Trained to Care: The Role of Obligation in Military Experience

by

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Abstract

The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan renewed attention to US military service members and veterans, but the daily life of service members remains a mystery in both popular and scholarly writing. This dissertation explores veterans' reflections on their experiences of everyday relationships within the US military. My starting point is a sentiment echoed by many veterans: that the relationships they experience in the military are closer and more caring than any they have known since. Employing a phenomenological approach to mundane details of military training, I explore ways in which service members learn to care, which I define as an ability to appreciate and fulfill obligations to each other. I argue that the care they experience is rooted in collectivist obligations imposed by the military—obligations to work together toward shared goals amidst shared risks. Under the rubric of an Ethics of Care, I suggest that the scaffolds that we use to build care are often mundane, and always worthy of attention.

I interviewed nineteen military service members, all of whom served in the 9/11 era. Not all of them deployed to combat. I started my collection of evidence with the idea that military training, and not combat, is the common denominator of military service. Employing an open-ended phenomenological interview format, I gave participants space and time to explore the relationships that they found most meaningful in their experience. From the empirical evidence emerged three phenomena that became the central chapters of this dissertation. The first of these phenomena is downtime. The military often requires service members to spend vast amounts of time alongside each other, and that time is often spent chatting with each other. The second phenomenon is team organization. Service members experience highly formalized and redundant

organizational structures wherein there is a high ratio of leaders-to-subordinates. The third phenomenon is training. Service members experience training constantly, and it was the single most common activity that participants discussed as the setting for relationships.

Each of these phenomena yielded insights into how mundane aspects of service—activities and organizational structures alike—became scaffolds for relationship. Chapter Three explores the role of downtime in relationship formation. Downtime conversation provides the essential means for service members to get to know each other and to integrate into a collectivist culture. Chapter Four explores the roles of military regulation and military organization in relationship formation. The modern US military is designed around small units, and regulations articulate the obligations that leaders and subordinates have to each other. Chapter Five explores the role of training activities in relationship formation. The fundamentals of soldiering—marksmanship and physical fitness—provide opportunity for service members to understand their obligations to each other and act on those obligations. The transformation of obligation to action is essential for service members to demonstrate care for each other.

The growing field of Veterans Studies is committed to exploring diverse ways in which military service and veteran experience are connected, but there is a need for qualitative work that explores the meaning of military experiences. This dissertation is a step toward a more detailed approach to the mundane experiences of military service. I also suggest that phenomenology, with its close attention to the lived experience of individuals, might serve as a model for future qualitative work in Veterans Studies.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The reader expects to hear of strategic theory, of lines and angles, and instead of these

denizens of the scientific world he finds himself encountering only creatures of everyday life.

-Von Clausewitz, 1976, p. 193

Army briefings usually start with the Bottom Line Up Front, or BLUF. What this means is: start with whatever you think your audience most needs to know.

This study looks at veteran's military experiences in the US Armed Forces, and at their most mundane training experiences. Veterans can't really be understood without understanding their military experience, and how that experience continues to shape their post-service experiences. I interviewed nineteen veterans of post-9/11 service between January and September of 2020 to learn about the most meaningful relationships they experienced while serving in the military. The interviews were broad-ranging and touched upon all aspects of military experience, before and after service. Through my conversations with veterans, I found that military training, especially in the Army and Marine Corps, creates certain expectations in service members with respect to the relationships they form.[1] These expectations include:

- Relationships are scaffolded by, and over, time;

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[1] There are several common terms for people who serve in the military; I employ "service members," because it is gender-neutral and because the context of the study is the US military, which means the service in question is necessarily in the military.

- Relationships are scaffolded by clear obligations;

- Relationships are scaffolded through action.

When a building is raised, scaffolds are often raised around it during construction. Scaffolds make the work of construction easier. Educators often talk about scaffolds for learning, practices and tools used in a classroom to help students develop skills: the dotted lines to guide unsteady hands while learning handwriting, the boxes to place numbers in while learning long division, and so on. In this study, the scaffolds are military practices, customs, and especially regulations that help service members understand what they can and should expect of each other. These scaffolds are often so deeply embedded in everyday routines that service members don't give them much thought, or any thought at all.

The invisibility of such scaffolds can make them hard to study. To make them a little easier to see and talk about, I'll present case studies and stories that dig into the everyday life of service members engaged in military training. I talk about these scaffolds in the context of phenomena, or common experiences, that recurred throughout my interviews. In many cases, I will connect service members' stories to the military regulations that are relevant to their story—not to validate regulation, but to give readers a stronger sense of its place in military experience, and its importance for relationships.

The importance of relationships to veterans' experiences in the military was powerfully evident in their responses to the last question I asked most of the veterans I interviewed: *Do you miss it?* "I miss my Marines. I miss that sense of community. I miss that love that we had for each other, that bond that we had for each other. It changes you. You learn very quickly whether you can depend on a person or not." This is one of the last things Valentina, a young Hispanic

woman who joined the Marine Corps at the age of seventeen, told me.[2] From her earliest training

experiences—even before she left for boot camp—Valentina explained to me that she felt, for

the first time in her life, that she had brothers and sisters. She gathered with her new military

family every day after high school for physical training, pushing herself to become more than the

"shy bookworm" she believed herself to be, striving to meet the Corps's expectations for

physical readiness. Her efforts were noticed: in time, she became one of the trainers, pushing

others to meet those same standards. She learned in the Marine Corps to care, and be cared for,

in ways that were different from anything she'd known in the seventeen years prior to service, or

in the handful of years since her service. Today, as a woman in her mid-twenties looking back on

her military experiences, Valentina misses her family.

Valentina's sentiment—that she missed not just the people she served with, but the

quality of the relationships they shared—was echoed by many of the service members I

interviewed. It is a sentiment that I share. I, too, miss the "battle buddies" I served with in the US

Army, first as a soldier in military intelligence and later as an officer in the infantry. There is a

particular quality to the relationships we shared back then, and describing that quality is not easy;

indeed, doing so is one of the major preoccupations of this study. In brief, shared obligation was

central to the relationships that my participants described. Valentina's trainer had an obligation

to prepare her for service; once she was, in his estimate, prepared for service, she had an

obligation to help the even newer recruits. The latter was true even though there was no

difference in rank amongst Valentina and the newer recruits; in fact, they had no rank, because

they weren't Marines yet. But the obligations these nearly-Marines felt were acted upon, just like

they were between Val and her trainer. Whether leaders and subordinates, or service members on

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[2] Names in this study—participants and their fellow service members, as well as my fellow service members—are pseudonyms.

equal footing, members of the military held in common ideas about obligation: the specificity of

the obligations they had to each other, and the way that they acted upon those obligations.

Further, the lack of such relationships in post-service life was a common refrain; implicit

(and occasionally explicit) in participants' discussion of post-service relationships was the lack

of shared obligation. As a veteran of service in the US Army, I know what they're talking about.

Service members call it many things: family, community, camaraderie. The word itself is less

important than the sentiment behind the word: shared obligation that is specific and acted upon.

The simple fact is that many veterans say they only find that sense of obligation fulfilled while

they are serving in the US military. It is also a fact that military experience—at the granular level

of individual experience—is an understudied phenomenon. In the newly formed field of

Veterans Studies, the essential connections between military experience and veteran experience

have yet to be developed; I intend to provide both a key connection, and a methodology of

connection, through my research.

In this study, I will speak of the obligations and their fulfillment under a broader rubric:

caring. The role of caring is not given much thought in conversations about military

experience—for many readers, it might seem antithetical to such experience, given that the

military's primary function is delivering violence. This unpleasant truth is one that both public

conversations about the military, and even the literature of Veterans Studies, often seems to want

to avoid. We might like to think that discipline and courage are essential to the military, but they

are useful only insofar as they make for better warfighting. A military has a purpose and does not

necessarily have any preferences when it comes to fulfilling the purpose. But somehow, when

my participants talked to me about their service, they talked about care—caring for others, and

feeling cared for. Care is lurking in every story that my participants shared with me, but not

because the military was aiming for care. Rather, the same training routines that support the development of a war-fighting military incidentally support the development of care amongst service members. It is a second-order effect of the training and organization adopted by the US military to make a warfighting force.[3] But, even though care is not the intended outcome, it is an undeniable outcome Furthermore, it is an outcome that seems to stay with service members when they leave the military: the way they experience obligation and care in the military seems to be formative for many veterans. For that reason, understanding how particular service members experience care in the military is critical for understanding what they expect of the people around them after service. The care that service members experience starts with obligation.

Obligation has a rather strict connotation, appropriate to military orders but perhaps inappropriate to the more generous connotations of the word care. I would encourage readers to remember that when I speak of obligation, I speak of care. But I also want to speak with precision, and so I will refer to obligation more often than I will refer to care, because I would suggest that most theories of relationship ultimately rely on obligation: a sense that two people owe each other something. Whether this something is specified or not may not be terribly important; we often express devotion to friends in metaphorical terms. But certain relationships, and particularly professional relationships, consist in very specific obligations. This is especially true in the professions of nursing and teaching. The obligations of nurse and patient, or teacher and student, are not symmetrical—that is, the nurse has a far longer list of specific obligations to the patient, as does the teacher to the student. But symmetry is not necessary for obligation to exist, and care is often measured by the successful fulfillment of obligations. We can say, then, that *to care* is not merely to have an obligation, but to fulfill that obligation in a way that takes

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[3] "Organization," in this study, is used to refer broadly to the way that military units are organized: the number of service members, how they are sorted into smaller units, how the leadership roles are defined.

others into account. Care is action-oriented, and requires demonstration. Those demonstrations are frequently mundane, routine, repetitious, and rooted in obligation.

I will describe two different theoretical approaches to obligation that might help readers to better understand how I use the term in this study. In the world of education, Nel Noddings's work in the Ethics of Care is foundational. Her ethical philosophy has its source in the profession of nursing, and it focuses on the importance of personal relationships and individual needs. Though her ethics are not necessarily limited to professional relationships, her examples are often drawn from professional settings where obligations are part of a broadly recognized code of conduct. It is important to recognize the role of professions in an Ethics of Care. Noddings tends to assume that an obligation exists, and her concern is the fulfillment of said obligation. Professions tend to spell out the obligations in more detail—especially where stakes are high. Nevertheless, the role of professionalized obligation—and especially the scaffolds that professions employ to ensure obligations are met—is not to my knowledge a major concern of Noddings's work. Those scaffolds, so important for the realization of professional goals and the relationships that can make a profession worth the effort, are worthy of our attention.

In her landmark work *Caring*, Noddings suggests that care requires two things. The first is engrossment—getting to know another person, and specifically their needs and desires. The second is displacement—giving up some of one's own energy to act on another's behalf. Both concepts are applicable to professional and personal relationships, and both can be described in terms of obligation. With respect to engrossment: if we are obligated to another person, especially in the sense of rendering assistance, we need to know a little about what they think they want or need. Otherwise, we will simply be imposing our preferences on them, especially if we think we know better than them what they need. It may be true that we share the desire for a

particular outcome with another person, and it may even be true that we know better what they need, but engrossment is nonetheless important. For example: it may be that both Valentina and her trainer needed her to perform a certain number of push-ups, and that Val was struggling. Her trainer could help her without regard to her own desire to do push-ups; but it would be a vastly better outcome for their relationship if the trainer were able to engage with Val enough to discover how to motivate her toward the shared goal. Engrossment may not be necessary to the task but getting to know somebody is necessary for relationship to form. It is essential for care.

To care, according to Noddings's ethics, we also need a willingness to act on the obligation we feel. We may even need to prove this willingness by acting upon the obligation in some small way. This demonstration might come at a cost to us, in terms of time or effort. We would be giving up something to care for another. This giving up is what Noddings calls displacement; it is often mutual, since both parties are required to spend a little time on behalf of each other for any but the most perfunctory interactions. And to speak of displacement—to speak of giving up a bit of oneself for another—is perhaps to describe the nature of obligation itself. Again, we see that Noddings is trying to describe what makes caring relational, rather than mechanical: obligations are entered into and fulfilled by two people whose relationship is partially defined by the obligation. Obligation and relationship are intertwined.

From the field of anthropology, Robin Dunbar's work on friendship offers a different perspective on obligation. Dunbar tells us that friendship is "a two-way process that requires both parties to be reasonably accommodating and tolerant of each other, to be willing to spare time for each other." We would never hesitate, Dunbar says, to ask a friend a favor, nor would we hesitate when that friend asks a favor of us. Friendships are a two-way street, and the metaphorical street is built of obligations and obligations fulfilled. We might distinguish between

professional and personal relationships here. In the former, the obligations are much more likely to be clear, and to be acted upon as a matter of routine. In the latter, the obligations are likely vaguer, and may be prospective rather than fulfilled assurances. Nevertheless, obligations are essential to each; in truth, to understand relationships may require nothing more than understanding the obligations that bind us. Relationships in the military partake of both the professional and personal, although the obligations my participants describe always start in the professional realm. And it is through training, the constant of military experience, that these obligations are formed and enacted, which is to say: it is through training that service members learn care.

As soldier and officer, I spent years training for war—quite apart from other years I spent at war—and training young men and women to go to war. Today, I am a writing instructor; I spend my days training young men and women to write for academic and professional purposes. The students I train in college are often at the same phase of life as the young men I led in the infantry—they are curious about the world, curious to learn who to care for and how.[4] Training young men and women matters to me; I relish the obligation. But their curiosity matters more, because understanding their curiosity is what transforms my obligation into care. Thus, my interest in the training environment is ethical: to train well is to care.

Chapter 2 of this study will explore the methodological underpinnings of my research. This work is phenomenological in nature—it prioritizes individual experiences of military experience, while seeking the common features of experience. Since much of the work done with veterans today is under the auspices of the Veterans Health Administration, the evidence collected often pertains only to specific health concerns about veterans. A powerful need exists

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[4] During my time in the infantry, only men were allowed to serve; as a result, many of my stories and service connections are tilted toward men's perspectives and experiences.

for qualitative work that explores the meaning of service experiences; my hope is that a more detailed discussion of not only how I conducted my research, but how I approached my research from a philosophical perspective, might provide a direction for future qualitative work in Veterans Studies.

In the subsequent three chapters of this dissertation, I present my research. Chapter Three explores the role of downtime in relationship formation. Downtime conversation provides the essential means for service members to get to know each other and to integrate into a collectivist culture. Chapter Four explores the roles of military regulation and military organization in relationship formation. The modern US military is designed around small units, a warfighting adaption that allows small unit leaders to pay close attention to a relatively small number of subordinates. Regulations articulate the obligations that leaders and subordinates have to each other; the small-unit organization of the military makes it easy for service members to fulfill these obligations. Chapter Five explores the role of training activities in relationship formation. The fundamentals of soldiering—marksmanship and physical fitness—provide opportunity for service members to understand their obligations to each other and act on those obligations. The transformation of obligation to action is essential for service members to demonstrate care for each other.

In Chapter 6, I consider how my research fits into recent developments in Veterans Studies, which may or may not be ready to call itself a field of study but needs a foundation of its own. It would be hubris to suggest that I have offered a foundation for the field, but through my method and my exploration of the connection between military experience and veteran experience, I believe I can provide a small measure of direction to the collective effort to build a field of Veterans Studies.

1.1 Literature Review

The research that forms the basis of this study is exploratory in nature. I asked very basic and open-ended questions of veterans about their experience in the military, and especially about the relationships they formed in the military. I define my research as exploratory for two reasons. First, I embarked upon it without any clear notions about what those relationships would be or what meaning my participants would assign to them; I followed my participants' leads through our conversations. My research process was, in many ways, a response to the most common forms of research about veterans. That research is quantitative in nature—undertaken by entities such as Rand and Pew—designed to survey the broad demographics of service, and to help us understand veterans from a "10,000-foot view," so to speak. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which is charged with the care of the 18 million veterans in the US today, directs its research energies toward the needs of its veteran patients. These needs are broad, and naturally include the wounds of war—historically the physical wounds, and more recently the psychological wounds. Associating veterans with war and war-related injury is common in popular culture and in scholarly literature, but neither war nor wounding is what makes up the mundane life of the modern soldier. Training is the stuff of daily life. It is deliberately detailed and repetitive. It is often boring to go through and might be considered boring as a topic of study, but the relationships that matter most in the military are formed through the mundane activity of training, making it an essential research site.

The second reason I call my work exploratory is that it opens new ground for further research (Watkins, 2012). My own work certainly raises more questions than answers, which I view as appropriate for a study like this. A fellow doctoral student asked me what a "win" would look like with respect to the reception—if any—of my dissertation. I told him I would be thrilled

if it led to a few new questions in the next survey that the VA or Rand or Pew send out. Qualitative work of this kind can feed into quantitative work: I think this study provides a couple of avenues for new questions about service. It can also be a follow up to quantitative work, providing the granular detail that gives life to statistics.

My own research started in my "home" discipline, Writing Studies. Much of the work at the intersection of Writing Studies and Veterans Studies is encapsulated in D. Alexis Hart and Roger Thompson's 2020 publication *Writing Programs, Veterans Studies, and the Post-9/11 University*. Eight years in the making, this fine book offers a broad view of how veterans might experience higher education. The authors offer helpful teaching tactics—at both the institutional and classroom level—designed to assist veterans in their transition from the military to higher education. Though the book offers stories about student-veterans, it includes little information about what those veterans did in the military. Their military experience is important of course— they couldn't be veterans without it—but in a distinct sense, the authors take it for granted. By contrast, what is important in Veterans Studies is veteran experience, which often seems to begin on the day a service member leaves the military.

However, despite the frequent assurances in Veterans Studies research that veterans' military experiences vary greatly, ten years of work in this burgeoning field have produced few empirical studies that focus on either the actual variations in service, or the importance of such variations. Fewer studies offer advice about how to approach the varied experiences of veterans (Zinger & Cohen, 2010; Morrow & Hart, 2014). With respect to war veterans in particular, Marilyn Valentino's (2012) advice remains typical: "When veterans do write about horrific events, we clearly can't just make editing marks and ignore the content… Discussions about the best ways to respond would be productive topics for faculty and writing center workshops" (p.

174). Even the most insightful articles too often suppose that military experience is always war or trauma (DiRamio, et al., 2008); that veterans are therefore traumatized; and that discussions about the right response are the prerogative of civilians (Zinger & Cohen, 2010; Morrow & Hart, 2014; Browning, 2015). The current state of scholarship thus leaves considerable room to consider military experience as a uniquely lived experience. There is a need to think about how to have a conversation with a veteran about their experience, and why that experience matters— not merely for the sake of civil-military relations, or for classroom civility, but for the sake of relationships that further these causes.

As I worked my way through the literature aimed at helping veterans in secondary education, the lack of discussion of military experience was not something I noticed as much as it was something I felt. I knew there was something missing from the literature, but it was perhaps too fundamental to notice. Then, in December of 2019, I came across an article in the *Journal of Veterans Studies* that called for "further empirical research on the internalization and longer-term impact of military culture to better address the needs of US military veterans" (McCormick, et al., 2019, p. 287). What the authors meant was this: few studies pause to ask individual veterans what their service meant to them—what their service *was like*. The authors started from the assumptions that: 1) military culture was distinct from civilian culture, and 2) participation in military culture might change a person. The authors also assumed that those changes would depend a good deal on the individual's experience of the military. It was the fundamental truth that was missing—service member' experiences were too often taken for granted, and rarely asked after.

Reflecting on this article led me to two very different and important conclusions; first, I needed a research method that would allow me to consider specific veterans, and the specific

meanings they attributed to their experiences. This realization led me to adopt the methodology of phenomenology, which starts with the assumption that understanding how experiences matter to people is essential for understanding people. The second conclusion I reached is that disciplines including social psychology, social work, and Writing Studies, share some interest in Veterans Studies and might therefore benefit from both the methodology and findings of a phenomenological study of military experience.

Through the National Council of Teachers of English, scholars and teachers in Writing Studies have offered public support for veterans in higher education—in large part through scholarly activity (Hart & Thompson, 2013). The small but important body of research generated thus far concerns specific teaching tactics, suggestions about what veterans expect from teachers, and advice about how to handle the traumatic stories that veterans might share in a writing classroom (Burdick, 2009). All these efforts are meant to assist veterans in the task of making the transition from military to civilian life—in fact, this transition is one of the most important topics within Veterans Studies. In our recent conversation, D. Alexis Hart noted that by her count, and across all fields connected to Veterans Studies, student scholars produced more than 30,000 dissertations and theses on the transition from military to civilian life in the last four years.

