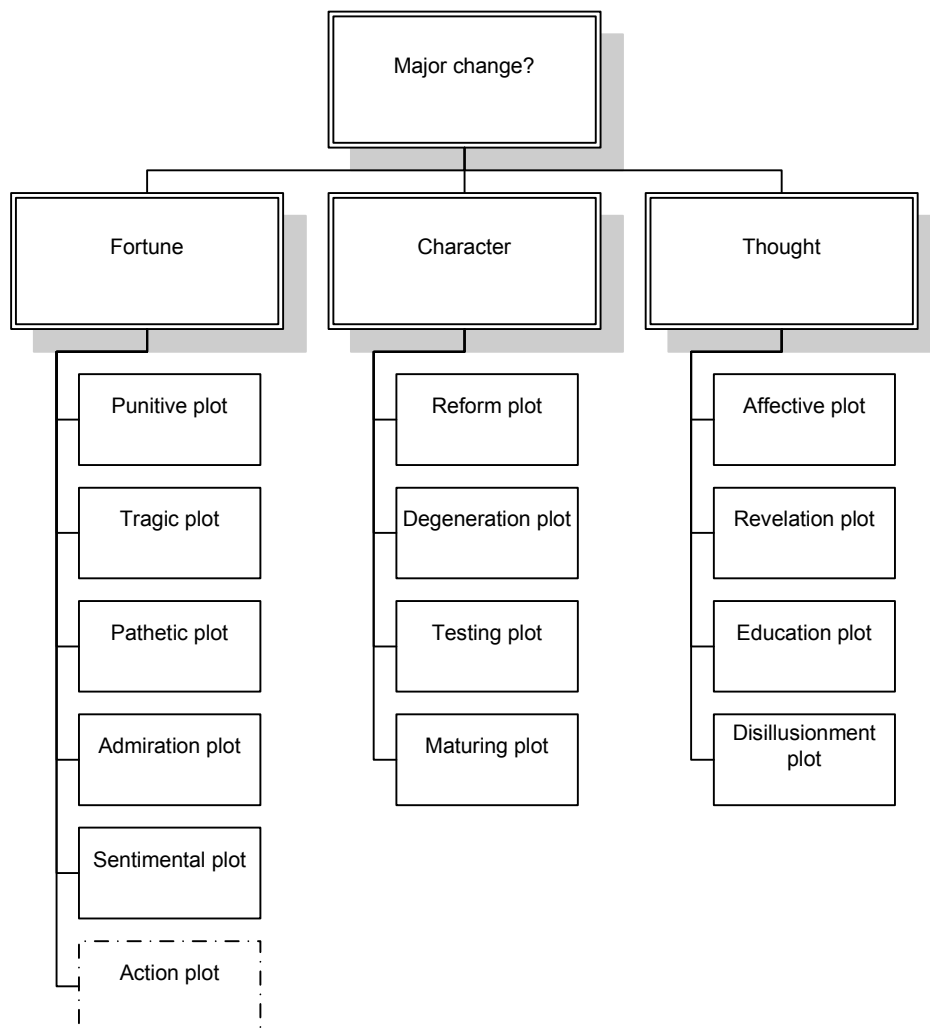


newspapers and author websites, and inquiries to publishers. The second dataset comprises over 150 memoirs published from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1980 by authors about their experiences of participation with British armed forces, and includes both accounts of active military operations as well as more autobiographical career histories which may or may not involve active deployment on operations, and complemented by additional interview data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted by a member of the research team with five of the authors of the books included in our sample here of fifteen memoirs.<sup>5</sup> Although this second dataset includes 26 books (at time of writing) dealing with the Afghanistan war, a number of these have been excluded from the present analysis in order to match with the selection criteria for the first dataset, which includes only those books where copyright (indicated in the colophon) at least partly rests with the author/protagonist, and in which over 50% of the content refers to the preparations for a deployment to Afghanistan, the deployment itself or its aftermath. The sample discussed in this article is therefore selective, and the sales data used are a snapshot of a specific point in time. We should also note that the findings of this analysis may be specific to the Afghanistan conflict. They comprise a small sample over a long war, rendering comparisons with the much larger sample of memoirs from the relatively short First World War inadvisable. The results of this analysis are also not directly comparable with an equivalent for the 1980s and 1990s, a period prior to the ban (by the British Ministry of Defence) on the publication of accounts of service with special forces such as the Special Air Service (SAS), which dominated British military memoirs during this period (Evans 2001).