In Writing Studies, the commitment to veterans seems clear enough: over the last ten years, Writing Studies scholars have consistently called for tending to veterans' educational goals on campus. This scholarship includes Marilyn Valentino's (2010) address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, in which she outlined an ethical obligation to veterans on college campuses; Hart & Thompson's (2013) white paper formally framing the "ethical obligation" to assist veterans through writing instruction; recent publications such as Langstraat & Doe's (2014) *Generation Vet;* and the *Field Guide* (Hart & Thompson,

2020). This call was originally framed as a response to a specific historical moment—the arrival of students who had served during the so-called "surge of troops" in Iraq in 2007-08 (Hart & Thompson, 2013). Yet, thanks to the various forms of the GI Bill over the decades, veterans were and continue to be on campus in strength since World War II; because of the consistent turnover rate in US Armed Forces, vets will continue to be on campus in strength for the foreseeable future.[5] If Writing Studies is in fact obliged to tend to veterans in some special way, it is not the work of a moment. Because there will probably always be veterans on campus, Writing Studies needs an ongoing commitment accompanied by more careful thinking about who veterans are, what they have in common, and what they carry from the military to the classroom.

Despite the increased awareness of veteran presence on campus, transition remains complicated for veterans. They often report that is hard for them to know where, or even whether, to seek relationships in civilian life. Campus life is hardly representative of American society at large, but the distance that many veterans feel from their civilian classmates is representative of a larger problem. Both popular and scholarly writers of the past twenty years have lamented the increasing distance between American culture and the culture of the American military. Although the military continues to enjoy broad public support, that support is often characterized as "shallow," demanding little of the American populace beyond the occasional, "Thank you for your service" (Golby, Cohn, & Feaver, 2016). Complicating the problem even more, recent studies suggest that military insularity—that is, the way that the military is separated from civil society and its influence—is only getting worse, as new recruits are ever more likely to come from military families (Mattis & Schake, 2016). Increasingly, the military is only experienced by those who already have an inkling of what the experience is like.

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[5] According to a 2019 report from the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 700,000 vets use their education benefits each year; roughly half of those students attend public universities.

Indeed, we have arrived at a peculiar situation in which most Americans respect and admire service members and yet have little-to-no idea of what military experience is like.[6] Of post-9/11 warfare, one study states plainly: "As a nation, America is at war. As a people, Americans are not." The "civil-military gap," as it is commonly known, is a two-sided equation with deep historical roots that reach back before 9/11 (Feaver & Kohn, 2000). For many veterans entering civilian life, trust can be elusive because the perceived gap between civilian and military culture is wide (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Sayer et al., 2010; Koenig, et al, 2014). As veterans perceive, and as civilians today admit, non-veterans know little about the military (Mattis & Schake, 2016). The result is that veterans have few expectations of care from civilians, and civilians who do wish to care for veterans have little understanding of the kind of care that veterans might expect given their military experience. A particularly regrettable point that is easily lost is that veterans know a good deal about care, at least within the context of their military experience. But what they know is lost in conversations about transition that view veterans as civilians-in-training.

For the many veterans who use the G. I. Bill, the college campus becomes the main stage on which their transition into civilian life plays out (Hart & Thompson, 2020). Colleges and universities have made great strides in the past ten years in caring for veterans, developing transition programs and various forms of assistance—financial, educational, and social—on campus. However, recent research suggests that while the assistance is helpful, especially for

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[6] See the survey upon which Mattis & Schake's 2016 collection, *Warriors and citizens: American views of our military,* was based. As two contributors, Wittes & Poplin, note: although 70% of Americans claim familiarity with the US Armed Forces, "Americans do not know how big the services are or how much they cost; they do not know whether troops are well paid; they are unsure about who can serve and why" (pp. 148-49). Nor, say the authors, does the American public know what service members do or why they do it. With respect to the question "why they serve," in fact, a recent study suggests that most Americans' answer to the question is a function of that American's partisan leanings; Krebs & Ralston (2020) found that those people who self-identify as liberal are more likely to believe that economic hardship is the most salient factor in a person's choice to enlist in the military; *see also* Asoni, et al., 2020.

forming student-veteran peer groups, a sense of caring does not always reach the classroom (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018; Hart & Thompson, 2020). Veterans are widely reported to struggle in trusting instructors; they find the instructor's attitude and teaching style off-putting (Wright, 2016; Morrow & Hart, 2014; Mallory & Downs, 2014). It may well be that these student veterans are used to training that differs from the collegiate student-instructor dynamic, and addressing veteran expectations would be an important step (Hart & Thompson, 2020; Blackwell-Starnes, 2018; Leonhardy, 2009). But it might also be that veterans have a thing or two to say about teaching, and especially about how training—which is certainly a kind of teaching—and relationships can, or even should, be connected. In other words: transition might be a two-way street.

Student-veteran Micah Wright (2016) shares a story of one college writing instructor who reached out to him as a veteran, asking him questions about where he had served, and what he had done in the Marines. The questions were simple enough: "You're a Marine? How many tours?" This was sufficient to begin building a teacher-student relationship that made Micah's transition to college much easier. Instructors on college campuses don't need to be subject-matter experts on military culture. It was enough to ask a good question, and small, mundane moments such as these made a big difference to Micah. That same focus on mundane moments of relationship is central to my study, as well.

Jonathan Shay (2002), in his landmark work on veterans returning to civil society, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*, describes post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as "the persistance into civilian life of valid survival adaptations to combat" (p. 40). Shay is describing a specific problem he encountered as a counselor working with veterans. My study does not specifically concern trauma or PTSD; rather, it concerns

training and the preparation for war, which is itself a formative process for most service members. Nonetheless, I find Shay's description useful for more than just PTSD: to be a veteran is to live with the persistence of military experience into veteran experience. Too often, those experiences are generalized too quickly, connected too easily to trauma—real or imagined—encountered in the military. But relationships are formed, many times, in far more mundane ways. And those ways are hard to notice, precisely because they are so mundane, unless we deliberately stop and pay attention.

My study pays close attention to the role of military experience in relationship formation. This overlooked and understudied area is central to understanding both military experience, which is my primary interest, and veterans' understandings of relationship. I do not focus on the "persistance" into civilian life because my interviews were focused largely on military experience. However, for Veterans Studies as a field and for the sake of veterans themselves, this study is a necessary first step toward a larger understanding of how military experience informs veteran experience.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to make the language as plain as I can without sacrificing precision. I have engaged in judicious paraphrase—and occasional translation—of my veteran participants' statements, to make military jargon a smaller hurdle for those who find the alphabet soup of military life bewildering. I have endeavored to keep the "terms of art" to a minimum and stick to everyday language as much as I can. Every profession needs a certain amount of technical terminology to get its work done, but I have tried to smooth the path between disparate professions as best I can.

This chapter is a deep dive into the theory, methodology, and methods of my study—that is, the ideas that were important to me in planning and executing my research. I explain why I think relationships are so important, and why I chose an approach to my research that prioritizes specific relationships. Similarly, I explain why I think a focus on the mundane life of the service member is so necessary right now to Veterans Studies. I have tried to make this chapter as helpful as possible for anyone who is working with veterans and wants to make veterans' perspectives a bigger part of their research. And with that, let's talk coffee…

I learned about coffee during my first deployment to Iraq. I learned out of necessity. Our operations were round-the-clock, and while the six members of my team shared our duties in 10-hour shifts, we did not do so in an orderly fashion. Day and night assignments changed frequently, so we often found ourselves looking at fifteen or twenty hours of work without stop. The coffee maker in our shop—a cheap white plastic CoffeeMate machine from the big Army

base on the other side of Baghdad, stained with dust and streaked with spilled coffee—was everyone's friend, eventually. For my part, I'd never cared much for coffee before I arrived in Iraq.

The coffee that became part of my life in Iraq was bitter and tasted of the air around it. It was a fussy drink, too, and required too much fiddling with creamers and milk and sugar to become palatable. And it was a novelty, which is to say it was time- and focus-consuming. The carafe needed to be rinsed out, the old filter (and grounds) removed and replaced, the new ground coffee measured out of a gigantic red plastic tub of Folgers that came in a care package from the States. I worried that I would miss a step and either produce a mess of watery grounds overflowing the filter and spilling onto the floor—which I did, at times—or produce a thin brew that did little to keep us awake. Each step was new to me. Each step required a degree of presence and thoughtfulness, and a certain amount of willpower. At that point, my goal was not to savor a cup of coffee, but to get the caffeine into my bloodstream and to satisfy the needs of my teammates. I don't know whether any of us enjoyed coffee, but successful coffee-making was a team activity that we each tried to adopt. The pouring out into cups and mugs was a way of marking time, and a reason to pause in the work and chat. We may not have expected much in the way of quality coffee from each other, but we expected an effort to be made. And so, I went through the coffee-making process deliberately, not yet routinely, but with a by-the-numbers approach that could become routine.

Fifteen years later, my process is more sophisticated. I use a French press, carefully cleaned after each use. I choose the beans with care, too, and grind them myself. I drink the same two cups of coffee every day, and every day it is a similarly rigorous process. Nevertheless, today I rarely think through the process. It simply happens, as a matter of muscle memory. It is a

routine. It is a routine that, despite the variations possible, is shared by many people—including many of my readers. We each have our particularities about our coffee; and yet, if we were to speak of our shared routines, we could do so easily because the routines are founded on a set of similar motions, choices, patterns, and presumptions. That is the nature of routine—to become invisible, and available to us once more only through conscious reflection or reconstruction. For this reason, many contemporary phenomenologists regard the experience of a cup of coffee as a good starting point for understanding phenomenology, and the idea of the phenomenon: a discreet and identifiable experience (Dahlberg, 2006; Van Manen, 2014). The everyday experiences and especially the everyday routines of our lives are rich in potential for reflection and for research.

Broadly speaking, phenomenology seeks to understand the origins and meaning of phenomena, which are types of specific lived experiences (Van Manen, 2014; Husserl, 2014). Since we are speaking of interpersonal relationships, a phenomenological inquiry might look at the conditions under which particular friendships were formed as a way of understanding the general conditions under which friendships are formed. Understanding the origin of a phenomenon—where it came from—is important because it helps us to understand what characteristics make the phenomenon unique and easily recognizable (Dahlberg, 2006). Such understanding starts with an investigation of conscious experience, often the details of our lives that are too mundane to dwell on or even notice. Early phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl (2014) started with the idea that knowledge comes from our experience—what is often referred to as "lived experience" in the social sciences—and that such knowledge is part of the pattern of a person's life, which means it is "subjective," or dependent on the subject. In order to understand the knowledge that individuals acquire through their experience of the world,

phenomenologists developed a means of collecting that knowledge as empirical evidence. They asked their participants to talk about their experiences in as much detail as possible, with the goal of getting participants to return to the moment of experience as much as memory would permit (Van Manen, 2014; Wertz, 2011). By listening closely and allowing interview subjects to stay with a subject or experience, the researcher and participant move toward what the experience was *like* from the perspective of the participant. Contemporary practitioners such as Max van Manen (2014) suggest that the goal of phenomenological inquiry is to recover an experience through attention to detail. The phenomenological interview is a way of approaching first-hand experience; combined with the researcher's explication of the narrator's experiences, the meaning of the phenomenon is brought more nearly into view.

This sort of investigation is not easy. It requires patience and the willingness to join in as participants wander down rabbit holes of memory—without much assurance that wandering will yield the sort of empirical evidence that a researcher seeks. Max van Manen (2012), one of the leading theoreticians of phenomenology, suggests that it is a mindset: "more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning" (p. 26). Phenomenology begins with listening closely and asking questions that approach lived experience; it is a means of asking what is meaningful in individual experience. For the social sciences in particular, phenomenology—with a close focus on individual experience, and an assumption that such experiences are meaningful—is a valuable tool (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020; Hinton, 2013; McCormick, et al, 2017; Daniels, 2017; Hall, Rings, & Anderson, 2020).

For many phenomenologists, the practice of listening openly requires a commitment to self-restraint. The researcher or interviewer must keep in check the assumptions and

preconceptions that they might have about either their participant or the phenomenon being investigated. This restraint requires some effort—it is sometimes called" bridling," a reference to the tool and technique used to restrain a horse's range of motion and keep it focused (Dahlberg, 2006). Bridling comes from self-reflection and practice. It helps the researcher to let a participant wander as they will through their experiences. And bridling requires that the researcher think through their own experiences before, during, and after interviews, to find those places where the researcher's own perspectives or experiences may be limiting their ability to appreciate a participant's experiences.

For example, physical training is universal in the military. Nevertheless, my own particular and positive experiences of, say, running by the seaside in California while stationed at the Presidio of Monterey might influence how I hear other veterans when they talk about their experiences with physical training. If I don't give them a chance to describe their experiences in detail, I might just fill in the blanks of their experience with a generally positive attitude toward running, or the sentiment that "running isn't that bad." I need to know that I bring a certain attitude toward physical training with me into my interviews. More importantly, as a researcher, I need to ask my participants to walk me through all the mundane details of their experiences, even when—perhaps *especially* when—those details seem to be in complete agreement with my own experiences.

The tendency to imagine agreement is common. Several of my participants—not all white, but all male—brought out a military commonplace: "Everyone here bleeds green." One Marine told me there were "light green Marines and dark green Marines." The idea behind the phrase is that service members don't notice qualities such as race and gender, especially on the battlefield. It is a pleasant notion, and it is worth considering whether some of the scaffolds I

describe in this study might counteract the prejudices that every service member inevitably brings to the military. But it also remains true that service members' ideas about identity and prejudice never disappear from the scene—nor do mine. That same Marine was also profoundly disappointed by the racism he saw while stationed with the Army in Louisiana. Racism and sexism are very much a part of the experiences, mundane or extraordinary, of military service. It is therefore important for me to spend a moment talking about who I am, and about my service.

I served several different roles in the US Army, and so I tend to consider myself more well-rounded than most when it comes to military experience. I was a soldier and an officer, in intelligence and infantry, in stateside and overseas service with units from various echelons of the hierarchy. What's more, I was relatively old when I joined up: already 27. I brought a certain amount of education and experience to my role in the military. While military service might be formative for younger service members, in my case it was probably reformative—although it is also possible that, even at that age, I didn't have a coherent sense of how relationships ought to be formed. Regardless, my identity and experiences are shaped by my service, and they shape this study in ways that inform and limit both my understanding of my participants' experiences and the conclusions I draw from my understanding. This is especially true where gender and race are concerned; I am a white male who served in an historically white male institution, and I conduct my research within an historically white male institution. I have tried to take my own perspective into account as best I can and acknowledge my limitations. I know that I missed opportunities in my interviews to ask follow-up questions; I missed cues that might have led to a deeper consideration of race, gender, and sexuality within the interviews themselves.

In Chapter 3, for example, we will meet Diego. He is one of two participants with whom I served. Diego enlisted in the US Army straight out of high school, in the year 1998, and I met

him nearly ten years later. Diego self-identifies as Hispanic. He told me a bit about his favorite leader, a soldier named Morris. When Diego told me about Morris, though, he also mentioned Morris's successor. The successor, Allen, was one of two soldiers who came to Diego's squad from an assignment in South Korea. "They were both real good buddies," Diego said of his new squad leader, Allen, and the other soldier, whom Allen appointed as team leader, "because they both came from Korea. They were both... they were Black, but they had no leadership skills." Diego paused before he mentioned race; and I will admit that I don't know quite how race factors into Diego's estimation of Allen's leadership skills. I will also admit that I missed this moment as it happened in the interview: I should have followed up with a question right then and there, and I didn't. But my reading of Diego's pause, in conjunction with the actual text, is this: Diego saw Allen's decision to appoint his friend as team leader as connected to their shared racial identity, as well as to their shared experience in Korea, but he did not connect their poor leadership qualities to their shared racial identity. In other words, Diego saw it as natural that a Black noncommissioned officer might select another Black soldier as his subordinate over the other soldiers in the squad, both because they knew each other and because they were both Black. Diego might have seen their shared racial identity as a reason they would look out for each other.

I missed an opportunity to follow up on Diego's comment. And I know that I missed opportunities in my explication, as well, because my own identity and experience limit my perspective. I brought one of my stories to a colleague, Kelly Wheeler, who helped me to expand my take on the story of Casey and Taylor, which appears in Chapter 3 as well. I interviewed Casey, a Korean-American woman who joined the Army as an officer a couple of years before 9/11. She was telling me about her experiences as commander of a communications unit in South

Korea in 2003. In brief: when Taylor was assigned as a platoon leader to Casey's company, Casey asked her battalion commander whether his decision was based in any way on the fact that Taylor was a woman and Casey was a woman. Casey's battalion commander responded, *Maybe. Why?* When Casey asked him if he, the battalion commander, was allowed to make decisions on that basis, he again responded, *Maybe. Why?*

Taylor, who was white and right out of college, had a reputation in the battalion as a "party girl," as Casey put it, already a demeaning and gendered distinction. And while Casey had a high degree of respect for her battalion commander, she also suspected that he saw "fixing" Taylor as a woman's job. Or, perhaps, he saw women in the military as having a special bond that would make it easier for Casey to care for Taylor and bring out her potential. Perhaps he believed that the men in his battalion could not see beyond the reputation, or beyond the "girl." Regardless, the battalion commander saw that one of his new platoon leaders needed a company commander who could care for her. He was himself acting out of care, and that care was likely intertwined with sexist assumptions.

Casey's function as a role model might also be more complicated than it initially appears. She is a woman who successfully adapted to the historically white and masculine environment of the US military. If one of Taylor's struggles to meet expectations in the military is a struggle to adapt to men's standards, and if it is true that Casey successfully adapted to the standards, then Casey can serve as an intermediary— a sort of translator—to help Taylor become accustomed to military life. If one of Taylor's struggles was to find a leader who was able to respect potential without regard to gender, then Casey served as a slightly different type of intermediary. Whether or not gender differences are the driving factor in Taylor's difficulty to adapt, Casey seems to be serving as a guide at a moment when other scaffolds and leaders may have failed Taylor. Gender

is certainly part of the story, even if I cannot be sure exactly how it has shaped each person's decisions and experiences. But thanks to Kelly, I was able to see possibilities I could not see on my own.

I often need to have pointed out for me the ways in which gender and race affect military experience because, at times, I consider my "insider" status—the fact that I served as part of the community I am researching—as a sort of universal pass to every veteran's experience. With respect to insider status, I try to take seriously Indigenous American scholar Shawn Wilson's wisdom that neither insider nor outsider status frees a researcher from the need to reflect on their relationship with their participants (Wilson, 2008). As I suggested earlier, the insider runs the perpetual risk of assuming they know more than they really do about their participants' experiences, because they share many of those same experiences. From the perspective of Indigenous Studies, Wilson (2008) tells us: "While I feel that I have an ethical right as an insider to study my own people and other Indigenous peoples in Canada, no matter how many similarities exist between Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous Australians, I am still an outsider to the Indigenous Australian people" (p. 130). He was not raised with the same beliefs or practices; his insider status within one Indigenous community is not an all-access pass to every Indigenous community. He must acknowledge the limits of his knowledge.

In a similar fashion, my military experience allows me access to some beliefs and practices, especially those of the infantry in the Army. But where other military occupations are concerned, and other branches of service, e.g., the Air Force, I must enter the research as a novice or risk unwarranted assumptions about other service members' experiences. For this reason, I asked participants to walk me through the details of their mundane experience even when I felt quite certain I already knew what they would say. My sample leaned heavily toward

Army and Marine Corps experiences—even the Navy corpsmen, or medics, with whom I spoke worked largely with the Marine Corps. What this meant is that my study is focused largely on the experiences of soldiers and Marines—an important limitation to bear in mind as I reach conclusions about what military service might be like.

2.1 Recruitment Method

I solicited participants in Phase 1 through chapters of Student Veterans of America at three college campuses in my vicinity; two are large state universities, and one is a county community college. All three chapters posted the flier through electronic message boards to their membership; two of the chapters also met in an on-campus veterans' center, and I posted fliers inside the centers as well. I invited veterans from any branch of service, provided they had served for any length of time after 9/11. I also attended a meeting of the chapter on one campus, explained my research, and invited participation to the few attendees at that meeting.

In March of 2020 the coronavirus changed the trajectory of my study. I had to change my recruitment approach; the break in action also gave me an opportunity to re-evaluate who I might invite to participate. As I reviewed the empirical evidence from Phase 1, the importance of activities and settings to the formation of relationships was emerging; but in interviews with veterans of the Navy and Air Force, the activities and settings they described were so far outside my experience that we spent most of our time just establishing what mundane looked like for them. The exceptions to this were the Navy medics, both of whom served with Marines Corps units. We were left little time to talk about relationships, or to form enough context for me to grasp their experience. In consultation with committee members, I decided to focus only on experiences in the Army and Marine Corps; the limitations on service experiences allowed increased focus on common activities and settings in which relationships were formed.

Some participants in Phase 2 contacted me through the invitations extended in Phase 1 of my study; I solicited other participants in Phase 2 through a faculty member at the University of Michigan who has extensive veteran connections on Facebook. (I don't use Facebook, or any social media aside from LinkedIn, and so I borrowed online connections from friends.) That faculty member distributed a message on my behalf.

And finally, Valentina was recruited for me by Cassidy. I mention this because Cassidy also tried to recruit other participants for me, but we ran into a limitation on recruitment that should be noted: many people who are still actively serving were reluctant to participate because they were unsure about the legal or professional consequences of speaking to me about their service; I respected their reluctance and did not press for participation.

2.2 Conduct of Interviews

In Phase 1, I conducted interviews with individual participants—and one married couple, Jackson and Kerry, who are referred to as "dual military" in the Army—on campus. The interviews were conducted in two parts, my intention being that I would have time to assess the information in the first part of the interview and then ask participants to follow up on specific relationships in the second part. Francesca and Shea both conducted at least part of their interview via videoconference; our interviews were helpful both in terms of the stories they offered, and in terms of their willingness to help me figure what it meant to create a more intimate and compassionate interview through videoconference.

All the Phase 2 interviews were conducted via videoconference. I offered a short message to all my participants in advance of our interview, to set the tone and set expectations for a space that might be both informal and generative. I believe our conversations were generative; I know they were informal. Children and spouses and neighbors and cats and dogs and rain and cigars

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and anything else imaginable interrupted us from time to time; "Now, where were we?" is a refrain throughout the transcripts.

In both Phase 1 and Phase 2, I conducted the interviews as conversations driven largely by my participants' recollections of service. In most cases, the participants were exploring their memory and I was along for the ride; however, Martin showed up with a list of relationships he wanted to speak about, and Elliott even had notes about the relationships that he thought most worthy of mention. Regardless of preparation, though: the interview guide, especially in its later form, was meant to help me identify those relationships that seemed most meaningful to my participants, and then explore the textures and context of those relationships as far as memory would allow. In the spirit of what Mariana Grohowski calls "reciprocity," I shared some of my own service stories with participants at moments when it seemed useful to do so.[7]

I made audio recordings of each interview and supplemented the recordings with handwritten notes. The recordings were transcribed by a commercial service, rev.com; I reviewed the transcripts for errors, which are inevitable when speaking of a culture so invested in acronyms and jargon as the US military.

I assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect their privacy; participants were given an opportunity to change that pseudonym, and some did. I also let my participants know that I would, at their request, obscure other details, such as the name or location of units and military installations, to further ensure their privacy.

The interview guide and interview practice I developed were open-ended.[8] Indeed, in the earliest stages of my research I did not even yet know that I would focus on relationships, but rather asked my participants in the broadest terms to tell what it was like to serve in the military.

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[7] Grohowski, 2018

[8] The guide—in both its first and second iteration—are included in the Appendix.

It was only after three of four interviews that I started to discern a pattern in my participants' responses. They were always talking about what they did in the military, but who they did it with seemed more important to them. With that in mind, and with some help from my committee members, I decided to revamp the interview guide.[9]

I did not suggest the types of relationships I would discuss with participants; some of my participants stuck to happier recollections, but most delved at least once into a relationship that they had misgivings about. Some of my participants found the guide too open-ended at times; they would apologize for going on too long about a particular experience or subject. I assured them that my purpose was to explore the stories and relationships they wanted to share, and to take their priorities on as my own, to "follow the logic of their experience," as I put it in one interview. Over several months of development, starting with a dense ten-page guide that addressed every aspect of military life in some detail, I winnowed the questions until I arrived at a single-page guide to serve as a rough roadmap for the interviews. I designed this shorter guide to give participants greater freedom to wander through their experiences. As we wandered, I took notes and tried to note those relationships that seemed most important to participants; I then used a set of prompting questions when it came time to explore a relationship in greater detail. My goal—which, as a novice interviewer, I achieved less frequently than I might have hoped—was to listen for relationships that mattered to my participants, and then develop empirical evidence to help me understand that relationship. I believe I improved in my listening skills over time. I learned to give my participants more silence in which to choose their way. I became more attuned to the stories that my participants seemed most excited about or invested in, and

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[9] See the Appendix, which includes the Phase 1 and Phase 2 interview guides, for more details.

therefore seemed most worth unpacking. Indeed, I lean more heavily on the later, richer interviews in this study because of my own learning curve.

2.3 Research participants

My participants—all but one—served in the US military after 9/11; however, deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan was neither a requirement for participation in interviews nor a focus of this study.[10] All but two of my participants joined the service after 9/11, and all who served after 9/11 did so knowing that deployment to war was a distinct possibility. Some of my participants deployed, and we discussed those deployments—sometimes at length—during our interviews. But veterans of service are not necessarily veterans of war, and I went into my interviews knowing that I wanted to dwell on military training rather than war. Nonetheless, the possibility of deployment was an important part of the historical and cultural context for the service that my participants experienced. Military training takes on a new urgency when the skills acquired might be used in war tomorrow, and after 9/11, it was impossible for most service members to escape the sense that they could be at war tomorrow.

This study is focused on post-9/11 service chiefly because the realistic possibility of deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan is an important context for the study participants, and because it is a relatively small slice of US history. However, without further study of relationships in a peacetime military experience, I cannot say what distinctions there might be in wartime

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[10] One participant was a military spouse to a service member in the US Navy. Chanda reached out to me after she saw one of my flyers through a Facebook group. She acknowledged at the time that she did not meet the selection criteria for my study, but she remarked that she was quite qualified to talk about relationships in the military. I agreed to interview here, largely because I was curious what contribution such an interview might make to my study, which was still in its early stages. Ultimately, I chose not to use her interview as part of the analyzed sample. I will share one interesting observation I made as I attempted to find a place for her amongst the sample. Chanda described in great detail the group dynamics amongst the Navy spouses with whom she associated; those dynamics—and especially the social hierarchy of her group—in many ways mirrored the dynamics and structure that she ascribed to her husband's unit. In other words: Chanda's experience suggests that some of the scaffolds of the military also become scaffolds for military families. This is not a new point to make in Veterans Studies, but it is a point whose full implications have not been explored yet.

experience. The participants in this study might represent the possible experiences of all service members, but they offer a more reliable window into the lives of the 3.7 million veterans who have served since the day the World Trade Center fell and Operation Enduring Freedom began.

According to a Pew Research survey (Taylor, et al., 2011), since 9/11 the number of service members on active duty—serving in the military as a full-time job—at any given moment is roughly 1.4 million; roughly 1 million more serve in the National Guard and Reserve forces. Moreover, turnover in the military remains quite consistent since Vietnam: in the Army in particular, the average soldier serves about 6.5 years and the average officer serves about 11 years. If both turnover and the total size of the force are constants, then roughly the same number of service members are coming and going each year.

With respect to the demographics of my study, nineteen former and current service members and one former military spouse participated in interviews.[11] One married couple, both of whom served in the Army, interviewed together. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 42, and from lower enlisted to high-ranking officers. Their experiences with active duty ranged from four to 24 years—two participants' service began before 9/11. Among the service members interview, six were women and thirteen were men, which means that women were heavily oversampled in my study.[12] Half the participants self-identified as white; four self-identified as Hispanic; two self-identified as Black; and two self-identified as Korean-American. The military today is changing rapidly; in the last twenty years, the number of service members who identify as white decreased from two-thirds of all service members to just over half, and the number of women is increasing (Barolo, 2019). This means that my research sample is also roughly representative of

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[11] See table of participants in the Appendix for more details regarding my research sample.
[12] This is true whether we consider the Department of Defense (2019) report on the current military, or the US Census report (2018) on the current veteran population. The same is true of sampling for race and ethnicity.

the changing faces of military experience. However, three caveats apply: first, most of the participants came from the Army and Marine Corps; second, the sample size in a phenomenological study is always far too small to be considered representative of a whole; and third, despite efforts to recruit a diverse sample, I was unable to recruit any Black men to participate in my study. None responded to the initial outreach efforts, and the few Black men with whom I served and was still in contact with were still serving and were unwilling to participate because they were concerned about whether the military would approve of their participation in the study.[13] Although not every participant mentioned race as a feature of their experience, I include racial self-identification in each participant's first appearance in the study because race is undoubtedly a factor in American service members' experiences.

The coronavirus pandemic interrupted my research momentarily. At the outset, I recruited participants locally for in-person interviews, but I had to shift my interviews online in March of 2020. An unexpected benefit of the shift was that I was able to interview veterans as far away as Texas and Florida. Each participant agreed to a total of three hours of interviews, but a few participants in the "online" phase of the study agreed to an additional three hours of interviews. Each interview, whether in-person or online, was audio-recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions became the most important tool for my research, although I often went back to the audio recordings to recover the way that participants talked about their experiences. Although I did not share the transcripts with my participants, I did share the manuscript of the dissertation with my participants so that they could review the text and suggest corrections or request redactions.

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[13] They were not the only potential participants to express reluctance; Big Army seems to have a chilling effect on service members' decisions to tell their stories, at least while they are still in uniform.

I prefaced the interviews with a bit of background about my military experience and my research goals, along with assurances that we would be exploring what participants were comfortable exploring. I explained that the interview could be stopped at any point and interviewees would be able to review the eventual manuscript and request revisions or redactions. In these ways I endeavored to give my participants a strong sense of ownership over their stories. We started off with a summary of their service: when and where they joined, where and with what units they served, when they decided to re-enlist or separate from the military. We talked about what they did after service. And then, based on their service history, we dug into the specifics of their experience—usually in a chronological fashion. Although I encouraged participants to dwell on their training experiences, I did not require them to do so.

My goal was to give participants space to recall their experiences in as much detail as possible. I do not, however, interpret their stories as the experience itself—rather, their stories are an account of the experience. So, in keeping with phenomenological inquiry, I try to provide some context for each service member's story. I ended up using a "case study" approach so that I could provide enough context for the stories to feel particular and distinct. Ultimately, this study represents only a few of the experiences that participants shared with me—I was obliged to identify stories that offered a model phenomenon, with the understanding that every service member would offer unique variation. The perspectives and experiences that each participant brought into service are important for understanding the perspectives and experiences they later carried into civilian life. In my view, it is only in trying to grasp what persists—and why—that we grasp who a person is.

I spent months living with the stories in these pages, reading and listening over and over—a process that one of my advisors described as "marinading in data." My initial selection

was for vividness; I chose the stories with sufficient detail, in my estimation, to suggest not only a phenomenon but something of how the participant experienced that phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014, p. 261). I then clustered stories by phenomena: experiences at the rifle range, for example, or experiences in basic training. From the broad phenomenon of relationships in military experience, subsets of phenomena appeared and three stood out as most frequently mentioned by all participants. These phenomena were not themselves relationships, but were essential to relationship formation. The first of these was downtime: many participants spoke of the experience of spending time alongside their teammates, with nothing to do but chat. Another phenomena was being part of a team. The final phenomena was training. I isolated the stories about these phenomena and moved into a more detailed explication of the empirical evidence.

I summarized key elements of each story on oversize sticky notes and I covered the walls of my living room in sticky notes as I explored different connections between stories. I moved the notes around, experimenting with different ways to connect the stories. I wrote pages and pages of memos, mostly by hand, testing connections between stories. I sought the essence of the phenomena, the "model" that forms the basis for the infinite variation of experience (Dahlberg, 2006, pp. 12-13; Groenewald, 2004, p. 50). I wanted to account for the importance of the relationship and how participants thought about the scaffolds that helped that relationship form (Vagle, 2018, p. 111; Hycner, 1999, p. 154). What I found was that across the phenomena certain scaffolds recurred. Chief amongst the scaffolds was *obligation*—what one is required to do— and it came up in various guises, over and over. The most frequent guise was also the most difficult to discern: military regulation. Underneath the downtime, underneath the team organization and the training, were a set of regulations. Those regulations were often indistinguishable from what service members did or how they did it because service members

were often taught to do things without reference to a regulation. A chain of reasoning formed: certain phenomena in military experience were essential to relationship formation, and underneath these phenomena were common scaffolds that determined how the phenomena were experienced. The regulations may not have been designed with relationships in mind. To put it another way: the regulations were not designed to help service members care for each other. But care was the frequent outcome of the scaffolding.

The kind of care my participants recalled was not a general warmness or fuzziness, nor the camaraderie of hardships shared in war, but rather a precise set of expectations and obligations created by professional training. Most of the stories centered around the common experience of training for war, over periods of weeks and months, alongside people who had common goals and worked together to achieve those goals. The goal belonged to the military: every service member was preparing for war. But the odd thing was that effective preparations for war had a distinct second-order effect: service members came to care deeply for the people closest to them. Because it emerged so consistently and powerfully in my participants' statements, that oddity became the focal point of this study.

Chapter 3 Taking Time to Care

BLUF: The first phenomenon is downtime. The military often requires service members to spend vast amounts of time alongside each other, whether in training or in the execution of routine duties. The time is often spent chatting with each other, and what is learned through these chats often enables service members to care for each other, personally and professionally.

When my participants spoke of their downtime, I found that the relationships they described depended greatly on the availability of time—both within and outside their regular military duties—so that they could get to know each other, professionally and personally. The knowledge they gained became a way to understand how best to fulfill their obligations to each other, which is another way of saying that they learned how to care for each other. This knowledge generally came through mundane training events and daily routines. In the same way, the time they found to spend with each other generally came through the mundane and the routine parts of military life. Importantly, the time that service members had wasn't time they found—it was, for the most part, time that the military made.

Take, for example, Diego. I was Diego's officer in an infantry platoon. We served together in 2007 and 2008, including one deployment to Iraq. He was a good leader, one of the best I worked with: physically tough, mentally resilient, and cheerful as anything, even on our worst days. I met him at the halfway point in his Army career, and Diego had already learned to take the long view of his military experience. When I interviewed him, we talked for a few minutes about the time we spent together in an infantry company. But Diego served in the US

Army from 1998 through his retirement in 2018—today he works for the Border Patrol in his home state of Texas—much of which happened before and after our time together.

In the last few years of his Army career, Diego worked alongside agencies such as Customs and Border Patrol, providing a military presence in a civilian workplace. He learned early on that his civilian counterparts tended to judge performance by paycheck. They worked long hours and were generally well-compensated, especially when they started to rack up the overtime. But because Diego was military, he could not earn overtime pay. His civilian peers, who were working the same job, assumed that his work ethic would lag, in step with his paycheck. They were wrong, but Diego knew that there was nothing he could do but demonstrate his work ethic and give them time to notice. And, because he had learned a certain type of patience in his military experience, Diego was prepared to give them time.

He told me, "You have no control over time, and time is what it takes to gain trust. So, it doesn't help… to get all upset about what people think or don't think about you… you can't control time, [and] it takes time for them to kind of know you and for them to trust you." Later in the interview, Diego repeated this point: "You just got to do that rapport… Give it time, get the time to get to know that person and build that trust." Diego was not suggesting, nor would I, that time alone is sufficient for people to form relationships with each other. But Diego insisted, as I would insist, that time is a necessary ingredient for relationship formation. Time is what allows us to see a person more fully, to evaluate them and judge their capabilities. What's more, we usually see not all at once, but in increments. We learn a little bit at a time. In time, Diego's peers came to see his work ethic and value his contribution to their team; Diego, for his part, trusted his new co-workers to do so. He didn't like giving them time to overcome their assumptions, but he knew that doing so was necessary.

Diego's goal was not friendship, but rather trust. He did not care whether they liked him. He needed his civilian co-workers to understand that he would fulfill his obligations. Similarly, many of my participants mentioned that their relationships with fellow service members were not about friendship, but rather about fulfilling obligations. Diego told me that when it came to taking time to get to know folks, "it's important [in the military] that you give everybody the benefit of the doubt because you have to trust everybody… like, 'I know I don't fucking like you, but I know I have to work with you, [and] you can count on me being there for you.'" Put differently: we don't need to like a person to care for them. Caring and liking come from different places, and—for the purposes of this study—care requires that obligations are acknowledged and met. If we also happen to like the person to whom we are obliged, that is icing on the cake.

When we talk about how a community sets standards for behavior, we are talking about normative ethics, or norms of right and wrong behavior. These norms are often very specific to a community. Although ethical norms are meant to cover a whole community, it is often most useful to think of ethics as being about relationships: between individuals, one interaction at a time. I approach obligation and caring as a relationship between individuals, even though the relationship's scaffolds—the norms around which the relationships are formed—are often regulations that cover the entire Army or Marine Corps. These regulations were not, generally, meant to help people care for each other—they were meant to make the military effective in war. But even if care is a second-order effect, it is nevertheless a distinct effect of the regulations.

Two existing approaches to the idea of care serve as a helpful starting point for understanding service members' surprising concept of the connection between obligation and care. The first comes from educator and philosopher Nel Noddings, whose Ethics of Care

belongs to an ancient philosophical approach known as virtue ethics. Virtue ethicists look to community consensus to find specific virtues (such as courage, integrity, or patience) that will help individuals live a worthy life. The idea that care is a virtue is relatively new and comes from the profession of nursing. Noddings developed her ethical system after reading nurse Milton Mayeroff's *On Caring*, a brief but powerful treatise on the role of care in modern nursing. Mayeroff (1971) started with the notion that, "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself" (p. 1). Care requires attention to others and action on their behalf. In the profession of nursing, care is often highly regulated, even though caring for a patient is still fundamentally a relationship between two individuals.

Noddings picked up on the need to listen and transferred Mayeroff's ideas to the field of education. Where Mayeroff's essential relationship is that of nurse and patient, Noddings's (2013) essential relationship is between teacher and student. So, a teacher who would care for a struggling student "must make the problem [their] own, receive it intellectually, immerse [themselves] in it; [they] must also bring the struggling student into proximity, receive such students personally" (p. 113). Noddings suggests that caring requires a teacher to set aside some of the energy they might otherwise devote to their own needs and goals in order to make room for their students' needs and goals. The teacher must get to know the student enough to understand the struggle and understand what the student would want to happen next. She calls this action "displacement." In the context of this study, we might think that displacement occurs whenever a service member's obligations outweigh their needs or desires—at least, those needs or desires that might make it hard to fulfill their obligations. The energy they might devote to their own goals is displaced—redirected toward the obligations of the military.

This displacement is not itself caring. A leader can redirect a service member's energy without regard for the cost to the service member. Often, military orders and hierarchy are imagined to be indifferent in just this way; they are about victory that will not count the cost. However, if the leader takes time to get to know the service member, obligations can be met in ways that help service members to grow, professionally and personally. As noted in the Introduction, Noddings (2013) calls the process of getting to know a person "engrossment" (p. 9). Engrossment is not merely about time but also about deliberation and focus that is proportional to the obligation. In other words, the higher the stakes, the more important it is that teachers, leaders, and peers take the time to get to know each other and understand how to help each other fulfill the obligations that they share.