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<sup>5</sup> The larger ESRC project from which this sample is drawn included interviews with 21 authors of memoirs published about participation with British armed forces from 1980 to the present.

In our analysis, the variables relating to author and paratextual features are straightforward and are explained in the discussion of results that follows. The variables concerning narrative plot require more detailed explanation. They draw on Norman Friedman's plot theory (Friedman 1955). In 1955, Friedman devised a readily usable, formal system to divide plots into fourteen different categories (see Figure 1), building in turn on the Aristotelian concept of plot as a change in a hero's fortune from good to bad or the other way around (Aristoteles 2004 (ca 330 BC): VII 51a6).



**Figure 1: Friedman's Fourteen Plots (based on Friedman, 1955: 247-252)**

Where Aristotle sees only two major changes that the hero can undergo, either in fortune or in thought ('recognition'), Friedman distinguishes a third possibility: a change in character. Like Aristotle, the change can either be from positive to negative, from negative to positive, or remain the same. Friedman also looks at other aspects, such as whether the protagonist is sympathetic or not, the kind of knowledge that changes (for 'thought plots') and whether the protagonist was in control of the main change that occurred (for 'fortune plots'). Of particular interest and utility to this analysis is the distinction Friedman makes between growth plots and disillusionment narratives, the two types of revelatory plots that, following Harari (2008), dominate in contemporary military memoirs. Friedman identifies education and maturity plot types that correspond with the idea of positive growth in revelatory narratives, and identifies disillusionment and degeneration plot types which correspond with Harari's idea of the disillusionment narrative. While other plot-categorisation schema exist in analytic studies of literature (see for example Brockmeier 2000; Campbell 1949; Gergen and Gergen 1988; McKee 1999), and life-writing (see Smith and Watson 2010), and a market exists in self-help and popular literature on the practice of writing for would-be authors (see, for example, Booker 2005; Tobias 1993), Friedman's schema is preferred here because of its utility across different fictional and non-fictional categories within literature, and for its clarity.

In this article, we use statistical analysis to compare books with higher sales volumes with author, plot, and paratext variables from the research database. We have made a distinction in the analysis between books that had sold fewer than 15,000 copies (based on the sales data on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2011 and with the heuristic applied) and those that had sold more than this

number. For the purposes of our analysis, we term the latter ‘better-sellers’, with the caveat that this is a category defined numerically for our purposes here. For the purposes of our analysis we required a definition that distinguished between low and high sales, and as Appendix A shows, there is a marked disparity between the sales volumes of the lowest and highest sellers in the sample, and this number is appropriate for the specific genre of military memoirs.

In terms of the variables used in this analysis, as most of the data in this database are nominal, the number of cases is low (n=15) and the data are independent, the main statistical tests performed are chi-square tests comparing better-seller status with (where possible) a dichotomous variable. The size of the dataset is such that the requirement of a minimum expected value of five in each cell can never be met, and therefore Fisher’s exact test is used in 2x2 tables (Field 2009: 690) instead of Pearson Chi-Square, indicated by ‘ $X^2_{Fisher}$ ’ instead of ‘ $X^2$ ’, whereby the two-side probability is noted, unless otherwise indicated by ‘*p<sub>one-sided</sub>*’. In larger tables, an asterisk is added to the chi-square to indicate loss of statistical power:  $X^2^*$ . In addition, t-tests were performed with the sales levels based on the heuristic. These are all calculated in SPSS version 20. These statistical analyses were then backed up and explained with rich qualitative data obtained in interviews with military memoirists, which are used to account for the phenomena observed from the quantitative analysis. These analyses are in turn framed by the two discrete research projects that underpin the research.

Although a dataset of fifteen books seems small, it nonetheless is not a *sample* of all U.K. military Afghanistan memoirs published between 2001 and 2010, but comprises the whole of the dataset, a 100% sample. Strictly speaking therefore, statistical testing on this dataset is not

necessary, as the numbers do not indicate a probability, but the situation ‘as is.’ However, if we are interested in generalizing the effects we see in this study to a broader range of (U.K.) military autobiographies, it is also relevant to discuss statistical probability as we will do in this article.

## ***Results***

### **The books**

It is necessary at the outset to explain our sample of fifteen books in further detail. They all share the distinction of being written by individuals who served with the British Armed Forces in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2010, who have sole or shared copyright of a book that was published in material form by a publisher in the United Kingdom that recounts in over 50% of the text the experiences of a single or multiple deployment to Helmand province (where the British contingent of the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, was based). Although we categorise all fifteen as military memoirs, their locations in bookshops indicate points of intersection with other publishing genres. On the shelves of large bookshops (such as Waterstones and WHSmith), one is to be found in the ‘animal interest’ section - Pen Farthing’s *One Dog at a Time: Saving the Strays of Helmand* (Farthing 2009). Two other books are less concerned with the deployment to Helmand and specific operations, but are concerned rather with their aftermath following serious injuries sustained by their authors. Of these two, *Home from War: How Love Conquered the Horrors of a Soldier's Afghan Nightmare* by burn victim Martyn Compton and his wife Michelle (Compton, Compton and Summerfield Smith 2009), has been found displayed among ‘painful lives’ or ‘tragic life stories’ and indeed its cover denotes targeting at a different readership from that usually associated with the military memoir (see Woodward and Jenkins, 2012). The other, *Man Down* by Mark Ormrod (Ormrod 2009), the

story of a Royal Marine's rehabilitation following the loss of three limbs is, both in terms of cover design and tone of text, far more clearly identifiable as a military book. Both, however, tell very similar stories of injury and recovery, and the sustaining love of a good woman. Patrick Hennessey's *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (Hennessey 2009) accords with the key features of the military memoir, but because of specific publicity and marketing activities undertaken by the author and his publisher, has been positioned by media commentators as a more literary form of war writing in comparison with an imagined standard military account of the Afghanistan war. The rest are generally shelved as 'military' or 'history' or 'military history', rather than as autobiography.

Of these fifteen books, nine were better-sellers (see our definition above) with over 15,000 copies sold (according to the heuristic). The top better-seller in the set is *Apache* by Ed Macy, which sold 96,369 copies (Macy 2008). The book with the most modest sales is *Blood Clot* by Jack Scott with 1,681 copies sold (Scott 2008). None of the books in the sample were self-published. Two-thirds were published by a major publisher, over a quarter by a smaller imprint of a major publisher, and only one was published by a small publisher (*Blood Clot* by Helion and Company (Scott 2008)), showing clearly that not only has the U.S. book market consolidated extensively (Dilevko and Dali 2006: 209-210), but that the U.K. market has too (see Thompson, 2010). Although major publishers sell more copies<sup>6</sup> on average than smaller imprints of those publishers or small publishers<sup>7</sup> and the odds of having a better-seller are four times higher with a

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<sup>6</sup>  $M = 32,343$ ,  $SD = 27,721$

<sup>7</sup>  $M = 23,134$ ,  $SD = 33,605$

major publisher than they are with the smaller publishers and imprints, in this small dataset the difference is not statistically significant<sup>8</sup>.

## **Author**

### *Elite*

The first thing that is striking about the authors in the dataset is that none of the books are written by members of special forces, whereas at specific points in time in the past, books by SAS personnel have dominated the U.K. military book market. This reflects Ministry of Defence policy since 1996 that restricts publications of this kind of memoir for reasons of operational security (Evans 2001). Instead, a new breed of elite troops has taken the place of the special forces: fighter pilots, Royal Marines and members of the Parachute Regiment (hereafter paras) now write 53% of all books. Being part of this new elite does not guarantee a better-seller, however. On the contrary, it has absolutely no impact whatsoever on the sales figures.<sup>9</sup>

### *Type of Soldier*

We then hypothesized that books by combat personnel in general would produce more better-sellers than books by rear-echelon soldiers. We could not test this hypothesis for the simple reason that all of the writers have a combat background. Basically, in terms of the Common Joint Staff System (CJSS) (Kalloniatis, Macleod and La 2009: 1624), the NATO<sup>10</sup>-wide classification system used to divide all military functions into nine categories, only two types of functions

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<sup>8</sup>  $t(13) = -.567, p = .580$

<sup>9</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = .045, p = 1.00$

<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization

produced books published in the United Kingdom: soldiers who work in operations and soldiers who work in training (see Table 1).