Noddings's theorization is useful for understanding the role of caring in a professional setting. Most professional settings are built out of professional obligations, in varying degrees of clarity. The military is successful as a professional institution because service members generally understand their obligations and are ready to put those obligations before their own needs or desires. But the sheer quantity of downtime in the military also makes it easy for service members to get to know each other in ways that make caring more likely. Down time can also make personal relationships, built on liking, more likely. However, service members need to know first and foremost that the people they serve alongside can be counted upon to fulfill their obligations. Porter, a white man who enlisted in the US Army in 2008, at the age of eighteen, offered a perspective on a related problem: working alongside people he liked but didn't trust. "I had worked with some guys that were super nice guys," Porter told me; "I guess you could say they tried their best, but I wouldn't rely on them to do specific tasks." In Porter's view, his shop on an Air Force base in South Korea contained people he could trust to get a job done, and

people he needed to monitor. This fact didn't change whether he liked them or not, because his obligations didn't depend on liking the people he shared them with. In fact, the act of monitoring is itself a form of care, because it represents an ongoing evaluation. Time was an important factor in how Porter looked at his teammates' performance. Porter knew that the people he trusted best were those whose performance he could see over time. Porter and Diego were talking about the same relationship factor: *time* in which to see obligations met. Both men emphasized the need for time in which to care; Porter understood that he had an obligation to the people he didn't trust. He had to "monitor their work," checking in with them regularly to ensure their performance. Perhaps time confirmed Porter's concerns. Perhaps his unreliable teammates improved with time and moved into the category of trustworthy. Perhaps Porter stepped in to help his teammates improve over time. Diego talks about being on the receiving end of care; Porter is the care-giver. But they both feel the importance of time to caring. I would argue that time is the indispensable factor in the relationships that Diego and Porter describe—and in all caring relationships.

3.1 Time, Conversation, Caring

What Diego and Porter were talking about is the importance of time as a factor in relationship formation. Recently, researchers have made great strides in thinking about this factor, in both quantitative and qualitative ways, with respect to the idea of "friendship." Robin Dunbar (2019), a British anthropologist who studies friendship formation, defines friendship as "a two-way process that requires both parties to be reasonably accommodating and tolerant of each other, [and] to be willing to spare time for each other" (p. 6). When it comes to the importance of time to friendship formation, Dunbar (2021) is emphatic: "How emotionally close we feel to someone is directly related to how much time we invest in them" (p. 118). He then

points us to another researcher, Jeffrey Hall, who quantified that investment of time. According to Hall (2019), people tend to move from acquaintance to friendship if they spend more than 43 hours together in the first three weeks after meeting, although he notes that other researchers have put the number closer to 60 hours.

Whether 43 or 60 hours, the point is that forming a friendship takes time, and more than time, it takes conversation. Hall (2019) mentions various types of conversation that seem most productive in friendship formation, particularly conversation, serious or playful, about each other's activities and concerns. It is unlikely that every conversation my participants described was this kind of chat. But most of my participants mentioned the guard shifts, the whispered conversations in foxholes, the quiet talk that gets service members through the downtime. I have some experience with chat, because I've spent those nights on guard duty and in foxholes and waiting for the bus, and I recognize that this kind of talk keeps folks connected to their obligations and to each other.

Hall and Dunbar are both concerned with the development of friendships, which they maintain are distinct from professional relationships. However, Hall describes a study from the 1960s in which adult men were paired to spend their working hours together; half of the pairs also shared their leisure time and sleeping quarters after work. The authors of the study found, unsurprisingly, that the men who shared work and leisure time became close friends, whereas those who shared work alone regarded each other as mere acquaintances (Altman & Haythorn, 1965). The relevance to military life should be clear enough: in fact, neither "co-worker" nor "friend" seems to do justice to most military relationships. Instead, soldiers tend to use the term

"battle buddy."[14] This term encompasses both co-worker and friend, but it also connotes physical proximity and special obligation. A battle buddy is someone you look out for, keep track of. The proximity and obligation are interconnected.

Proximity is a relationship factor in another way, for most service members. Because military posts are often isolated, and service members often have little control over the first post to which they are sent, they tend to be geographically remote from the family and friends they relied on before joining the service. New networks need to be built and are often built around the people service members spend most of their time with. Not every service member lives in the barracks, or even on-post or on-base, while serving. But it is a relatively common experience. One of my participants, Harvey—a white man who enlisted in the Army in 2000, right out of high school—described the culture of the barracks thus: "My military experience had no separation whatsoever; it was 100% military. I didn't go home to my wife in my house that wasn't owned by the military." That lack of "separation" allowed Harvey the time and opportunity to connect more consistently and deeply with his battle buddies.

Proximity and time are tightly linked. Service members spend an enormous amount of time with each other, often in circumstances that compel the chats that Hall described. These chats might pop up during an eight-hour guard shift, or in the five minutes before physical training starts in the morning. Whether in large or small chunks of time, moments of relationship formation accumulate at a surprisingly swift clip. Service members get to know each other quickly—those 43 hours arrive before they know it. It is my hope that in the pages that follow,

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[14] This is a term I was introduced to on the first day of basic training. It is easy to dismiss the addition of "battle" to the term as gratuitous, but it might be a handy way to start introducing the connection between the high stakes of military service and the quality of the relationships service members form.

readers will appreciate just how much time service members get to know each other, and how very different the military is from most civilian workplaces in its approach to time.

3.2 Time and Structure

Time is always a factor in military experience: every activity, from a morning run to the invasion of Iraq, operates on a schedule. But the amount of control the Army asserts over the schedule differs from one activity to another. At one end of the control spectrum is structured time, wherein the military asserts a great deal of control over how the time is spent. Activities such as physical training or a rifle range are run on rigorous schedules, with service members constantly moving from one assigned position or activity to the next. Service members may have some downtime between these activities, but most of their time is accounted for by official requirements.

In a vast in-between are semi-structured activities, where the military requires a service member to be present but may not have strict requirements for how the time is spent. For instance, service members may be offered some structure for the use of their eight-hour shift in a tower overlooking an encampment, or behind a desk at the entrance to the barracks. For much of that guard shift, service members are left to their own devices, but they are not entirely on their own: since service members never undertake such duties alone, there is always a battle buddy to help you pass the time.

At the other end of the spectrum is unstructured time, wherein the military has little-to-no say in how that time is used. The military duty day runs from about 6 am to 5 pm; for the most part, service members have evenings to themselves, as well as weekends. They can spend their unstructured time as they please, and with whom they please. However, for a few simple reasons,

many service members choose to spend that time with the same battle buddies they're with all day. Unstructured time is therefore an important part of relationship formation in the military.

3.3 Structured Time: On the Range and on the Run

Efficiency in the military matters most at the moment a major operation begins: hundreds, if not thousands, of people need to move simultaneously and according to plan. Prior to the operation, though, what matters most is readiness—especially readiness to fulfill the basic obligations that are common to every service member, such as marksmanship and physical fitness. Readiness takes time: time to gather the people and equipment for training and testing, and time to check and double-check that everyone and everything is in readiness. Service members expect to spend a good deal of that time patiently waiting for the moment when readiness is demonstrated by every service member and every unit; the experience is called "hurry up and wait." The waiting, almost always alongside the same battle buddies, is important: time spent in consistent company is what makes caring not only possible but likely in military experience. Even amid highly structured training activities such as a trip to the rifle range, teammates have countless opportunities to get to know each other better, one moment at a time. But the opportunities are, in one important way, limited: the order of people in the line is always about the same.

The rifle range is the grounds for training and testing the most fundamental of soldiering skills. Rifle marksmanship training and testing are conducted on a routine basis, a process known in the Army as "qualification." Qualification is conducted *en masse*, by either a company or battalion, and company-level training events in the military are unlike anything in civilian life. The sheer number of people who need to qualify, often taking multiple turns at the firing line,

has an inertia all its own—one that is perhaps equaled in civilian life only by the experience of the line at the DMV.

A trip to the range is usually a whole-day experience that begins before dawn, when service members gather to receive their assigned weapon. The weapons are issued one at a time. Military safety regulations require that each service member be assigned a specific weapon. On being handed a weapon at the Arms Room—the vault where the weapons are kept under lock and key—each service member verifies that the weapon issued to them is in fact their assigned weapon. The process is painfully slow. Service members spend a good deal of time before dawn waiting their turn for the sake of weapons safety.

What I remember from those mornings is not the bit where I received my rifle and headed to the trucks to wait for the company to depart for the range. What I remember is sitting in long lines, back against the wall outside the Arms Room, chatting with the folks on the right and left of me. Sometimes the talk was about the range, or the company gossip; sometimes about a movie, or the pizza place they went to the night before, or whether there will be time for a bite to eat before heading out to the range. Sometimes the talk was about more serious or personal matters. The talk lasted for exactly the amount of time it took to get to the front of the line. It was often small talk, both in terms of content and duration. Nevertheless, these small increments of conversation would add up over time, especially since hurry up and wait was a constant in military life. There were daily opportunities to stand or march or run next to a teammate and fill the time with talk. Always talk, and almost always with the same battle buddies.

Even on the range, once the firing had begun, there was time to chat. Service members were brought to the firing lines in small teams and would return to the firing line as often as needed to qualify. While waiting their turn, service members would rotate through required

training activities to prepare for their turn on the range. Chances to chat or connect were replaced by chances to assess professional performance. There wasn't much small talk on the firing line, because the need for safety was paramount while the rifles were firing. Everyone on the line except the Range NCO kept their mouths shut. But on the sidelines, waiting their turn to get into the next training station or onto the firing line, service members kept up the chat.

The rifle range is one type of structure: the flow of events over the course of the day is highly prescribed, but the mass nature of the training creates a lot of small opportunities for connection. Physical training is a different kind of structured training. Service members are required to be present for a specified period and work toward specific goals of physical fitness. However, choice of the training activities is often left to the discretion of junior leaders. And these activities—often longer runs or gym days—provide spaces where service members can keep up the chat. For instance, Casey told me a story about how important it was for her, as a leader, to go on long runs with her junior officers. A five-mile run became an opportunity to find out more about her lieutenants, and about one young lieutenant in particular.

As a young company commander, Casey was assigned a new platoon leader, Taylor. She was a young woman recently out of college, and she had already gained a reputation in the battalion as an underachiever, especially in the area of physical training. Casey decided to take Taylor on a run; the run would give Casey a chance to check on Taylor's performance, but also a chance to chat with her. Running is a constant in the US Army and running while talking or singing or calling cadence is common: it develops lung capacity and breath control. (It also takes your mind off the miles, if you don't love running.)

During these runs, Casey had a chance to notice things about Taylor—and to ask about what she noticed. One thing she noticed was that Taylor didn't seem to be pushing herself. "I'd

just be running alongside of her during physical training," Casey said, "and being like, 'You're not even breathing hard. Will you try to run a little faster?' And she'd be like, 'I don't know, let me try.' And she'd start running a little faster, and we'd see how long we could go like that."

Casey's investment in Taylor, ethically grounded in their professional relationship, is essential for this story. Casey needed a genuinely felt obligation toward Taylor in order to even consider such a check-in as that which she describes. Much of the obligation stemmed from Army regulations, as we will consider in the next chapter. But Casey wanted Taylor to want more for herself, which meant that Casey had to take time to get to know Taylor and figure her out. The Army gave her that time, primarily as a means of improving Taylor's fitness, true, but incidentally as a means of forming a relationship. Without the relatively unstructured physical training time, Casey would not have had such an opportunity to get to know Taylor and come to understand that Taylor needed someone to push her to run a bit faster, try a bit harder. The time it takes to run a few miles may not seem like much, but the daily routines of physical training ensure that those few miles add up quickly and become an important means of spending time together.

3.4 Semi-Structured Time: Guard Duty and Other Mundane Tasks

The involuntary nature of association in the military is something service members must become accustomed to from their first day of service. You have little to no control over who is standing next to you. If we think back to Porter, he might have wanted to work alongside different people, but he had no control over that. Had he remained in the military twenty years, he never would have had control over that. This isn't necessarily different in kind from civilian workplaces, but it is probably different in degree. Military members have less control over who time is spent with, and much more time spent with others.

In Basic Combat Training, my bunkmate was a fellow named Todd. He was from California and had signed up to serve in the California National Guard in order to continue his education. Todd was much taller than me. Because we were bunkmates, it was assumed that we would also share the foxholes we dug. I recall needing the Army equivalent of a phone book to see over the edge of our foxhole, since it was dug to accommodate Todd's needs. Todd and I were about the same age—roughly ten years older than most of the other recruits in our training platoon—and that was the extent of what we had in common. In civilian life, I doubt I ever would have exchanged more than a nod with him. But the service placed us next to each other, told us to rely on each other, and then left us on guard duty for two or three hours every other night.

Guard duty in a barracks is often referred to as "fire watch"—practically speaking, there is rarely anything else to guard against. But it is a universal requirement for barracks everywhere. Whether this is so because the military doesn't hire private security guards for stateside military bases, or because we have a tradition that we can't bear to part with, or some other reason entirely, I don't know. What I do know is that every other night in Basic Training, my bunkmate Todd and I sat up for two hours in a dim corner of our platoon's barracks, taking turns walking around to check out the laundry room (and our own laundry cycles). But mostly—to stay awake and avoid the wrath of a drill sergeant who might check in at any moment—we had to chat.

So, chat we did. We talked about Todd's work with the railroad in California; he was an engineer on a freight line, and he had a wife and son. We talked about my family back home in Michigan, and my education. We talked about the politics of 9/11, and what we thought might lay ahead at a moment when Afghanistan was the only deployment possible. The small hours of

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the night were ideal for chat: our talk kept us awake, kept us engaged with our surroundings. It was small enough to keep up a steady flow, personal enough to be memorable.

Harvey, a former infantryman like me, spent a fair amount of time on guard duty as well in barracks on Army bases and in foxholes at training centers. "When you sit in a foxhole or at a post for an eight- or twelve-hour shift with a battle buddy," Harvey said, "and the only thing you have to entertain yourself is conversation, you learn about a person intimately." He told me how he spent an eight-hour guard shift with Brian, who had grown up on a farm, talking about the business of farming. His questions and Brian's answers occupied their entire shift; Harvey said, "That's how you get to know someone. So, everybody [is] randomly thrown in from random walks of life, and then you're stuck in a foxhole for eight hours and you talk—and that's how relationships [are formed]."

Today, Harvey is a social worker with the Veterans Health Administration; he spends his days speaking with veterans and helping them reflect on their experiences. My conversation with Harvey was wide-ranging and I found him to be thoughtful and reflective—he tends to view his experiences in the military back then through the eyes of the social worker he is now. His reflectiveness was an unusual challenge to my phenomenological approach to our interview: the social worker in him was already analyzing the experiences even as he recalled them, which made it hard to know how close we might be getting to that original experience. Nonetheless, his new professional identity was also a boon: he was already thinking about his experiences in the terms of relationship and care that are central to social work.

Harvey's comment on the guard duty, for instance, was utterly about relationships. What Harvey said he wanted to know about his battle buddies was simply this: "[First], can you PT?[15] And second, are you a decent human being for eight hours in a foxhole? Can [you] tolerate conversation that long?" Harvey understands today that the opportunities to chat were essential to the formation of the relationships he depended on, both in semi-structured time such as guard duty, and—during a long weekend spent on that farm he mentioned—unstructured time. Not every service member made such complete conversational use of their guard duty, but Harvey's sentiment about the importance of "being a decent human being… in a foxhole" is echoed by many of my participants.

The foxhole that Harvey refers to can be literal or figurative. Todd and I spent plenty of time in Basic Training in foxholes we dug for various training exercises. But foxholes are also an Army figure for any scenario where you are stuck with just one other person, with limited duties and lots of time on your hands. Gabriel told me a funny story. He was also one of my former soldiers—two participated in my research—and he enlisted in the Army on almost the same day I did. Like me, he named 9/11 as one of the big reasons he joined up. Like Diego, Gabriel self-identifies as Hispanic and served in the infantry. He told me about his 21st birthday, which he celebrated in a guard tower in Iraq with his fellow infantryman and friend, Bill: "I'm sitting there. I'm debating whether I should tell [Bill] that it's my birthday because [our unit] had a reputation: if there was a birthday or something big, you were going to get beat up by the entire platoon." Gabriel told Bill, and of course, Bill told the rest of the platoon. Gabriel got a "dog pile," as he put it, for his birthday. But for Gabriel, the important takeaway from his birthday

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[15] Physical training. I've avoided acronyms as much as I can in this study, but this one stays. Physical training (PT) is the daily routine of workouts, running, marching, obstacle courses, and other activities that are designed to help service members maintain physical fitness standards.

celebration was this: "Those things are what bonded us together, those experiences. As much as the combat, that solitary time that was spent on guard duty [and] other mundane tasks like that—where you just start sharing things to beat the boredom."

Service members' duty hours are often occupied with mundane and "boring" tasks, such as disassembling the machine guns and rifles and small arms, cleaning out the carbon, oiling the weapons, then reassembling them. Maintenance tasks, with weapons or vehicles or living areas, are part of the daily and weekly routine of stateside service. These tasks are just mindless enough to allow for conversations that might drift, along with the service members, from their duties to their break time. The task of weapons cleaning is essential to soldiering, but so are the connections that are made during the process of cleaning, and taking breaks, and cleaning some more. Soldiers will sit with their squads, in clusters of five or six, passing around the cleaning materials and chatting. Like my conversation with Todd on guard duty, the conversation tends to be just small enough to keep up a flow, and just personal enough to keep everyone engaged with their work and their teammates.

Such chat is essential to caring. Cassidy, a young Black woman who joined the US Army in 2012, straight out of high school, shared a story about a monthly check-in with her supervisor. Both were exhausted from work, and Cassidy was looking forward to the check-in because it was a chance to sit still for a moment. Cassidy called it "white space," as if it were blank spaces in a planner. She created white space by joking with her supervisor, trying to convince her to set aside work for a moment and just chat. If Cassidy could get her supervisor to laugh at a joke, she knew she had some leeway; she knew that eventually her supervisor would "let her guard down." And then her supervisor might continue, "By the way, did you know such and such happened?" And then, Cassidy told me, "[they] get a little bit into it, [they] start laughing. And I'm like, 'I'ma

be honest. I don't want to do shit today.' She'd be like, 'Hey, soldier. I'll be honest: I don't either."

Work talk gave way to chat, through Cassidy's effort to shift the topic of conversation. But the chat itself was only possible because there was a semi-structured space called a monthly check-in. For full-time soldiers, conversations that move beyond small talk are inevitable because the structure of military life is routine, and much of it is routine in daily and weekly terms: the work week starts in the Army with Motor Pool Monday, and each day has its mundane tasks to attend to. Every day, the same tasks and the same people. Conversations must move past pleasantries, and relationships move along with the conversations. Each day has opportunities like the one Cassidy describes. For service members serving in the National Guard or Reserves, where units often meet only once a month, mundane tasks are valued even more highly.

Dylan, a white man who enlisted in the Army in 2007, spent his service years in the Army Reserve. He told me that "a lot of people [in the Guard and Reserve] found [their] battle buddies during their active duty training time." What Dylan means is that many of his teammates in the Reserve had formed relationships with their peers during Basic Training. But Dylan had not gone to Basic with any one in his unit. In his case, "There was a group of three or four of us… we got to be really close, and I really don't know when I first recall meeting them. It might've been at the smoke pit, just in between whatever we're doing, or cleaning weapons, or something like that." The smoke pit—a designated smoking area for service members—showed up in several of my participants' stories. It is a sort of water cooler for the military: a place where Dylan was able to linger a bit and chat up his neighbors. The time they spent at weapons cleaning and at the smoke pit were structured enough to keep them together for long stretches of

time, and unstructured enough to allow Dylan and his battle buddies to develop connections from which they might come to care for each other.

3.5 Unstructured Time: The Four-Day Weekend

The four-day weekend is a phenomenon that most Americans should envy. Since federal holidays are often observed on Mondays, the military gives service members not only Monday but also the Friday preceding as days off. And during the grueling training periods between deployments, every unit I served with also found a way to make sure that there was a four-day weekend in every month, even if there was no federal holiday in that month. It was a remarkably humane way to ensure that we had time to get away from our duties, even if we almost always brought along the same people we saw on-duty throughout the week.

For my part, Sunday brunch in Austin, Texas with my squad was a key bonding site. My squad was mostly single soldiers. We lived in the barracks, for the most part. We needed to get off-post to maintain some sense that we weren't soldiers in every waking and sleeping moment. So we would sit down to brunch together, Bloody Marys and *huevos rancheros* at hand. Conversation moved past the duties and training we had in common at Fort Hood and 1st Cavalry Division—we shared what we had been before the military, and what we imagined for our lives after the military. The quality of the conversation wasn't necessarily any different from the conversation we shared while cleaning weapons, although it tended to go a bit deeper. Perhaps it was just a continuation of those same discussions, but the continuation is important. Because our social circles on-post and off-post were basically identical, the process of relationship formation continued without pause from the weekday to the weekend.