<b>Nr</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b># Books</b>	<b># Better-sellers</b>
<b>1</b>	Personnel	-	-
<b>2</b>	Intelligence	-	-
<b>3</b>	Operations	11	7
<b>4</b>	Logistics	-	-
<b>5</b>	Strategy	-	-
<b>6</b>	Signals	1	-
<b>7</b>	Training	3	2
<b>8</b>	Finance	-	-
<b>9</b>	CIMIC <sup>11</sup>	-	-
<b>Total</b>		15	9

**Table 1: Better-Sellers in Terms of the Common Joint Staff System**

The classic fighting soldier and fighter pilot fall under CJSS code 3: Operations, and military personnel who are training their Afghani counterparts in the Afghan National Army or the Afghan National Police in small mentoring teams fall under CJSS code 7: Training. The only exception (CJSS code 6) is the signals man from the Household Cavalry Regiment (Compton, Compton and Summerfield Smith 2009) who is first of all a combat soldier and only secondarily a signals operative. No books by people who work in rear-echelon functions such as logistics, finance or Civil-Military Cooperation, have been published during our period<sup>12</sup>. This might indicate that rear-echelon stories are not seen as commercially viable by U.K. publishers.

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<sup>11</sup> Civil-Military Cooperation

<sup>12</sup> although they do exist, see Taylor, C. 2011. *Bad Company: Face to Face with the Taliban*. Plymouth: DRA Books., recounting the story of a female Naval medic, which lies outside our time-period



### *Rank*

We then examined rank composition. We hypothesized, on the basis of a wider exploration of military memoirs over a longer time-period (Jenkins and Woodward 2014) that in the present time the majority of authors would be ordinary soldiers or junior officers. This also complies with the previous emphasis on combat soldiers, as it is the ordinary ranks (privates, lance corporals and corporals) and the commanders at troop level (the sergeants and junior officers) who are primarily involved in close combat, whereas mid-level soldiers at company level (warrant officers, majors and lieutenant-colonels) and staff officers (colonels and generals) are usually rarely engaged on the ground during active operations. We hypothesized that better-selling authors would be found mainly among the ordinary ranks, and among commanders at troop level. Because the books in this dataset are mission-based stories (with at least half the text dealing with pre-deployment preparation, the deployment itself and its aftermath) as opposed to life stories (covering an entire military career), we also predicted that few staff officers would be found in the dataset as they tend to write career autobiographies rather than mission-specific accounts (an example here would be (Dannatt 2010)).

This prediction was correct: there were no staff officers in the dataset at all. Although Stuart Tootal is identified as a colonel on the cover of his book *Danger Close* (Tootal 2009), he was still a lieutenant-colonel, and thereby a mid-level officer, not a staff officer, during the deployment he describes. What also proved correct was the prediction that the ordinary ranks combined with the commanders at troop level produce most (73%) of the books written (see

Table 2). So the fact that the type of rank is statistically significant in determining who produces better-sellers<sup>13</sup> did not come as a surprise.

	Better-seller		Total
	no	yes	
<b>Ordinary ranks</b>	3	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Command at troop level</b>	3	5	<b>8</b>
<b>Mid level</b>	0	4	<b>4</b>
<b>Staff officers</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 2: Better-sellers per Rank Type**

What we did not predict, however, was that mid-level ranks would produce almost half the better-sellers. However, when we look at the dataset, this can be easily explained, as three out of four of the mid-level better-sellers are books by active fighter pilots (*Apache* (Macy 2008) and *Hellfire* (Macy 2010) by warrant officer Ed Macy, and *Joint Force Harrier* (Orchard and Barrington 2008) by lieutenant-colonel Ade Orchard) and the fourth book is *Danger Close* by Stuart Tootal, a para commander who was very active in the field (Tootal 2009). So these mid-level soldiers could all be categorized as combat soldiers. What was more surprising, and at this stage in the investigation still puzzling, is the fact that none of the soldiers of ordinary rank has produced a better-seller. This contradicts findings from analysis of the memoirs emanating from other conflicts (Harari, 2008), and also with the high volumes<sup>14</sup> generated by Lance Corporal Matt Croucher’s book *Bullet Proof* (Croucher 2009), that was published in the same period and

<sup>13</sup>  $\chi^2(2, N = 15) = 7.19, p = .027$

<sup>14</sup> Real sales: 16, 965; Heuristic sales: 24,236

includes his Afghanistan experience, but was excluded from our sample because the majority of his text deals with his entire career in the military.

### *Gender*

There are two books with a female protagonist. The first one is *Dressed to Kill* about a female Apache pilot (Madison 2010) and the second one is *Home from War*, which has two protagonists, both a male military protagonist (burn victim Martyn Compton) and his wife, Michelle Compton (Compton, Compton and Summerfield Smith 2009). Although neither book was a better-seller (*Dressed to Kill* had an (adapted) sale of 11,760 copies, *Home from War* 2,192), statistically gender does not make a significant difference<sup>15</sup>.

### *Co-author*

Finally, because one-third of the U.K. memoirists credit a co-author, usually a recognised novelist or journalist who is acknowledged on the cover, title page and/or in the colophon, we predicted that co-authored books would have a better chance of becoming better-sellers. This reflects the fact that a publisher has invested in a co-author in order to shape the style, tone and quality of the original manuscript or narrative, and the idea that to have a co-author with name recognition might act as an extra incentive for the public to buy the book. Here, we were wrong again. Not only did having a co-author not contribute to getting a better-seller<sup>16</sup>, on average the (adapted) sales of co-written books ( $M = 25,782$ ,  $SD = 17,685$ ) were lower than those by a single author ( $M = 31,019$ ,  $SD = 33,950$ )<sup>17</sup>. This might well indicate that potential buyers of

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<sup>15</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 3.46, p = .143$

<sup>16</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 1.25, p = .580$

<sup>17</sup> This was not a statistically significant difference, however:  $t(13) = .32, p = .754$

autobiographical memoirs are suspicious of books that overtly indicate that they are not single-handedly written by the author/protagonist on the cover.

#### *Sub Conclusion: Authors*

From this data with regard to the authors, we can conclude that the publishing market for mission-related Afghanistan memoirs in the United Kingdom is dominated by major publishing houses, publishing stories by combat soldiers who either work in operations or training functions. Staff officers do not publish mission-related memoirs and although the ordinary ranks do publish, their stories have not become better-sellers. Better-sellers are produced by the commanders at troop level and of mid-level rank. Having a famous co-author does not help in producing a better-seller, nor does being part of the one of the ‘new elites’ (marines, paras and fighter pilots) or being female (or male).

#### **Plot**

We then focused our analysis on the content of these books, to see whether the kind of plot influences sales. Based on the Friedman categorization discussed above, we examined whether disillusionment plots, growth plots or other plot types contributed to better-seller status.

#### *Plot Type*

In the dataset, five out of the fourteen possible Friedman categories were used by soldier-authors (see Table 3). Our predictions, following Harari, were confirmed: disillusionment and growth plots were used in the majority (two-thirds) of the books. No single dominant plot type leads to

a U.K. better-seller. Neither disillusionment plots<sup>18</sup>, nor growth plots<sup>19</sup>, nor other plots<sup>20</sup> produce significantly more better-sellers.

Type	Plot	#
<b>Disillusionment</b>	Disillusionment	4
<b>Growth</b>	Education	1
	Maturity	5
<b>Other</b>	Action	4
	Admiration	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>

**Table 3 Plot Type**

### *Co-author*

What is interesting, however, is the correspondence between professional co-authorship and other plot types<sup>21</sup>. None of the five co-authored books are disillusionment stories; one is a growth plot and three of them are action plots. The only admiration plot in the dataset, *Home from War* (Compton, Compton and Summerfield Smith 2009), is also a co-authored book. In short: co-authors write positive and action-driven plots.

### *Charity*

There is a further point of interest regarding stated charitable intentions by authors concerning revenues generated by sales. One-third of the authors promised to donate (part of) the royalties of the book to a charity, or in the case of *One Dog at a Time* (Farthing 2009), included information on a charity in the book. Although this increases the odds of producing a better-

<sup>18</sup>  $X^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 2.78, p = .235$

<sup>19</sup>  $X^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = .185, p = 1.00$

<sup>20</sup>  $X^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 1.25, p = .580$

<sup>21</sup>  $X^{2*}(2, N = 15) = 6.11, p = .047$

seller fourfold, this difference is not statistically significant in this small dataset<sup>22</sup>. It also does not lead to better sales: charitable books sell on average even slightly less ( $M = 25,900$ ,  $SD = 19,051$ ) than books that do not mention a charitable intention ( $M = 30,960$ ,  $SD = 33,630$ ), but this is not in any way a statistically significant difference<sup>23</sup>.

### *Sub Conclusion: Plots*

From this data on plots, we can conclude that neither the type of plot nor whether the proceeds of the book go to a charity influences the sales of a military memoir. This is an interesting conclusion, for two reasons. First, it shows the diversity within the genre, with no single plot type dominating, which may be contrary to popular beliefs about the nature of these books. Second, although book sales have occurred during a period where the rise of the charity product (books, calendars, CDs) has been notable, both as a means of generating revenue for specific causes, and as a means of generating public profile for a given cause, the use of the material book to raise funds seems, on the basis of our data, to make little difference in whether or not that book generates sales. Furthermore, although a number of military charities and causes, prompted by the consequences of service in Afghanistan, have turned to proactive campaigns to generate funds, this seems to have made little difference on the genre.