Harvey's chat with Brian about the family farming business led to one of his most memorable long weekends. "Brian took all of us to the farm for a long weekend," Harvey said.

"We all worked together, and he taught us how to drive a tractor, and cut and bale and rake hay. So, we pulled in the crop of hay, and then we went fishing in the evening. It was the most amazing weekend ever because it was just all these super-close guys doing teamwork and working together." Harvey was working alongside exactly the same teammates he worked with all week at Fort Campbell. The change in setting and duties made a difference, of course: "We weren't carrying guns, and we didn't have pressure, and no one was yelling at us, and it was the most fun thing in the world. It was the coolest thing ever." The experience was also clearly an extension of Harvey's military experience. The teammates with whom he baled hay were those he served with; the time that they spent together was time the Army gave them. Although Harvey and his friends had a good deal of choice about how to spend their weekends and with whom, they made a common choice: to spend their time with their military teammates. That choice simultaneously flowed from their existing relationship and flowed into the deeper relationship they developed over the weekend.

Harvey's long weekend suggests that while soldiers don't necessarily need the military to provide the orders, they do take some comfort in a clear set of obligations that can be shared amongst themselves. A farm has its routines and patterns, just like an infantry company. In both cases, disrupting the routines is a big risk to individuals and to the unit alike. The routines of the farm didn't require that Harvey and his friends take time to get to know one another—but things go more smoothly if time is taken. Each person has a chance to demonstrate their reliability, and to figure out who they can count on. With a small enough cast of characters, each person has a chance to chat each other up, to figure out what motivates the others. Time has two-fold importance: it is a means of figuring who is meeting their obligations, and a means of learning enough about teammates to help them meet obligations. Together, what is achieved is caring: it

is an environment where obligations are made, and obligations are fulfilled, in ways that are meaningful to Harvey and his friends.

In the next two chapters, we will look at the obligations themselves. As we shall see, neither the obligations nor the downtime that comes out of the obligations are sufficient for caring. Both time and shared obligation are necessary for caring.

Chapter 4 Teaming Up

BLUF: The second phenomenon is team organization. Service members experience highly formalized and redundant organizational structures wherein there is a high ratio of leaders-to-subordinates. This unit organization allows leaders to focus on a small number of subordinates, which is important to relationship formation.

While time is an essential element of relationships in the military, military regulations play perhaps the most important and surprising role in how service members experience relationships. Looking at leader-subordinate relationships in the military and the regulations and customs that govern them will illuminate how the regulations clearly define obligations and ensure that obligations are uniform from one military unit to another. In other words: regulations ensure that obligations will be defined and described with clarity, and then achieved through direct action.

The regulations also define the organization of military units, and in doing so, they limit the number of subordinates that each leader will work with, significantly increasing the likelihood that service members will receive individual attention. Much of that attention is regulated, as well, in the form of professional interactions between leaders and subordinates such as coaching—hands-on training in new skills—and counseling—prescribed conversations about professional development. These activities focus attention and make it more likely that obligations will be met in ways that are meaningful for leaders and subordinates. In other words, as we shall see with the US Army, regulations make care more likely.

The US Army is by far the largest of the Armed Forces, numbering today roughly half a million soldiers in full-time service and another half a million in the National Guard and Reserves. However, since the largest unit that most soldiers identify with is a company—usually between 120 and 150 people strong—the Army is really built out of thousands and thousands of companies.[16] These companies are, of course, organized into larger units; nevertheless, each company maintains a certain amount of autonomy and shares a common organization of leader-subordinate relationships. Not all companies share the same organization as an infantry unit, but the infantry is still the starting point for understanding both the US Army and the US Marine Corps. As scholar and former Army officer John Nagl (2002) suggests, the culture of "ground combat" is the essence of the US Army (p. 6). Beyond the cultural centrality of the infantry—the "Queen of Battle," as the chess metaphor has it—the infantry is simply the largest specialty in the Army. The organization of the infantry company is therefore the most common in the Army and Marine Corps. Every one of my participants—infantry or not, Army or not—served in company-sized units that were organized on roughly the same lines as an infantry company, and they all spoke of leaders serving in functional equivalents of team and squad leader roles. Therefore, we will take the Army infantry company as a model for unit organization in this chapter.

4.1 The "Rule of Four"

This is a central paradox of military life: the very organization that is designed to help service members deliver violence effectively also ensures that they can care and be cared for effectively. This is possible because unit organization tends to ensure that no one person has

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[16] The US military uses a variety of different terms to talk about the various groupings of service members; among those terms, "unit" is one of the most common. In the interest of keeping military jargon to a minimum in this study, I use unit as a broad signifier for any group of service members; when the size of that group matters, I make mention of that fact.

direct responsibility for more than four people at one time. This structural feature, which I will refer to as the "Rule of Four," is likely the most novel feature of life in the military.[17] There are few other places, aside from family, where my participants received such dedicated attention from leadership. While the Rule of Four is not alone sufficient to ensure the care that most of my participants experienced in the military, it may be the most important of the necessary conditions.

Infantry organization is described in *Field Manual (Field Manual) 7-8, Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad*: a platoon leader who is responsible for four squad leaders, each of whom is responsible for two team leaders, each of whom is responsible for three soldiers (Department of the Army, 2016). This pattern of leader-to-subordinate ratios is repeated throughout the organization, the company, and even beyond to the upper echelons of the Army. At each step, a leader is very rarely assigned more than four soldiers for whom they are specifically responsible. This kind of responsibility is known as *direct leadership*: face-to-face leadership that involves daily contact throughout the mundane routines of military life, where the leader can directly determine and address developmental needs of individual service members (Department of the Army, 2006). Within this organization is tremendous opportunity for leaders to carefully focus their daily attention and efforts on only a few subordinates.

It is important to service members and military units alike that the organization of company-size units is a constant throughout the military. For service members, the consistency makes it easier to transition from one stage of their career to the next: a soldier moving from one base to another can easily be slotted into the appropriate role in a new unit, and they can be

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[17] I am indebted to Len Cassuto for coining this term. I described to him the phenomenon that I observed, and he immediately gave it a name—possibly to avoid having to hear me say more than once, "the general principle that any leader in the military, regardless of their place in the chain of command, will be assigned no more than four direct reports at any given time."

reasonably confident that they will understand the role and its function within the unit. From the perspective of a leader in that new unit, an easy move means that the unit can maintain its readiness despite the inevitable turnover within the unit. For soldiers, the consistency of roles means that expectations are consistent from one unit to another; although a soldier in a new unit will need time to prove themselves, they will know what they need to do to prove themselves, which tends to make it easier to form new relationships. The organization is a means of keeping the Army ready to fight; but importantly, if incidentally, the organization makes it easy for soldiers to keep forming relationships throughout their career.

The organization is also deliberately redundant in the extreme. In an infantry company in the US Army, which averages 140 soldiers, roughly one-third of the soldiers are in a leadership position. This redundancy of leadership roles is a necessity in war: every leader must have a ready replacement at hand. In terms of relationship formation, this means that leader and subordinate have very specific obligations to each other—if a leader understands their own job, then they understand what they are obligated to teach their subordinates. Further, this obligation extends to no more than four subordinates at one time, which is a modest teaching expectation. Again, there is a second-order effect to military readiness: the same organization that ensures continuity of leadership on the battlefield makes it possible for leaders to focus carefully on a small number of people. While care is not a guaranteed outcome, it is much more likely when there are such clear obligations and clear focus.

While Robin Dunbar's research into friendship helped us understand the importance of the time that service members can spend with each other, his research also reveals another important factor in the formation of friendship: focus. Researchers suggest that there are both cognitive and pragmatic limits to the number of people with whom we can maintain close

relationships; the most well-known of these limits is, in fact, popularly referred to as "Dunbar's Number." Dunbar suggests that the number of people with whom we can maintain a face-to-face friendship is roughly 150; while the specific upper limit is still being hashed out in anthropology and social psychology, the principle is not in question that there are cognitive limits to the number of people we can keep track of (Dunbar, 2021, p. 25; Lindenfors, Wartels, & Lind, 2021). Dunbar imagines relationships in concentric circles, rippling out from each person. Each circle represents both a degree of closeness and a cognitive limit. The smallest and therefore closest circle of friends Dunbar (2021) refers to as the *circle of sympathy*. Most people have roughly 5 such friends. In explaining the innermost circles and their small size, Dunbar points to the cognitive capacity required to retain enough information about this circle, as well as the sheer amount of time that is required to maintain closeness. Each of us has only so much time and attention. We make choices, or perhaps choices are made for us, with respect to how this attention is parceled out to those around us.

Drawing on Dunbar's theory, I suggest that the organization of a military unit makes the most of both cognitive capacity and available time. The people who serve in squads and teams will tend to be assigned duties together, eat at the chow hall together, and spend downtime together. Unit organization, and especially the Rule of Four, enables caring.

4.2 Responsibility and authority

Organization alone is not enough to explain the complicated relationships between leaders and subordinates in the military; another important factor is the distinction between responsibility and authority. For the purposes of this study, responsibility denotes a set of obligations, established in regulation and custom, that comes with a leadership role. Responsibility concerns specific obligations connected with leadership, while authority concerns

the power, legal or otherwise, necessary to fulfill these obligations. When people think of the military, they often think of the authority alone: the power to issue orders and expect those orders to be obeyed. But the essence of military leadership is responsibility. To illustrate this point: my father, who served in the National Guard during the Vietnam War, told me about payday in his unit. The paymaster for his company would come out with a cashbox and a stack of paperwork. From the lowest-ranking to the highest-ranking soldier, each person came forward to look over the paperwork, consent to it, and receive cash on the barrelhead. Each time there was disagreement over the pay, the line stopped moving until the disagreement was resolved. Team leaders weren't paid until their team was paid; squad leaders weren't paid until their team leaders were paid; and so on. At each link in the chain of command, leaders had a responsibility to ensure that their soldier was paid properly. I doubt many readers have experienced this kind of responsibility. And while paymasters and cash boxes are a thing of the past, I learned early on that my team leader had to accompany me whenever I had pay issues; as an officer, I understood that if I showed up at the personnel office with one of my soldiers, it was because an officer was needed to fix the problem. I had a responsibility, and the authority to act on it.

Leaders often have the authority necessary to fulfill their obligations; however, they can also assign some of their authority to a subordinate to act on their behalf. In military parlance, leaders can delegate authority but not responsibility. For example: a platoon leader may be tasked with running a training exercise for the company, such as an Army Physical Fitness Test. Three separate events are tested: push-ups, sit-ups, and the 2-mile run.[18] The platoon leader may delegate to three of his squad leaders the task of managing an event. Each squad leader may then

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[18] The Army Physical Fitness Test changed a good deal since I separated from the Army in 2010. However, the standards I knew— which required a soldier to perform as many push-ups and sit-ups as they could in two minutes, and then run two miles as quickly as possible—were the standards most of my participants knew, too (Department of the Army, 1998).

delegate some portion of the work to their team leaders, e.g., setting up half-mile markers for the run. At each step in the chain of command, a leader has the responsibility to accomplish a given obligation, and the authority to compel their subordinates to help. But the platoon leader, though he has delegated authority to his squad leaders, has not given away any of his responsibility. In the eyes of his company commander, that platoon leader is still fully responsible for the execution of the Army Physical Fitness Test. If those half-mile markers are missing, the platoon leader is the first person to be reprimanded. As Field Manual 7–8 (2007) puts it, "The platoon leader is responsible for everything the platoon does, and everything the platoon fails to do" (p. 15). And yet, the platoon leader must hand off some of his authority to fulfill his obligations—he or she *must* delegate some authority to squad leaders in order to achieve anything that the platoon is expected to do. The platoon leader needs squad leaders, and squad leaders need team leaders: this is the two-way street that Dunbar references. The metaphor might also help us understand that the platoon is on the same street. They are working toward a single collective goal, usually sharing physical proximity to risk, or at least the notional risk of the training environment. Delegation within the unit, in sight of a shared goal with shared risks, results in a cascading and interconnected set of obligations that binds every person in the unit together. This complex combination of organization, shared risk, collective goals, and oft-times personal relationships that grow up between unit members becomes the everyday expectation of service members. In truth, there probably is no word for the relationships that tend to form amongst service members serving alongside each other, especially those service members who are teammates and squad-mates. They are so alike in their experiences and expertise, and they share so much together. They depend on each other for so much, and always know exactly what they can count on each other for, a phenomenon known as collectivism.

Scholarly discussions of collectivism illuminate the social importance of the experiences that service members share. Harry Triandis, a social psychologist devoted to the study of collectivist and individualist tendencies in societies across the globe, describes collectivism as a "social pattern" of behavior among individuals who are closely linked. Such individuals are "primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives, and they are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals. Triandis suggests that cultures—comprised of "shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, and behaviors" arrived at through interaction—are not wholly collectivist or individualist but are instead described in terms of their tendencies in one direction or the other. In a similar fashion, individuals have both collectivist and individualist tendencies. The US military tends far more strongly toward collectivism than individualism, and each echelon of command (i.e., the platoon that forms part of the company that forms part of the battalion that forms part of the brigade) can lay claim to some collectivist obligation on the part of a service member. But the strongest collectivist obligations form amongst service members who spend their days training with each other.

For Triandis (2018), these daily connections are essential to the formation of an *ingroup*. The ingroup is "characterized by similarities among the members, and [by having] a sense of 'common fate' with members of the ingroup" (p. 9). Both the similarities and the "common fate" arise from shared experience. For soldiers in the infantry, the ingroup is made up of the people with whom they will dig and share foxholes, operate machine guns and mortars, and move through houses—in training and in war. At the intersection of the people and the task is the ingroup. For all soldiers, the mundane tasks that are shared will include morning physical fitness sessions that often feature a weekly long run or obstacle course; regular trips to the rifle range or

machine gun range to confirm that marksmanship skills are kept up to standard; and vehicle maintenance on a weekly basis, a phenomenon known as "Motor Pool Monday." In a collectivist institution such as the US Army, the performance of the group is the measure of success or failure, and so if a vehicle breaks down, that is a unit failure. If a soldier fails a physical test, that is a unit failure. These mundane tasks, and the shared sense of success or failure, make up the bulk of military life; the people with whom the tasks are shared make up the ingroup.

4.3 Regulation

The Rule of Four and the bonding of the ingroup provide some explanation for the organization of the US military, and especially for the sense of general obligation that service members would feel toward each other. However, the military supplements the organization with much more detailed obligations: regulations. Life in the military is highly regulated, often in ways that service members are not even aware of, so that customs and regulations blur into each other. Even the simplest actions, taken as customary practice, likely have a basis in regulation, ensuring uniformity across the service. For example, the soldier who is moving from one post to another will easily assume the role of team leader in his new unit if he was a team leader in his previous unit: *Field Manual 7-8* prescribes the obligations for team leaders, no matter where they are (Department of the Army, 2016). And even if the soldier only learned those obligations by word of mouth, rather than from a book, the regulation is nevertheless a sort of backstop to his learning. *Field Manual 7-8* is there for reference when needed.

Regulations in the military are often imagined to be top-down decisions about how the military ought to be. This is true, of course—some of the time. But regulations are revised often, and often revised to reflect what service members are doing in the field. Former Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl (2002), in his landmark study of militaries as "learning institutions," explains:

"As a result of the long process required to revise or rewrite published doctrine… doctrinal change is in many ways a *trailing* indicator of institutional learning (p. 7). Nagl suggests that published doctrine, which he also describes as a form of institutional memory, is a backwards-looking codification of what is already happening in the military. Service members find new ways to do things, and those new ways become new regulations. In the Army, the key regulation concerning leaders and subordinates is *Field Manual 6-22*, *Leader Development (*Department of the Army, 2006, 2015). Revised versions were published in 2006 and 2015; taking Nagl's observations into account, these two revisions would cover most of the developments in regulation during the time period my participants served. However, Nagl also points out that approval of revised Field Manuals takes time. Doctrinal change within a bureaucratic institution—even a collectivist bureaucratic institution such as the US Army—is a slow process. For that reason, I will chiefly refer to the 2015 revision of *Field Manual 6-22* in this study. Specific regulatory obligations will be spelled out as they become relevant in the case studies that follow; however, it might be helpful to suggest the spirit of the regulation beforehand.

Field Manual 6-22 provides "a doctrinal framework covering methods for leaders to develop other leaders, improve their organizations, build teams, and develop themselves… with an application focus at the operational and tactical [i.e., company-and-below] levels" (p. 1-1). The framework is both a theoretical explanation of leadership and the attributes that leaders are expected to exemplify, and a practical handbook of leadership practices and techniques; it is also supplemented with shorter, strictly practical guides such as the *Commander's Handbook*, which offers "quick applications" of the principles and practices outlined in *Field Manual 6-22* (Department of the Army, 2007a). With respect to the qualities of a leader, *Field Manual 6-22* has this to say: "Leaders set goals and establish a vision, motivate or influence others to pursue

the goals, build trust to improve relationships," and "serve as a role model by displaying character, confidence, and competence…" (p. 6-5). These guidelines are rather general, but the regulatory language continues: the leader, as part of their responsibilities, "demonstrates willingness to motivate and help others grow," and "provides coaching, counseling and mentoring" (p. 6-7). Coaching, counseling, and mentoring are terms of art in US military leadership. *Coaching* concerns the development of new skills; *counseling* concerns professional development in a broader sense. Whereas coaching and counseling are an obligation of leaders to their subordinates, *mentoring* is professional development outside the usual leader-subordinate organization. Together, these three leadership activities provide much of the foundation for the relationships described in the following case studies.

4.4 Case Study 1

In the previous chapter we met Casey, an officer in the US Army, as a young company commander with a new platoon leader, Taylor. As commander of a communications company, Casey was responsible for a unit of roughly 100 soldiers, divided into three platoons that were slightly smaller than the average infantry company, but not much. She was responsible for ensuring that the communications equipment—everything from handheld radios to encrypted computers, from backpack-size communication units to trailers with arrays of antennae and dishes—was always ready. She was responsible not just for the battalion to which her company belonged, but for the brigade to which her battalion belonged. Casey was, by virtue of her role in the battalion, authorized to control and maintain all that equipment, and she was authorized to allow a certain number of soldiers to assist in the task. To manage her responsibilities, Casey delegated a certain amount of her authority to her three platoon leaders. Indeed, she could not

manage her responsibilities without those platoon leaders, which meant that the competence and confidence of her platoon leaders was essential to the success of the company.

When she arrived at the battalion, Casey had only two platoon leaders. So, when her battalion commander called her in one day and told her she would be receiving a new platoon leader, Casey was initially thrilled. But her battalion commander went on: Casey would be given Taylor. Casey immediately replied, "God, no, sir. Anybody but her."

From any company commander's perspective, being short a platoon leader is tough, but a noncommissioned officer can often step into the role usually occupied by a commissioned officer, at least for a little while. However, getting a platoon leader to whom the commander is reluctant to delegate authority is much tougher. The company commander's responsibilities don't change one whit just because the platoon leader can't be trusted. In the short term, it means that the commander must find a way to work around the platoon leader, which increases the burden of authority placed on others in the company. More importantly, a platoon leader who is unable or unwilling to step up to their role is a problem because the company commander must work even harder to develop that platoon leader's leadership capabilities.

Taylor, it seems, presented just such a problem for Casey. Don't get me wrong: every new platoon leader is a leadership challenge for a company commander, because every new platoon leader will require a certain amount of counseling and coaching to handle their new role. This training is built into the very nature of promotion in the US military. Every soldier and every officer is promoted to a new rank or new role based on "demonstrated performance and potential," which means that the soldier or officer is not expected to be fully competent from day one; rather, they are deemed ready to learn new responsibilities and handle new authority (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 1). But sometimes it is a new officer's turn to move into a

new role, and even though it is obvious to everyone in the unit that they aren't quite ready to learn, the needs of the service are deemed more important than the short-term inconvenience such an assignment will cause. Casey's boss—the battalion commander—knew Taylor wasn't ready for the responsibility of serving as Casey's platoon leader, but he also knew that Casey could handle the challenge of helping Taylor grow into her new role.