### **Paratext**

The final stage of our analysis concerned the paratext of our sample of books, a feature that we had hypothesized as a significant influence on book sales, particularly the cover. The fact that we see no correlation between plot type and sales, might also be an indication that content is less

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<sup>22</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 1.25, p = .580$ ,

<sup>23</sup>  $t(13) = .31, p = .762$

important for sales. Therefore, we looked at the textual elements of book covers to examine whether these might also influence sales. The two textual elements that can be displayed on a cover, either on the front near the author's name or on the back as part of the marketing blurb, are the soldier-author's rank, and whether he or she has been awarded a combat medal. The signaling of a foreword by another individual with name-recognition (another memoirist, recognised military author, or an otherwise famous individual) are other textual elements that can also be found on the cover.

### *Rank*

It appears from analysis that only the rank of the soldier seems relevant in producing a better-seller. This rank does not have to be on the cover, however, to help sales; only half of the better-sellers (five out of nine) have the rank of the author noted on the book's cover. This does not support the hypothesis that potential book-buyers only look at covers when choosing a book, and are influenced by the platform or authority of the writer.

### *Medal*

We then looked at the award of medals and the inclusion of this information on the cover. Some medals, the 'post nominals', give the bearers the right to put an abbreviation behind their name. In this dataset, three authors, writing five books in total, were awarded combat medals, these being Ed Macy (Military Cross), Stuart Tootal (Distinguished Service Order), and Doug Beattie (Military Cross). Two authors were awarded the Order of the British Empire, a non-combat medal, Stuart Tootal and Ade Orchard (Beattie and Gomm 2008; Beattie and Gomm 2009; Macy 2008; Macy 2010; Orchard and Barrington 2008; Tootal 2009). All these awards are post

nominals. We would expect medal bearers to produce more better-sellers than non-medal bearers, as medals (especially combat medals) give an extra indication of the status of the writer as a combat soldier. This hypothesis holds up. Simply put, all medal bearers achieved 'better-seller' status in our sample<sup>24</sup> as can be seen in Table 4.

		Better-seller		Total
		Yes	No	
Medal	yes	6	0	<b>6</b>
	no	3	6	<b>9</b>
Total		<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>

**Table 2: Medals and Better-sellers**

On average, corrected for future sales, medal bearers sell more books than non-medal bearers<sup>25</sup>, although this is not a statistically significant difference<sup>26</sup>

The fact that medals guarantee better-sellers also explains why the earlier mentioned book written by Lance Corporal Croucher (which is outside our data, but interesting as it was a better-seller despite being written by an ordinary rank soldier) did become a better-seller, as Lance Corporal Croucher was awarded a combat medal: the George Cross (Croucher 2009).

### *Foreword*

What is striking is that only two authors make use of a foreword writer: Paul Grahame's *Fire Strike 7/9* has a foreword by Lieutenant Colonel Simon Butt (who was the officer commanding the unit with which he was deployed), and the Comptons' foreword to their *Home from War* by

<sup>24</sup>  $\chi^2_{Fisher}(1, N = 15) = 6.67, p_{one-sided} = .017$

<sup>25</sup> Medal bearers:  $M = 41,763, SD = 28,631$ ; Non-medal bearers  $M = 20,946, SD = 27,516$ .

<sup>26</sup>  $t(13) = -1.41, p = .181$



HRH Prince William of Wales (fellow Household Cavalry member) (Compton, Compton and Summerfield Smith 2009; Grahame and Lewis 2010). Of these two, only Prince William's foreword is announced on the cover and it did not help in creating a better-seller, as *Home from War* had an adapted sales figure of only 2,192 copies.

*Sub Conclusion: Paratext*

From this analysis, we conclude that the single element most likely to guarantee the publication of a better-selling memoir is possession of a medal, although not necessarily a combat medal. The award of a medal is indicative of the authority or 'platform' of the writer (see Thompson, 2010), granting visible authority to the book, its author, and his (in these cases) experiences. We can speculate that the visibility of the medal, which is culturally specific to Britain as a warrior nation (Paris 2000), also prompts book purchases because the fact of a medal's award signifies something to a reading public around ideas of heroism and admiration (although many authors are very modest about their being singled out for recognition in this way). The award of a combat medal, which is the result of specific, valued actions in combat, also signals something about the drama of the plot described between a book's covers – medals are awarded for bravery and valour, and not for making tea, and the book-buying public knows this. Finally, we should also note the awareness of the allure of the medal-winner to the wider media and publishing industry, and it is notable that journalists, agents and publishers have been pro-active in seeking out the stories of medal-winners on the understanding that at the heart of the actions for which a medal is awarded lies (often) a very dramatic story (Ed Macy's involvement in the Jugroom Fort rescue of Matthew Ford, or Doug Beattie's involvement in the front-line at Garmsir would be cases in point) that has already received significant press coverage. Furthermore, press coverage

will be ably assisted by a Ministry of Defence press office eager to promote positive and affirmative stories of British military involvement in Afghanistan, given the unpopularity of the war and the fact that its logic remains mysterious to the majority of the British population. To put this another way, there is an appetite for traditional military stories of individual bravery and action, from a war where mission failure and stasis, as well as fatalities and casualties have otherwise dominated in the public imagination because of the nature of the war itself.

## **Discussion**

Having researched authorial, textual and paratextual elements of military Afghanistan memoirs to discover what produces a better-seller, we have seen that there are two variables that seem to determine whether a book becomes a better-seller. First of all, having a personally awarded medal ‘guarantees’ a better-seller. Second, being a sergeant or higher also gives a good chance of writing a better-seller. In order to be published by a commercial publisher at all in the United Kingdom, a soldier-author also has to be a combat soldier.

We have four points to make on the basis of this analysis. The first is to acknowledge the limitations to this research. The data drawn on in our analysis are a snapshot picture of sales at a point in time for one mission in one specific country. Further research will have to show whether these findings can be generalised to military memoirs from other time periods and whether other variables that we have not taken into account, such as the number (and the tone) of book reviews published or the blurbs on the cover, also influence sales. What we can say though, is that these findings cannot be copied one-on-one to other countries. Other research (Kleinreesink 2014) shows that important variables in this study, such as medals, co-authorship, and publishing method, are different, or even absent in military memoirs in other countries. The

acknowledgement of famous co-authors or of having been awarded a combat medal is a U.K. and U.S. phenomenon that is not found in other countries, such as Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands. The book markets in these countries are also rather different. While in the United Kingdom all Afghanistan memoirs are published by traditional publishers, in the United States half of them are self-published and in the Netherlands that percentage is 70%, and sales in the self-publishing market are different from those of traditional publishers. But apart from these limitations, we can also conclude that a mixed-methods analysis of sales data can generate new perspectives on books in general and military memoirs in particular and offers interesting new research opportunities.

Second, and as we have indicated, in considering the military memoir, we have to consider the production process surrounding the book, and how that is mediated. For whilst we maintain that memoirs feed specific public narratives of war, we also have to be alert to the publishing industry's role in shaping how that happens. Thompson notes that, within publishing, there is always an unknown quantity for any book, and predicting precisely which books will sell well is recognised as virtually impossible (Thompson 2010: 203), in the same way as Goldman does for the screen trade (Goldman 2012 (1983): 39). The uncertainty of its reception is a characteristic of any document brought into circulation (Prior 2008: 824). However, we should be alert to the skills and techniques, honed and developed by the industry, to try and ensure that despite this uncertainty a book does sell. Military memoirs – in common with any book – are mediated through the production process. We know, for example, that Ed Macy's better-selling *Apache* bears all the hall-marks of a slick and polished production process, with careful attention to detail right down to the design of its cover. So although it would not have been possible to predict

exactly how well this book would sell, we know from our author interviews that the combination of the authority of the author as an elite combat aircraft pilot and its roots in a gripping (and medal-winning) story provided the basis for significant publisher investment in the production of the book (from copy-editing through to marketing). In other words, it is not surprising that *Apache* sold well, given that it had all the key elements that surround a better-seller and high publisher investment.

Our third point concerns the question of the purchase or hold on the public imagination of specific stories about war, and the use of sales data to provide a means of exploring that question. Military memoirs, we maintain, are important because they are significant documents which shape public narratives about war. We know this because it is possible to trace, over longer time-scales, how public discourses about specific conflicts articulate ideas which show clear patterns and commonalities. So, for example, the dominant popular understanding of the Falklands war (1982) as an operation which, whilst successful, came at a very heavy price for those involved because of the traumas that war inflicted, can be seen to be shaped quite directly by the publications which came out of that war. Whilst the precise link between individual understanding of a conflict and the act of reading a book is notoriously hard to establish with certainty, sales data are a useful indicator because they provide consolidation for elements of that argument. There is a relationship between high levels of sales and the purchase of the ideas promoted in the books that sell well.