At this point in her career, Casey had served in the Army for several years and in several different leadership roles. Taylor, in contrast, was at the very start of her career; as a brand-new platoon leader, the only other role she had occupied was an administrative one with her battalion's motor pool. Furthermore, in that role she had not, it seems, managed to impress anyone with her competence or work ethic. As Casey told me, Taylor had a reputation for being "kind of lazy… not good at [physical training], not good at anything." Across the Army, physical training is seen as the most fundamental of obligations, and since soldiers start every day with physical training as a unit, it is also the most visible of obligations. If you aren't that good at physical training, everyone knows—there is an absolute scale that is used to assess physical fitness in each branch of the military. What's worse, though, is that if you aren't *trying* that hard at physical training, everyone knows. So, everyone knew at least one thing about Taylor.

But now Taylor had to become a platoon leader. The role of platoon leader is, for any officers, the best leadership role they will ever occupy. Amongst the officers I interviewed, everyone—myself included—looked back fondly on their days in charge of a platoon. Platoon leaders are in incredibly close contact with their troops, and every decision is immediately felt throughout the platoon. In no other role in the Army is the officer's responsibility so obvious. And, it seemed to Casey, Taylor was simply not ready for that responsibility. But Casey was not

seeking merely to get Taylor to do her job—she wanted Taylor to *want* to do her job. For that, she needed to know more about what made Taylor tick—she needed to care for her.

Casey was modest as she continued her story. She told me that she did for Taylor only slightly more than what she did for her other platoon leaders: "I did some basic counseling and some mentorship. The only extra stuff I did with her, I think, was maybe [physical training]-wise. I'd run alongside her… But other than that, maybe more time spent with her on counseling and handholding…" What Casey describes here can be broken down into two categories of leadership activity that are specifically addressed in Army regulation: counseling and coaching. Both activities are fundamentally pedagogical obligations—they are forms of instruction that a leader is obligated to provide, and a subordinate is obligated to receive. In the hands of an attentive leader, counseling and coaching also make care more likely.

4.4.1 Counseling

According to Army regulations, counseling "is the process used by leaders to review with a subordinate the subordinate's demonstrated performance and potential" (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 1-1). Counseling sessions are provided at regular intervals, as well as in response to specific events; in these sessions, leaders are responsible for clearly setting the expectations of both the Army and the unit for their subordinates, and, after the integration counseling that every soldier receives upon joining a new unit, providing clear feedback on their subordinate's performance in their role. These counseling sessions are mandatory, and the reception (or integration) counseling that Casey provided Taylor would have included a welcome to the unit, a description of the unit's responsibilities within their battalion and brigade, and a description of Taylor's new role and responsibilities. Casey would have also let Taylor know what expectations must be met with respect to her uniform and appearance, her physical fitness, and her punctuality

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and accountability. These last expectations may seem a bit perfunctory, and in some cases, they may be. But for Casey, the integration counseling is a means of putting Taylor on notice: "Our unit conforms to Army-wide standards, and those standards will be maintained at all times." Every time a soldier moves from one unit to another, they are reminded that the standards are the same across the Army. Given what Casey had heard about Taylor, we can easily imagine that Casey made sure Taylor was particularly clear about the standards of physical training.

Casey needs to clearly establish standards and expectations upon arrival, and then meet regularly to revisit progress toward meeting those standards and expectations; as the Army manual on counseling puts it, "Regular developmental counseling is the Army's most important tool for developing future leaders at every level" (Department of the Army, 2014, p. 1-1). And since the organization of the Army is such that nearly everyone is being developed for a leadership role all the time, counseling can be understood as a nearly universal—and obligatory—process. Casey views her integration counseling as an obligation and an opportunity to set expectations for Taylor. It is also a chance to assess Taylor's developmental needs and start thinking about how she, Casey, could best help Taylor to become the platoon leader that Casey needs her to be. For Taylor, the integration counseling is an opportunity to understand precisely what is expected of her and to understand how she, Taylor, will be supported in that effort. This is the two-way street of leadership in the military; the integration counseling is a means to define the shared goals of the leader and subordinate—which are largely unit goals, but also professional development goals for Taylor in particular—and to establish what the leader and subordinate are obligated to provide each other as they strive toward their goals.

4.4.2 Coaching

Casey had already identified specific "developmental needs": skills or attitudes that are not currently meeting Army or unit standard. The practical and hands-on teaching that follows is called coaching; in *Field Manual 6-22*, coaching is described as "guid[ing] another's development in new or existing skills during the practice of those skills" (Department of the Army, 2015, p. 7-2). So, as Casey tells us, she went running with Taylor. The regulatory mandate for Casey's decision is clear: as Taylor's company commander, Casey has primary responsibility for the professional development of the platoon leaders in her company. And she has identified a developmental need. Casey has no choice now except to step into the role of coach and help Taylor to improve in her physical training, which is the "little extra" that Casey mentioned when she described how she helped Taylor to become a better platoon leader and officer.

As we saw in Chapter 2, the routine of physical training allowed Casey a prolonged period in which to get to know Taylor. Spending that time was essential to Casey's leadership: in order to help Taylor in Taylor's professional development, Casey needed to understand something about why Taylor struggled with physical training. This is captured in the regulatory requirement to "identify subordinate internal drivers and uses those motivators to analyze developmental needs" (Department of the Army, 2015, p. 7-47). That neat little word salad means that leaders are expected to figure out what makes their soldiers tick and then use that information to get more out of them. We might note how similar this regulatory obligation is to Nel Noddings's notion of engrossment: the process of discerning someone else's goals, motivations, and desires. We should also note, though, that the collectivist nature of the military has a significant impact on a service member's goals, motivations, and desires. In fact, any two people in the same unit who are close to each other in the organization will likely share needs

and desires to an extraordinary extent. By virtue of their shared participation in a collectivist institution like the US Army, both Casey and Taylor have chosen to prioritize unit and institutional goals over their own—but this does not make individual goals unimportant. In fact, company commanders are clearly obligated to "build a relationship with each of [their] subordinate leaders as an individual," to "interact with them outside of their daily duty performance" (Department of the Army, 2007, p. 13). To do so will build individual relationships—it will "build confidence and generate trust"—and will also help a commander imagine how each subordinate's unique differences can contribute to unit success.

If we were to imagine a visual representation of Casey's and Taylor's shared goals, it might look like a Venn diagram wherein 90% of their needs and desires overlap, precisely because those needs and desires are derived from the collective. We might then imagine that 10% of each person's needs and desires do not overlap. But the 10% that remains is important for helping both Taylor and Casey achieve the totality of their needs and desires. The time that Casey and Taylor spend together is most profitably devoted to clarifying collective and institutional needs and desires, which include the fulfillment of their respective roles and responsibilities. But some of the time must be spent in discerning those individual motivations, goals, and desires that undoubtedly impact each soldier's performance.

The run becomes important to both Taylor and Casey, then, as a professional development activity unto itself: Taylor needs to improve her time on the 2-mile run. But it is more important as a site for Casey—as required—to get to know Taylor and understand what motivational factors might be leveraged to help Taylor develop. When Casey first challenged Taylor to run a bit faster, Taylor was surprised by the request; she didn't know whether she could run faster, but she would give it a try. She could in fact run faster. Through Casey's coaching and

cajoling across a variety of responsibilities, Taylor would eventually produce strong physical fitness scores and become one of the best young officers in the battalion. For both officers, the effort led to a distinct reward: Casey got the platoon leader she needed, and Taylor became the officer she wanted to be. Casey was able to achieve this partly through the coaching, but also through the insight she gained by spending time getting to know Taylor. Taylor confessed that she had never pushed herself that hard, in college or in her first days in the Army. Taylor settled for mediocre performance, and perhaps as a result, nobody else pushed her beyond mediocre. But Casey could see that Taylor wanted to be pushed. She wanted a challenge. And Taylor and Casey worked together in an environment that provided clear, concrete challenges, physical and otherwise.

To put it another way: the Army provided scaffolding—responsibilities and obligations—for Taylor and Casey's relationship. The scaffolding allowed Casey and Taylor the time and organization required to develop a relationship that extended beyond their respective roles, and made each of them perform better within their respective roles.

4.4.3 Mentoring

Casey described her work with Taylor, from company commander to platoon leader, as mentoring. According to *Field Manual 6-22*, mentoring is "the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect… A mentor is a leader who assists personal and professional development by helping a mentee clarify personal, professional, and career goals and develop actions to improve attributes, skills, and competencies" (Department of the Army, 2015, p. 3-17). However, the regulation also stipulates that "mentor-mentee connections are best if they occur outside the chain of command" (p. 3-17). This does not mean that Casey couldn't,

as her company commander, mentor Taylor, but Casey provided a much better example of the Army's notion of mentorship.

A few years after Taylor left Casey's unit, Taylor became a company commander. She was assigned a platoon leader with developmental needs. Like Casey, she had been assigned the platoon leader because Taylor's battalion commander thought Taylor was the right leader for the job. Taylor needed some advice, though, so she called up the leader who helped her. Casey and Taylor talked through their shared experiences, and two factors emerged. First, Casey stuck closely to the prescribed counseling activities that the Army required all company commanders to conduct with their platoon leaders; she also engaged in more focused coaching activities. Second, Casey took what she learned of Taylor's past into account in planning for Taylor's professional development. In other words: Casey sought way to fulfill her obligations to Taylor, and encourage Taylor to fulfill her obligations to Casey and the company, in ways that were meaningful to Taylor.

Casey was engaging in mentoring. Taylor reached out to Casey voluntarily to seek clarity with respect to a leadership challenge. Casey, in turn, was drawing on her expertise to help Taylor clarify her goals and actions as a company commander. This is much closer to the Army notion of mentoring than Casey's work when she was Taylor's commander. But we should take a moment to consider Casey's choice of words—describing that work as "mentoring"—because it might shed a little light on the murky connection between regulations and actions. Casey might have described her actions as mentoring because she did not know that the regulations contained a much more specific definition of a term that can have a wide range of colloquial uses. If that is the case, then Casey is doing what the regulations require without necessarily knowing exactly what the regulations say. In other words, Casey is enacting the regulations without knowing she

is doing so. She might have learned how to coach and counsel from her battalion commander, or from her first company commander. In fact, I will admit that I read through some of these regulations for the first time while doing research, and I was surprised to discover how many things I did as an officer that really were covered in detail in the regulations, especially where coaching, counseling, and mentoring were concerned. The regulations are a foundation for leadership activities, but many of those activities are probably learned through doing; the Army often refers to that type of education as "OJT," or on-the-job training. While we can't assume that Army regulations are always enacted just the way the regulations say—perhaps because the regulations have not, as Nagl suggests, caught up to new ways of doing things—we should think carefully about how the regulations scaffold leadership and relationships.

4.5 Case Study 2

For Army officers, the relationship between platoon leader and company commander is an essential first developmental step; experienced leaders get their first chance to directly influence new leaders, and new leaders learn the rudiments of military leadership. As such, it is often amongst the most memorable of relationships. On the enlisted side, the relationship between a soldier and their team or squad leader is of similar significance. Team and squad leaders are a new soldier's first supervisors, and they provide that soldier with their first indication of what is expected of them. From team and squad leaders, soldiers learn skills and capabilities—they are coached in soldiering. But soldiers also learn from their team or squad leader what to expect of their leaders, and what they should expect of their soldiers when it is their turn to lead.

This second kind of education is essential for soldiers. It may come through a leader's coaching and counseling, but it also comes from a leader's example. Good leaders deliberately

provide a model for their students, and in the military the idea of "setting the standard" is of the utmost importance for professional and personal development. The customary cry of the infantry platoon leader is "follow me!" But the platoon leader, and every subordinate leader in the platoon, understands that this is a cry of responsibility first and authority second. To ask others to follow must give them an example worth following. A good soldier is, in this light, a good follower who is learning to be a good leader: a person who is learning to follow, but also learning to discern what makes following worthwhile. This is, perhaps, the most personal and powerful form of readiness in military experience.

Diego was candid about his readiness for the infantry. He grew up in California and Texas, raised by his mother, grandmother, and older sister. While he played football in high school and was therefore ready for military physical training, he had grown up without much connection to the masculine activities that he saw as both normal and useful in his military experience. He had never fired a weapon, never worked on a car. He had never been far from home. He was, he said, "a mama's boy." It was perhaps fortunate, then, that his first assignment in the military took him only halfway across Texas: from El Paso to Killeen, in central Texas, the home of Fort Hood and the 1st Cavalry Division.

When I met Diego, years later, he was a senior squad leader with sufficient rank, experience, and expertise to mentor his fellow squad leaders. He was an excellent teacher, patient and willing to listen carefully before offering coaching to his team leaders or advice to me, his platoon leader. I was anxious to hear how his skills had been formed—and more importantly, by whom. Diego's story started at Fort Hood.

His experience in his first company taught him that the soldiers who took care of their uniform, shined their boots, and volunteered for duty were the readiest, the most "squared away."

Morris, his first squad leader, was the reference point to whom Diego and his peers looked. He set the standard for the squad, and this is common. The role of squad leader is critical in the Army. This is partly because of its priority in the infantry, where it is the "model for all tactical task organizations" (Department of the Army, 2016, p. 1-12). The squad generally consists of nine soldiers, with a squad leader supervising two fire teams of four soldiers each. It is true that fire teams are the fundamental unit of organization and obligation in the Army; as the regulations state, "infantry platoons and squads succeed or fail based on the actions of their fire teams" (Department of the Army, 2016, p. 1-11). However, by virtue of the greater military experience that squad leaders bring with them, the squad leaders often have a special place in the professional development of soldiers. Many of my participants, when they spoke of the greatest care they knew in the military, spoke about a squad leader.

A typical squad leader will have served in the Army for roughly seven years, whereas a typical team leader will have served three or four years. The difference in experience is enough to give squad leaders considerably more ethical authority. This doesn't mean, of course, that team leaders cannot or do not play an important role in their team members' lives—I took care of my team and helped them as best I could. But it was also true that our squad leader knew much more than I did, and I probably spent much of my time as a team leader learning from my squad leader as he showed me what was required, what was possible, what was best for my team. So, it was for many of my participants: they learned the most from their squad leaders, and their team leaders probably did, too.

The organization of the squad is well-suited to allow a squad leader room to maneuver, to borrow a military idiom. With only two team leaders to develop, the squad leader has the time and regulatory latitude to help develop soldiers in the squad; and there is usually a soldier or two

who stands out immediately either as a developmental need or as a soldier of unusual potential. Whichever is the case, the squad leader can help a team leader through counseling and coaching, and through even more direct tactics. This flexibility is built into the organization of the squad and is one more reason that squad leaders often loom large in my participants' recollections of their relationships in the military.

4.5.1 Coaching

In the case of Morris, Diego's squad leader, the recollections largely concerned an Army infantry achievement called the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB). As the name implies, an infantryman must demonstrate expertise across a wide range of soldiering skills. It is not easy to achieve—Diego's estimate that most servicemen need two or three attempts to complete the arduous requirements for the badge seemed about right to me. These requirements include a physical fitness test, a timed 12-mile march with 35-pound rucksack, daytime and nighttime map-and-compass courses, and a variety of tests on specific weapons including rifles, grenades, and machine guns (USAIS, 2016). Upon successful completion of the requirements, an infantryman is awarded a badge to be worn on their uniform. This last point is significant—for all the awards and medals and ribbons that service members are often awarded throughout their careers, surprisingly few are part of the everyday work uniform. But the EIB is amongst them and is considered a particular mark of authority—of "subject-matter expertise," as service members say.

Typically, the badge follows from the testing. But this story starts with the badge. When he first arrived at Morris's squad, Diego said, "He saw something in me and he gave me an EIB that had been passed down eight times." The badge that Morris passed on wasn't an actual

award, at least not since its first owner earned it.[19] It was a sign of confidence in Diego's

potential. It was an investment on Morris's part in Diego's professional pathway. Diego, when

he did eventually complete the requirements for the EIB, passed on the EIB in just the same way

he received it. Thanks in no small part to his squad leader's training and example—the standard

that he set—Diego did well in most of the testing. But he did not complete the requirements on

his first try, at Fort Hood. The summer heat in central Texas bested everyone in Diego's

company during the 12-mile march, he said. Nevertheless, he paid attention to Morris and

learned from him both the rudiments of soldiering that the EIB represented. Morris provided the

practical coaching that his squad required, and Diego held on to those lessons—he was one of

the best soldiers I worked with. But Morris took the time to get to know Diego and paid attention

to what made Diego tick. He took the time to care for him, through the organization and

opportunities the Army provided. Morris saw in Diego the capacity to train soldiers, and so he

expected not only that Diego would earn the EIB, but that he would also understand that

expertise—represented by the EIB—is an obligation. Soldiers are trained to become experts who

train. This was the leadership philosophy that Morris modeled for his squad.

4.5.2 Modeling

Morris's leadership philosophy—the model he provided—was also a hand-me-down:

"[Morris] stole it from a leader who adopted from a leader who adopted it from another leader

adopted in from many leaders," Diego said. And to be sure, the philosophy that Diego explained

to me was one I had heard before in the Army: fair, firm, and friendly. For Diego, "fair, firm, and

friendly" was grounded in the idea of obligation: each squad member had duties to complete and

would be held accountable for those duties. For Diego, as for many of the soldiers I trained, the

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[19] The practice of passing badges down in this way was new to me, but Diego talked about it as if it was fairly common..

idea of obligation extended beyond the duty day. The *Commander's Handbook for Unit Leader Development* suggests that a leader should "know their [subordinates'] strengths, weaknesses, goals, and life activities that extend beyond the workday…" (Department of the Army, 2007a, p. 8). That leader should also set the standard for getting to know soldiers, because "setting the conditions for leader development is merely performing your job in ways that signal leaders and soldiers throughout your command that leader development is highly important" (p. 8). The judgment and discernment that leaders model is meant to extend beyond the workplace and into soldiers' evenings and weekends.

When Morris gave the routine Friday afternoon safety briefing, he told his soldiers to have a plan, especially if their weekend included alcohol. That plan should include a designated driver. And if the need arose, Morris's squad could always call him for a ride. When the weekend came that Diego called Morris, he was expecting anger. But instead, he explained, "I called him, and he wasn't mad. I mean, he went and picked me up… and the next morning he wasn't mad either." Diego did some extra physical training that morning, but the point of the work wasn't, from Diego's perspective, punishment. It was a reminder that choices have consequences and an encouragement to Diego to have a plan next time. It was also a signal to Diego that he should treat his own soldiers thus, when the time comes. What impressed Diego, looking back on that experience, was that Morris was there for him, "even when [he] messed up." He was always friendly, or "available," as Diego put it, but he never played favorites when it came to fulfilling obligations. That was the lesson that stuck with Diego.

In Diego's telling, at least two important scaffolds define the relationship between him and his squad leader. The first was the EIB. The Expert Infantryman Badge that Morris passed on represented, for Diego, a mark of confidence in Diego's potential. That confidence is founded

on Morris's demonstrated ability to perform the same skills himself. But it is also a commitment on Morris's part to help Diego achieve the EIB, passing on the knowledge and skills he possesses. It is a commitment to coaching, in the regulatory terminology. For Diego, the EIB—both the artifact he received from Morris and the process of preparing and testing described in *Infantry School Pamphlet 350-6*—created a scaffold of shared responsibilities, of mutual obligations (Department of the Army, 2018).

The second scaffold was regulatory in nature, although it seems likely that Diego did not know at the time how deep the connection was between official Army leadership publications and his squad leader's philosophy of "fair, firm, and friendly." Back then, Diego looked on it as a sort of secret, passed from one good leader to another over the years. But as we have already seen in the earlier case study, publications like the *Commander's Handbook* describe the leadership choices and attributes that Morris displayed and Diego admired (Department of the Army, 2007a). I'm not suggesting that Morris was simply following regulations—the connection between the publications and actual leadership decisions in the Army is more complicated, and Diego is surely right to see a kind of hand-me-down convention at work in Morris's leadership. But Diego, as he grew as a leader, also took time to study the publications. His description of that developmental turning point is worth hearing in full:

When [they] made me a squad leader, it made me hit the books. You know what I mean? [I needed to get] the basics of everything, so that at least I'm practicing doctrine—because I don't have the experience. And that doctrine, I applied it in the field, and I started making my own ways: learning what did work, what didn't work. And just looking at other people and what they did wrong and just asking questions: 'How did you do this? Or what are you doing that I should be doing?' And in the Army, you can do that.