This leads directly to our final point about what the study of military memoirs can contribute to debates about militarism and culture in contemporary Britain. In shaping public narratives of war, memoirs can also be seen as influential in shaping public discourses of militarism. If we understand militarism to be an ideology that prioritizes military objectives and rationales in civilian cultural, social, economic, and political life, we can speculate how memoirs enable this to happen (see Woodward and Jenkins 2012b). The nature of militarism in contemporary Britain is such that the deployment of armed force as a solution to social and political problems tends to be normalized in elite political debate and in wider civilian public discourse. Military memoirs, arguably, contribute to the discourses through which this “solution” is sustained because they potentially normalize, simplify, justify, and sanitize military actions and interventions. Indeed, some critics—erroneously, we believe—dismiss taking military memoirs seriously as artifacts for rigorous scholarly analysis because of this supposition. What is more apparent, though, following a close reading of these texts, is that while it is possible to argue for the militarizing effects of memoirs, more interesting is the idea that these texts can be very disruptive of the idea of the utility of military deployment. As, for example, Stuart Tootal’s *Danger Close* (2009) shows, writers themselves as trained personnel have a clear idea of the possibilities of, and limits to, the deployment of armed troops. So while contemporary British militarism might be seen to be sustained by a range of cultural products (such as memoirs) and discourses which normalize the idea of military intervention, in looking at memoirs it becomes possible to see how that idea can be disrupted and resisted, not least by military personnel themselves.

**Appendix 1: The Books Studied**

Sales Heuristic	Sales Real	Military Author	Year	Book title	Publisher	Genre	Rank	Elite	Award
96,369	96,369	Macy, Ed	2008	Apache	HarperPress		Warrant Officer	Fighter pilot and former Para	Military Cross, on cover.
81,492	73,343	Hennessey, Patrick	2009	The Junior Officers' Reading Club	Allen Lane	War literature	Lieutenant	no	no
52,428	47,185	Farthing, Pen	2009	One Dog at a Time	Ebury Press	Dog book	Sergeant	Marine	no
48,698	48,698	Beattie, Doug	2008	An Ordinary Soldier	Simon & Schuster		Captain	No	Military Cross, on cover.
35,740	35,740	Orchard, Ade	2008	Joint Force Harrier	Michael Joseph		Lieutenant-colonel	Fighter pilot	Order of the British Empire, not on cover
24,820	22,338	Beattie, Doug	2009	Task Force Helmand	Simon & Schuster		Captain	no	Military Cross, on cover.
23,272	20,945	Macy, Ed	2009	Hellfire	HarperPress		Warrant Officer	Fighter pilot and former Para	Military Cross, on cover.
21,679	19,511	Tootal, Stuart	2009	Danger Close	John Murray		Lieutenant-colonel	Para	Distinguished Service Order, not on cover
17,459	12,221	Grahame, Paul	2010	Fire Strike 7/9	Ebury Press		Sergeant	no	no
11,760	8,232	Madison, Charlotte	2010	Dressed to Kill	Headline Review		Captain	Fighter pilot	no
8,624	8,624	Docherty, Leo	2007	Desert of Death	Faber and Faber		Captain	no	no
8,459	7,613	Ormrod, Mark	2009	Man Down	Bantam Press	Injury & recovery	Marine	Marine	no
4,421	3,095	Bury, Patrick	2010	Call sign Hades	Simon & Schuster		Lieutenant	no	no
2,192	1,973	Compton, Martyn	2009	Home from War	Main Stream Publishing	Injury & recovery	Lance Corporal	no	no
1,681	1,681	Scott, Jake	2008	Blood Clot	Helion & Company		Corporal	Para	no

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## **Author biographies**

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**K. Neil Jenkins** is senior research associate in the School of Geography, Politics & Sociology, Newcastle University, United Kingdom. He has written and researched textual and visual representations of military personnel, and has conducted a major study (with Rachel Woodward) of the social production of the contemporary British military memoir, post-1980. He also has research interests in military sociology, including university service units and reservist issues, as well as studies of workplace interactions from an ethnomethodological perspective.

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