Diego, as a squad leader, seemed to see the publications—the "doctrine," as he said—as a shortcut to the experience that he didn't have and that would be the preferred basis for leadership. But he also saw that the doctrine needed to be tested against his experiences. The doctrine is a useful starting point, but not the final word. His sentiments are reminiscent of a (probably apocryphal) comment attributed to a German officer in World War II, annoyed that American soldiers never follow their own doctrine on the battlefield. And perhaps this tenuous relationship between doctrine and practice is characteristic of every military, and every set of doctrines in the world. But Diego's confidence that the doctrine, the publications, were worth his time and attention as a leader—just as Morris's example was worthy of attention—seems meaningful. The doctrine was a scaffold that Diego used to build relationships with his squad, just as Casey relied on doctrine to scaffold her relationship with Taylor.

For both commissioned and noncommissioned officers, the relationship between leaders and subordinates is scaffolded by regulation. This is true with respect to both the specific duties and obligations—the responsibilities—that define the leadership and subordinate role. Whether a company commander, platoon leader, squad leader, or rifleman, each role carries clear obligations.[20] This sort of clarity is essential to effective warfighting—each person has a specific function to perform within the unit. Additionally, the redundancy that allows the unit to function despite losses is essential and built into the organization of the Army. Soldiers are trained to replicate obligations and replicate their ability to fulfill them, so that when a radio operator is killed in action, another soldier is ready to pick up the radio and carry on. Individual obligations are unit obligations, and vice versa, and the interconnection between individual and unit is a constant of the duty day. Those same regulations bind soldiers outside the duty day, so military

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[20] The infantry was, until 2018, only open to men. While women are slowly becoming part of the infantry and other combat specialties, some of the terminology (i.e., infantryman, rifleman) has not caught up to new gender-inclusive standards.

relationships often share characteristics of friendship, as Dunbar defines it. Relationships that straddle the professional-personal boundary can be complicated, but my research suggests that 1) establishing clear obligations in the professional realm, and 2) giving service members a way to focus on their obligations to a relatively small number of people, makes a big difference in both the professional and personal realms. The leader-subordinate relationships described in this chapter are characterized by a professional concern that extends beyond the obligations of the workplace and into personal lives, and this concern is what makes the relationship meaningful for both leaders and subordinates. Service members feel cared for when their leaders take time to get to know them and take what they know into consideration at work and off-duty.

While not every relationship between leader and subordinate in the Army follows the regulations or intentionally hews closely to publications like the *Commander's Handbook* do so in full awareness of that fact (Department of the Army, 2007), doctrine and practice are closely interconnected, and service members are trained to expect clear obligations like those of military regulation. My participants were able to speak about relationships that were personally and professionally beneficial, in part because those relationships were scaffolded by clear obligations. It is fair to say that, for my participants, knowing who they could count on, and what they could count on each other for in plain terms, was an essential part of their daily lives in the military. More than that, the clear structure and terms of obligation made it easy to really know each other, which made it even easier to fulfill obligations to each other. And that, in a nutshell, is what caring is.

Chapter 5 Training to Care

BLUF: The third phenomenon is training. Service members experience training constantly, and it is the place where obligations are not merely proposed but demonstrated. That obligations are expressed as action is essential to relationship formation in the military.

While Chapter 4 focused on obligations between leaders and subordinates, i.e., team leader and soldier, or company commander and platoon leader, this chapter explores obligations amongst peers. These obligations are more likely to be those common to every service member: fundamental soldiering skills such as physical training, marksmanship, or communication. As we have seen with the leadership skills, these fundamental skills are defined by regulation and enacted in training. The same considerations, like the specificity of the regulations and the attention that leaders pay to subordinates, are still in play. But in this chapter, we will explore the ways in which obligations are fulfilled in training—in the demonstrations of skill that are required by regulations. These demonstrations are essential to care because they provide an assurance that obligations to each other will be met under the most difficult conditions.

One of the most common terms for fundamental, broadly shared obligations is *standards*.[21] Service members are given standards to meet: how uniforms should look, how to march, how to call cadence. This chapter focuses largely on individual standards: whether a service member can pass their PT test, or rifle qualification. These standards are public; so is the testing. Every service member knows not only what to expect of their peers, *regardless of that person's role in the unit*, but they also see whether their expectations—which are also obligations—are being met. The term "peer" is broader than service members in the same role.

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[21] We should be clear about the connections between a few terms in this chapter. Regulations are obligations; standards are also obligations. To meet the standards is to meet an obligation—usually an obligation that takes the form of a regulation.

In the Army, peers are the people fighting on the right and left, no matter their role. They are the people who are close enough, both in the organization and in physical proximity, to share each other's experiences. To return to the idea of collectivism, they are an *ingroup*. According to Triandis, an ingroup is "characterized by similarities among the members, and [by having] a sense of 'common fate 'with members of the ingroup" (Triandis, 2018, p. 9). Both the similarities and the "common fate" arise from shared experiences, whether in training or in war. Service members see each other sharing the risks, and they can commit not only to a common goal but to the individuals who work toward it. As the great military strategist von Clausewitz (1976) said of soldiers, "An army's military qualities are based on the individual who trains the capacities it demands…, who gains ease and confidence through practice, and who completely immerses his personality in the appointed task" (p. 196). We should not suppose, though, that "immersion of personality" is the same as becoming an indistinguishable mass of soldiers. However common the similarities of experience might be, an ingroup is not incompatible with roles and hierarchy. In fact, Triandis (2018) suggests that the peer relationships within a collective are driven by an understanding of the collective's needs, and hierarchy is necessary to direct the cooperative effort—therefore, a strong sense of obligation to the hierarchy is part the obligation to the unit (p 44, p. 47). Despite the hierarchy, the standards are universal. Neither role nor rank exempts anyone from the requirement to demonstrate that they meet the standards. Every member of the unit must still show up for the PT tests and the rifle ranges.

    Unit is a variable term in the military. It might mean a platoon of forty soldiers or Marines, or a "shop" of eight people who share a particular specialty such as animal handlers. Triandis's (2018) idea of the ingroup is one way to make sense of this variability: a unit is small enough that its members can feel the bond of a common goal and a "common fate," and large

enough to encompass the hierarchy that is essential to effective military operations. Within the ingroup, leaders and subordinates remain apart from each other with respect to the obligations each has (as described in Chapter 3), but they are also brought together by the shared risks and hardships of training and war. These hardships are the ones that remind soldiers that they are equally obligated to each other in battle; the risks are held in common, as are the skills required to mitigate the risks. In truth, the risks in war are probably only manageable because service members have proven to each other their skills. Obligations are not, in the military, possibilities. They are not about what service members might do for each other. They are what service members have already demonstrated they will do for each other, including individual fitness and marksmanship. The obligations that scaffold relationships in the military are particularly powerful precisely because they are often proven under difficult conditions, and through hard work. When soldiers know that they are cared for, they know it for a fact: they *have already been cared for*.

Caring isn't the goal of training, though; readiness is the goal. To that end, it is important that training be as realistic as possible; yet it must also be consistent, so that soldiers from different units may have trained in different places and at different times but still arrive to the battlefield equally confident in each other's capabilities.[22] They must feel the confidence that comes from knowing that other units have gone through what they have gone through; they must feel the confidence that comes from obligations defined and fulfilled. Obligation remains the watchword for scaffolds, and the source of obligation is often a regulation. The regulations provide standards for the most fundamental soldiering skills—which are the concern of this chapter—as well as the specialties that exist throughout the military. The regulations are a

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[22] In practice, though, this is difficult: every unit wants to see itself as the best, which makes every unit necessarily suspicious of its neighbor's claims to be the best.

yardstick by which service members judge themselves and others. It is important to understand that each service member strives to meet standards not merely for their own sake but for the sake of their peers. It is easy to miss the fact that, in the military, competence is never really an individual achievement. Of course, competence is critical to any workplace, but there is likely no other workplace in the US that combines clear obligations, routine public testing, and collectivism in the way the military does. It is in training that these pieces come together.

5.1 Training

Training is so fundamental in its nature that it often disappears from most service members' and veterans' accounts of their experience—especially if those service members did in fact go to war. But training is the air that soldiers breathe, as necessary as it is unremarkable; from the initial training program popularly known as "boot camp," or "basic," training is just what service members do.[23] Whether in boot camp or infantry school or any number of other programs, or with units preparing to deploy to war, service members are constantly training to become whatever the military requires of them. And yet, especially with units preparing to deploy, they do so for the sake of the unit. Training is where relationships are formed. Relationships can also be formed in war, of course, but the experiences of my participants suggest that relationships are formed whether they served in war. This means that training, and not war, is the necessary condition of military service. Relationships were most often formed through the mundane and daily activities of training, wherein service members learned how and why to meet obligations to each other—in short, to care for each other.

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[23] As of this writing: the Army calls its introductory training program Basic Combat Training; the Air Force calls theirs Basic Military Training; the Navy and Marine Corps call theirs Recruit Training. Each has colloquial terms, the most famous being the Marine Corps' "boot camp."

Training is not just an event, or a program of events, although the training events are requisite. It is also—perhaps, primarily—a mindset, an ethic. Training is where a service member comes to understand the standards and behavior to which he or she will be held; and to which he or she will hold others. Those standards raise expectations within service members, for themselves and for others; those new expectations then become the basis for relationship. According to my participants, the specific features of that training that were most important to scaffolding relationships include: the standard of *readiness* to which service members are held; the importance of *muscle memory* as a training goal; and the high *stakes* of the battlefield, which are present—at least notionally—at all phases of training.

5.2 Readiness

In the domain of physical preparations for the rigors of war, the standard to meet is called "fitness." The point of physical training is to achieve fitness, which is the paramount requirement for service in the military. We learned from Harvey (introduced in Chapter 2) that infantrymen might need to know only two things about their peers: whether they can PT, and whether they can keep up a decent conversation in a foxhole. Physical fitness is essential to soldiering, and in Harvey's formulation, it is perhaps a basic human connection equivalent to conversation. The work of achieving and maintaining physical fitness is *the* mundane constant of military life. And as we shall see, it is a medium of connection, and often a connection unto itself, for many service members.

Fitness is a standard. The goal of fitness, and of all standards, is readiness, which is itself the primary function of a modern military. *Readiness* to go to war, on a moment's notice, knowing that all standards have already been met, might seem daunting. And if we were to imagine it as simply a state of mind, it would be both daunting and abstract. But readiness is

concrete, mundane. It is part of a daily routine that regards war as both imminent and inevitable: these sentiments lend urgency to the training, the end state of which is not war, but rather a constant state of *readiness* for war. It is about skills and roles. In the modern US military, readiness is the subject of endless regulations which define the specific skills and specific roles required to fight a war. Readiness is handfuls of checklists, each of them an obligation to fulfill and demonstrate, and each of them temporary. The perpetual fulfillment and renewal of obligations is the essence of military service.

Although war itself is an extraordinary circumstance, it is always the point of the profession: militaries exist to deliver violence. Many of my participants never mentioned this fundamental truth or met it head-on in our interviews. To be sure, much of the routine and ritual of everyday life in the military is not itself violent; it is simply the business of keeping a large institution moving forward in something like a uniform fashion. But underneath the mundane activities are these words from an earlier edition of the Army Field Manual for infantry squads and platoons: "The Infantry's primary role is close combat, which may occur in any type of mission, in any theater, or environment. Characterized by extreme violence and physiological shock, close combat is callous and unforgiving. Its dimensions are measured in minutes and meters, and its consequences are final" (Department of the Army, 2007b, p. 1-1). Violence is an ugly business, and it is the first and the final purpose of the scaffolds described in this study—the relationships that meant so much to my participants were a second-order effect. As pleasant as it might be to imagine that the military fosters relationships for the sake of relationship itself, this is not so. The scaffolds of leadership described in Chapter 4, and those of peer-to-peer connections in this chapter, exist solely to ensure the effective delivery of violence. If the same

scaffolds promote relationships that service members cherish, it is an unintended outcome—and perhaps even a grand irony.

The infantrymen I interviewed were, naturally, most close to and most aware of the violence that is central to a military's existence. Harvey was quite blunt about this fact: "Everything was violence. That's what we trained to do: we trained to be very good at violence." Training to deliver violence means demonstrating that you can do violence. Harvey was equally blunt about the fact that his infantry company, which he considered his ingroup, sought excellence in everything they did—for the sake of the ingroup. To serve in the military is to live with the possibility, and at times the certainty, of violence—violence against others, and, if the ingroup fails in its obligations to each other, violence against oneself.

The training that Harvey describes is not trotted out just because there is a war. Nor is that training limited to the infantry—although the infantry's training in violence is perhaps more intense than for any other military specialty, because the infantry specializes in ground wars. A wide variety of specialties exists in both the Army and Marine Corps, from mechanics to medics to pilots and parachute-packers, and common to all are *soldiering* skills upon which all else is built. They are the skills of the infantry, and though the infantry carries those skills to a higher pitch, all soldiers are trained to maneuver, to fire rifles and machine guns, to use radios and make reports. A few thousand years of warfare have not changed the fundamentals: maneuver and attack. Soldiers must be able to act with, as my drill sergeant put it, "quickness and violence of action," whether with spears or rifles. However, the arrival of firearms did change the vernacular: today, we say that soldiers must be able to move and shoot, move and shoot, move and shoot. Physical training is the constant and fundamental training in the US military. It is *the*

prerequisite to violence, and so it is impossible to overstate how important physical fitness is in military service.

The process of physical training is uniform across the military, and the process of testing physical fitness is at the apex of uniformity. The following is a brief excerpt from the script that is performed every time a soldier in the US Army is asked to demonstrate the definitive (and, one might think, self-explanatory) military exercise, the push-up.

> *THE PUSH-UP EVENT MEASURES THE ENDURANCE OF THE CHEST, SHOULDER, AND TRICEPS MUSCLES. ON THE COMMAND, 'GET SET', ASSUME THE FRONT-LEANING REST POSITION BY PLACING YOUR HANDS WHERE THEY ARE COMFORTABLE FOR YOU. YOUR FEET MAY BE TOGETHER OR UP TO 12 INCHES APART (MEASURED BETWEEN THE FEET). WHEN VIEWED FROM THE SIDE, YOUR BODY SHOULD FORM A GENERALLY STRAIGHT LINE FROM YOUR SHOULDERS TO YOUR ANKLES. ON THE COMMAND 'GO', BEGIN THE PUSH-UP BY BENDING YOUR ELBOWS AND LOWERING YOUR ENTIRE BODY AS A SINGLE UNIT UNTIL YOUR UPPER ARMS ARE AT LEAST PARALLEL TO THE GROUND. THEN, RETURN TO THE STARTING POSITION BY RAISING YOUR ENTIRE BODY UNTIL YOUR ARMS ARE FULLY EXTENDED. YOUR BODY MUST REMAIN RIGID IN A GENERALLY STRAIGHT LINE AND MOVE AS A UNIT WHILE PERFORMING EACH REPETITION.* (Department of the Army, 2012, p. A-6)[24]

The attention to detail, and the repetitive nature of the instructions—across weeks and months and years—are intentional. At the level of the institution, the detail and repetitiveness ensure uniformity in the readiness of soldiers, no matter where or by whom they are trained. Trainers

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[24] Yeah, it's really printed in ALL-CAPS, because Drill Sergeants deliver it in ALL-CAPS.

everywhere set the same standard and enforce the same standard. The instructions and terminology are the same everywhere. The education that results can be revelatory for some. In my father's National Guard unit, during the Vietnam era, many of his teammates were, like him, in professional programs such as law school, dentistry, or business. The consensus among them was that the Army provided the best training they ever received—largely because they always knew exactly what was expected of them and they knew the expectations would be the same for each soldier in the unit. The uniformity is an assurance to soldiers that everyone in the ingroup is held to the same standard, and that each soldier is equally ready for whatever comes next. Each soldier can be depended upon to meet a clear standard of readiness and has proved their readiness publicly, so that each soldier sees they can depend on each other.

The regulations encourage the vital connection between readiness, training, and demonstration. As stated in *Field Manual 21-20*, *Physical Fitness Training*: "The basic rule is that to improve performance, one must practice the exercise, activity, or skill he wants to improve. For example, to be good at push-ups, one must do push-ups. No other exercise will improve push-up performance as effectively" (Department of the Army, 1998, p. 1-6). In other words: if you require a skill, practice the skill itself. The connection to testing is a bit more elusive. *Field Manual 21-20* makes it clear that the Army Physical Fitness Test is a useful diagnostic tool, but it is neither a teaching tool unto itself, nor are the three skills that are tested the limits of a good fitness program (Department of the Army, 1998, p. 1-4, 1-6). Nevertheless, biannual testing of physical fitness, under implacable regulatory standards, is mandatory and generally regarded as helpful. Through the following case studies, I suggest that the second-order effect of this routine and mundane public performance is understated, and underestimated, in the military regulations. The regulations are important both for an individual service member—in

this case, Valentina, a member of the United States Marine Corps—and for her earliest peer relationships in the Corps. We will also see that the public demonstration of readiness played a critical role in her experience of those relationships.

5.3 Case Study 3

Valentina first tried to enlist in the Marines at the age of fifteen. Even with parental consent, though, seventeen is the youngest age at which one can enlist in the US military; as Val told me, the recruiters said, "Hold your boat." She waited patiently and returned two years later, in her senior year of high school, with parental consent in hand. Asking for her mother's consent had been tough for Valentina: her mother had only recently gone through both a messy divorce and a bout with breast cancer. But, Valentina told me, her mother could see the determination in her daughter's eyes, and so she supported the decision. That initial support was very important, because Valentina did not get much support elsewhere for her decision. Most of her friends didn't think she could make it in the Marines and told her that plainly.

When she reflected on the experience of enlisting, Val acknowledged that even today she didn't see herself—her high school self—as material for the Corps. She was the shy bookworm at the back of the class; she was never intimidating, physically or otherwise. She tended to believe what others told her about herself, and that included their low estimates of her confidence and courage. But, ever since an encounter with James Bradley's story of the Marine Corps' fight in the Battle of Iwo Jima, *Flags of Our Fathers*, at the age of thirteen, she also believed that the Corps was the way forward for her. The determination of the Marines who famously planted the American flag atop that island appealed to her. Val would be "first to fight," as both she and the Marines put it. But even after enlisting, she waited for her turn to fight; she had an entire year of high school to finish before entering Boot Camp.

The Delayed Entry Program was created for people who want to enlist but need to wait, whatever the reason: finishing school, separating from a job, or because the military specialty that the enlistee wants isn't open right now. Nevertheless, enlistment papers are signed, legal commitments are made, and enlistees remain civilians for a little longer—weeks or even months. This delay is a common experience for many service members. It is a between-places experience wherein enlistees might experience both the expectations of their former life and the expectations of military experience. Even during the waiting, though, recruiters often provide a little training, especially for younger recruits.[25] It is not a universal experience. However, looking at that training is helpful precisely because there is a certain focus to the experience. The physical training program that Val participated in was the only training available to her—training with weapons and the like was out of the question. In other words, Val's experience in the Delayed Entry Program is helpful to discuss precisely because it was focused on exactly one aspect of soldiering: physical fitness.

Throughout her senior year of high school, Valentina and a handful of other recruits in the same position gathered for routine physical training. The training was optional, as far as she recalls, but Val was grateful for the opportunity. She did not see herself as ready. She emphasized that point for me: "When I say I sucked physically, I *sucked* physically." She described her performance as a recruit in terms of the physical training standards that would be applied to her in the Marine Corps: "I think I did twenty crunches the first time I went to the recruiting station, think I hung on the bar for ten seconds, [but] I couldn't do a pull-up. And I think my run time for a mile was sixteen minutes. And that was me *trying*—the recruiter was pushing me half the way." The experience of physical exertion was new to Val: "I was doing that

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[25] In the Marine Corps, those in the DEP are known as"poolees," rather than recruits, which is a term reserved for those in boot camp.

level of physical exercise for the first time in my life." She suddenly found that her backpack full

of high school and college texts felt a bit heavier; the five flights of stairs at school seemed a bit

harder to climb. She found herself napping whenever possible and eating all the time. Val

mentioned to me in a later exchange of emails that she was aware, at the time, only of the

minimum requirements for Marines to be considered physically fit, but she also held herself to

the standards for male Marines, rather than female Marines.[26] [27] She was working alongside

mostly male recruits and did not want to be held to a lower standard—nor <u>seen</u> to be held to a

lower standard—than her male peers in physical training. And she was keenly aware of the

standard from the start: she knew that the Marine Corps had very clear expectations—regulatory

measurements—for fitness, even if Val had little regard for the gendered nature of those

expectations.

Val also understood that meeting minimum expectations was a necessary starting point,

but not enough. As the physical fitness regulations state: "Marines should be encouraged to

continually strive to perform their best and not merely accept minimum performance"

(Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 2-5). Whether or not Valentine knew the regulation—at least,

beyond the relevant standards to which the Corps held her, and those to which she held herself—

she understood the principle. So, she would head out to the recruiting station after school most

days, and on Saturdays, learning to meet the standards of the Marine Corps. Her recruiter noted

that she was there every session, rain or shine, working with her fellow recruits; he was the same

recruiter who helped her on her first timed mile-long run, and for Val he was also an early model

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[26] According to MCO 6100.13, which is the regulation governing the Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test, the male standard Val was striving for was nine pull-ups, forty-five crunches, and three miles completed in less than twenty-seven minutes (p. 2-7). The female standard, for contrast, was forty-three seconds hanging by the arms, forty-five crunches, and three miles completed in less than thirty minutes.

[27] In the US military, "male" and "female" are the terms used to cover both gender and sex. One company in which I served had a dual-military couple; when our platoon sergeant called for one of them, he yelled out "Private Smith, male-type," or "Private Smith, female-type," as if gender or sex were just a modification one could make to a government-issue soldier.

of Marine Corps leadership. In time, she did meet those standards: she told me that she was able to run a mile and a half in just eleven minutes, or about twice the pace of those early runs. She was able to "max out" her crunches and flexed-arm hang, meaning that she achieved a perfect score in each category on her physical fitness test. And were the story to stop here, it would be a good training story: Val was given clear standards to meet and she met them.

But through those standards, Valentina also found relationships far stronger than those she experienced in high school. In the training environment, physical exertion comes chiefly through planned group activity: the early-morning unit workouts with push-ups and jumping jacks (which are, in the Army, referred to as "side-straddle hops") and other strength-building exercises; long runs, either in cohorts according to speed and distance, or as a unit, with the readily recognizable singing or cadence-calling that many associate with military training and that are designed to improve endurance; long marches with a 35 lb. rucksack; and the occasional obstacle course. Even in the Delayed Enlistment Program, Valentina encountered many of these experiences. Granted, her workouts and runs were after school and voluntary. Nevertheless, the physical training she participated in shared essential features with every other fitness program in the Marine Corps (and the Army).

Valentina's experience of training was decidedly physical. She told me that she started "falling asleep everywhere": she would be found by her friends in the halls of her high school, fast asleep, head on her backpack. Her appetite increased as well, accommodating a new expense of energy. Valentina was voted "most ready to eat" by her fellow seniors. Eat, sleep, train, repeat; for a self-professed bookworm, the experience of physical exertion was new.

Also new were the relationships that developed out of Valentina's new routine. When she first mentioned to me the relationships that developed in her new military environment, she was

blunt about it: "[Physical training] definitely took a toll on me, but because of Staff Sergeant Romero and everyone else, I started to form that bond with the guys at my recruiting station." Those relationships were special for her. "For the first time," she said, "I had brothers... and sisters too, because there was some females there, too." Her fellow trainees seemed to believe in her, in way that her classmates could not. Val pointed out to me that she had no siblings and rather a small circle in high school, "a group of four friends (including me)… and those [friends] were the ones who laughed and said I would die [if I joined the Corps]. So—not the best friends." In training, Valentina found both encouragement and acceptance, even though she "*sucked* physically" at the outset. She clearly felt a connection between her improved physical performance and the relationships she formed in the Delayed Entry Program. One of her fellow trainees, Davis, lived nearby and owned a car; Staff Sergeant Romero suggested that he give her a ride home from training. Val recalled that his initial response was, "Who the hell is this?" He was unimpressed by the (in her words) "dorky and socially awkward" young woman he was asked to help. But over time, Davis saw her commitment to the training—and found a radio station they both liked—and his attitude shifted. As Val put it, "We bonded over music and the fact that we were both training to be Marines and everything that came along with that."

Staff Sergeant Romero noticed Val's dedication to training, as well; he noticed that she showed up for every training session, regardless of the vagaries of weather and (at least at the outset of the program) public transportation. He saw a motivated trainee and wanted her to share that motivation with her peers. Staff Sergeant Romero offered Valentina a chance to lead the warm-up and cool-down segments of training. His choices here are reminiscent of those that Casey made when addressing her new platoon leader, Taylor. Whereas Casey, as a leader, chose to delve into the 10% of Taylor's needs and desires that were more personal and not directly

connected to specific military obligations, it isn't clear in Valentina's version of the story whether Staff Sergeant Romero needed, as Casey did, to figure out something about Val in order to help her succeed. Valentina started out with needs and desires that seem to mesh entirely with the needs and desires of the unit: in this case, the desire to meet the physical training standards of the unit. In fact, Val became a model precisely because she was able to mesh her goals with unit goals so entirely. There was no assurance that Val would so easily adopt every need or desire of the unit, or that her needs and desires would always drive her toward unit needs and desires. But in that moment, thanks to the clarity of the physical training standards and Val's perception that she was not alone in pursuing those standards, military serendipity was achieved. The training became a means of developing oneself and developing the unit and assuring the unit that all is in *readiness*—a grand sort of mutuality. Valentina's unit saw that she set the standard, and that standard became the basis for relationships that were unlike anything she had known before.

The standards are set by regulation, so every regulation is an opportunity to form a relationship. Even stretching exercises are subject to regulation, and in the same manner as the push-ups. In fact, Army regulations governing physical training devote more than one-hundred pages to the various stretches and exercises available to soldiers, and another twenty or so pages to the various precautions that must be taken to avoid straining muscles during a physical training session (Department of the Army, 2012). The execution of these routines is, at some level, a matter of knowing the regulations. As we saw in Chapter 4, though, the relationship between the practice and military prose is complicated. Valentina didn't learn how to lead stretches by reading the Marine Corps manuals. She learned through training: by following along as Staff Sergeant Romero led her and her cohort, using the same litany and movements every time. Staff Sergeant Romero may have gained his knowledge by reading the manuals; as a

noncommissioned officer, it is quite likely that he could quote the regulations. Valentina didn't need to know the regulations, chapter and verse, but she understood the importance of the litany. Her story is worth quoting more fully, because she captured the magical connection between training, competence, and self-confidence:

> I would start the warmup or the cool down and stuff like that, and even something as minuscule as that was already enough for me to have a slight panic attack over… but the funniest thing is, because it was right before or right after doing strenuous exercise, it got to the point where I just let my body take over. I knew the stretches and I knew that [I knew the stretches]. So, I was perfectly fine leading them. It wasn't the easiest, and I would mess up sometimes… but that was the first time where I was like, "All right, I can do this. I know what to do and therefore I can lead people in a very small capacity."

This leadership role was just as important to Valentina's sense of finding "brothers and sisters" as was her own newfound self-confidence. It was a public demonstration of readiness, and it became the foundation for her relationships with her brothers and sisters in the Corps. We heard in Chapter 3 about Harvey's long weekend at his friend's family farm. There, the relationships he cherished were simultaneously created and expressed through the labor that he and his friends performed together; that the labors were not required by the military made them more pleasant— and lowered the stakes quite a bit, possibly—but the labors were described, just as military tasks are, in terms of specific and measurable obligations. The fulfillment of the obligation—the *demonstration* of fulfilling an obligation—is the key point in Harvey and Valentina's stories. The demonstration establishes clearly who can be counted on to understand and meet obligations, which is essential to care. Within a military ingroup, care is likely because service members are expected to demonstrate routinely their ability to fulfill their obligations to each other. Care is

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based not on assurances, but on demonstrated performance of shared standards amidst shared risks.

5.4 Stakes

The great Prussian philosopher of war Carl von Clausewitz famously observed, "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war." In other words: the tasks that soldiers perform on the battlefield are not necessarily complicated tasks. Rather, the ever-changing and high-stakes *context* in which those tasks will be performed makes them difficult—difficult in ways that the uninitiated cannot imagine. Running across an open field is not a difficult task; firing a rifle is simple. Doing those tasks, in turn, while under fire from someone else's rifles, makes both tasks much more difficult. It is a great advantage to the soldier if both running and firing a weapon become as automatic as possible.

In this sense, the importance of muscle memory to soldiering becomes clearer: tasks, skills, and capacities that are rehearsed to the point of becoming automatic are most likely to be successfully performed in battle. Muscle memory—a term often employed in the military and in sports training, as well—is an essential aspect of readiness. It is a deep kinesthetic responsiveness, born of deliberate practice and repetition, resulting in actions that are automatic and allow a soldier to pay attention to the battlefield.

My civilian athletic training has enhanced my understanding of muscle memory: I practice Taekwondo at a local studio, Keith Hafner's Karate. As with most martial arts, much of our time is devoted to learning sequences of specific movements. These sequences are called "forms," and the forms are committed to memory. But committing anything to memory, be it a form or a song or setting the table, has degrees of commitment. One of my teachers at the studio,

Master Jason Hafner, described that commitment thus: "You can know something well enough to do it right; but you can also know something so well that you can't do it wrong anymore." To ingrain a skill in memory in this way, so that it becomes automatic and seemingly effortless, is muscle memory. In martial arts and in military training, the art consists largely in identifying each fundamental movement and committing it to muscle memory, so that the "simplest thing" is a certainty amidst the chaos of battle, where care will be put to its greatest test.

Infantryman Gabriel described his training prior to his first deployment as an exercise in care. He had only recently been assigned the role of squad leader, and his new position was a cause for new anxieties: "It was a little bit scary because the unknown of 'Hey, this is for real now… [You've] got to make sure that you're squared away for your guys, and that you get them squared away. That was it: I took care of them as if I was going to take care of myself." [28] Gabriel understood that he set the standard for his squad, and that standards were set through training. He asked himself, "Did they have enough training? Have I taught them enough, and told them what to expect when we get out there? Is there anything that I missed?" For his soldiers to meet their obligations to the unit, Gabriel had to demonstrate the standards set by regulation. Those standards were essential to the formation of an ingroup, because they established shared professional practices. But the ingroup also needed a sense of "common fate," as Triandis puts it; realistic training was therefore essential to the ingroup.

It is impossible to fully convey to trainees the experience of the battlefield: the heat, the confusion, the noise, the distortion of time and space. Von Clausewitz (1976) tells us this: "It is immensely important that no soldier, whatever his rank, should wait for war to expose him to those aspects of active service that amaze and confuse him when he first comes across them"

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[28] To be "squared away," in military jargon, is to be fully prepared for a mission; in other words, to have achieved readiness.

(Von Clausewitz, 1976, p. 122). This is especially true of the physical hardships—the requirement to shoot, move, and communicate under the most intense circumstances, which are hardships not merely of the body but also of the will and imagination. "Exertions must be practiced," he says, "and the mind must be made even more familiar with them than the body" (Von Clausewitz, 1976, p. 122). These exertions having been made in training, the mind and body will understand that such exertions in war are normal. These exertions also introduce service members to the shared risks that solidify an ingroup, in a setting where the standards for exertion are clear and must be demonstrated by every member of the ingroup. The stronger the ingroup, the more goals and motivations are shared collectively, thus reducing the individual motivations and goals that each member (and especially a squad leader like Gabriel) needs to learn about to care for each other. Care is not a certain outcome of such exertions—but the formation of a strong ingroup contributes to the likelihood of care. Regulations are an important part of the training process that Gabriel describes as the basis for care.

However, not every service member finds the regulations to be a helpful scaffold to relationship. My final case study explores a soldier whose struggles with readiness complicated his relationships with his unit; his struggle can help us understand the problems that can come with regulations, and why we can't afford to forget that the military is, first and foremost, a warfighting institution.

5.5 Case Study 4

In the previous three case studies, service members have found relationships that were supportive, personally and professionally. This last case study is a bit pricklier. It is the story of a soldier who had the will to care for his fellow soldiers but was forced out of the Army by its nonnegotiable standards of care. Perry, a white man, spent his entire military career as an

infantryman, first in the Marine Corps, and then in the Army National Guard. Perry joined the Marines in the mid-1990s; he asked his recruiter for "a hard job" and was sent to the infantry.[29] He stayed there for a few years, leaving the Corps in 2000. But after 9/11, Perry went back to the recruiting office, this time opting for the Army. All told, he served in the military for eight years. And yet, despite those eight years, Perry could recall few positive relationships, and those few mostly stemmed from a brief stint in an Army National Guard unit in Chicagoland. Perry spoke of feeling isolated in each unit where he served, and of never really connecting with either his fellow Marines or soldiers. He seemed to feel that he had been cheated out of something. He felt that the military owed him better relationships than those he experienced. I don't disagree.

At least some of the isolation Perry experienced in the Army was connected to an injury. He injured his ankle during training, and that injury worsened with time. Perry was an infantryman—a scout, a specialty amongst infantryman with its own tightly-knit units. He wasn't going to give up on his unit, so he continued to use his injured ankle, despite a doctor's note excusing him from physical training." I just duct-taped my boot," he told me, "because I was a hard infantry sergeant. I ended up really damaging my ankle." Despite impressing his command with his skills, Perry's opportunities for promotion and, ultimately, for continued service in the military, were cut short by his injury; he was required to take a medical separation from the Army because he could no longer meet the standards for physical training.

At the time of his separation proceedings, Perry's unit was preparing for deployment to Iraq.[30] However, the unit was struggling to meet its training obligations. Individual readiness to fire the machine guns was lacking, and without individual readiness on weapons considered

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[29] Perry showed up that day with an appointment to see the Army recruiter, who was a no-show. Just the first in a long series of Army disappointments for Perry, it turned out. Lucky for him, the Marine recruiter next door was in the office that day and told Perry to "get his fucking ass in [there]."

[30] "Separation" is the term used for any departure from the military; there is no connotation to the word.

critical to their mission the unit could not be certified as ready for deployment. Both Perry and his First Sergeant, James, had been scouts, a specialized infantry unit that requires constant readiness with machine guns. James knew this—as a good leader, he had done the counseling and taken the time to chat with his soldiers—and he knew that, despite the pending medical separation, he needed Perry's help to get the unit through machine gun qualification.

Perry was unhappy with the request, which was a bitter reminder that he would miss out on the deployment. The request also put Perry in an awkward position. He was one of the lower-ranking noncommissioned officers in his unit and, to many in his unit, a surprising choice for the role of running the machine gun range. Perry could not meet the physical fitness standards of the Army. He was scheduled to lose his position within the ingroup. But Perry knew how to run a machine gun range, and so he was given a chance to set the standard for the unit. He was given a chance to fulfill an obligation to the unit—an obligation he incurred because of his expertise, and despite his injury. James knew Perry shared his sense of obligation to the unit, and he knew the machine gun. Perry would give each soldier the requisite training, and the regulations would provide the standards by which that training could be measured. In other words, he would demonstrate care for the soldiers on the machine gun range.

At each step in the qualification process, Perry was there: demonstrating firing techniques, reciting the steps required to operate the weapons, and calling out the orders on the range that kept soldiers safely firing their machine guns at paper targets a mere twenty-five meters away from them (Department of the Army, 2017). As a Marine, Perry committed to muscle memory the machine gun and its operation; as a soldier in the US Army, he used that knowledge to set the standard for his unit. He was able to care for soldiers in the way he wanted to, and then he was separated from the Army.

Perry never lacked in the desire to care for his teammates and unit. He was able to fulfill some of his obligations admirably and set the standards in some ways—but ultimately all that mattered to the Army were the physical fitness standards he could not meet. James could stall the separation long enough to give Perry one last chance to care for soldiers, but he could not stop it. The same rigid standards that made Perry successful on the machine gun range also required him to leave the Army. Regulatory standards of care can be unforgiving. Perry's failure to meet the standards spelled the end of a military career founded on his desire to care for soldiers. He understood why he had to separate from the military but felt bitter about the fact that he still had so much to give to his unit despite his injury. Perhaps he was rightfully upset that his unit relied on his sense of obligation but didn't seem to feel much obligation to him. But the logic that scaffolds care in the military compels service members to demonstrate their ability to meet standards and cuts out even the most dedicated when they can't meet standards, because readiness is about war, and not about soldiers. Perry's story is a harsh reminder that the care that service members experience comes about through scaffolding created to prepare them for war; when readiness and care seem at odds, readiness will win.

Nevertheless, the clarity of standards *is* meaningful for relationships. Valentina and Perry help us to understand that obligations matter to service members not only because they understand what they should count on each other for, but because they *see* that they can count on each other. Service members understand obligation not only as a matter of commitment—what you say you will do—but as a matter of action—what you have shown you will do. Their understanding of obligation becomes essential to their understanding of care. Care is not about what you say you will do for someone, but what you have done for them. Care is not a sentiment as much as it is an action. It is through training that service members demonstrate their ability to

care for each other—to meet specific obligations to each other, for the sake of a shared goal. This

demonstration, and the confidence it creates, permeates professional relationships in the military.

Chapter 6 Implications and Next Steps

BLUF: Scholars working with veterans need research methodologies and methods that help them incorporate veterans into their research process; that help them understand what makes a service member's experiences meaningful; and that help them understand how those experiences might become expectations that persist long after service is concluded.

Three years ago, I read an article in the *Journal of Veterans Studies* that said we need more qualitative research about veterans' perspective on and experiences in the military (McCormick, et al., 2019). We still do—three years is a blink of the eye when it comes to research projects. But even in that brief time, the *Journal of Veterans Studies* published several papers that delve deeply into the specifics of veterans' lives, and especially their military experiences. Recent studies examine the intersectional experiences of black men in service and of Latinx service members (Hall, et al., 2020; Casavantes Bradford, 2021). In both studies, the authors are interested in the connection between military experience and veteran experience. What connects the dots is veteran status, and the *Journal* makes clear on its homepage that its focus is "what happens after the service member departs the armed forces." My study hardly focuses on *veteran* experience at all; it is focused largely on *military* experience. Nevertheless, I see this study as essentially a Veterans Studies project, because the routine experiences that are at the heart of this study—and that concern service members' experience and expectations throughout their service—likely affect those service members' experiences and expectations after service as well. These expectations have implications especially for fields such as health

care and education, and for any person who would engage with veterans on a regular basis. For this reason, I believe that this study belongs to Veterans Studies, and that both my methodology and findings matter for scholars working with veterans.

I recently attended a conference, a gathering of scholars, caregivers, and educators with a collective interest in veteran welfare. Attendees gathered under the banner of Veteran Studies, but much of our conversation centered around concern that Veterans Studies hasn't yet coalesced into a proper field of study. Perhaps it lacks theories of its own that would make it a distinct academic discipline? Perhaps it lacks the pedigree? It has, after all, been only ten years since the first *Veterans in Society* conference convened, and the *Journal of Veterans Studies* is only a few years old. Perhaps it isn't old enough yet.

Scholarship in the field is still hampered by the same assumptions that make veterans an awkward topic for conversation in everyday life. PTSD, suicide, sexual assault—these topics have an urgency that makes them the focus of conversations about military veterans. The urgency of those topics is a problem in two ways: first, such discussions become the only discussions about veterans and then become the only thing that many people know about veterans; and second, research and writing about PTSD, suicide, and sexual assault overtake other research questions that lack the same sense of urgency (Castro & Kintzle, 2014). Questions about who veterans are, and what they have in common, end up on the shelf; consequently, stories about PTSD and suicide end up becoming the default answer to those questions. But the conversation at Veterans in Society suggests to me that, within the Veterans Studies community, questions about who veterans are, and what they share, still need asking and answering. They have an importance, if not an urgency, that demands attention.

These questions also have a particularity—questions of veteran identity are always connected to questions of military experience. Each experience is a bit different, which means each answer to questions of identity is a bit different. I don't mean to suggest that questions of identity are impossible, but they do require scholars to discern what any identity group truly holds in common. They also require distinction where experiences are concerned: the sampling process I employed led to a strong focus on Army and Marine Corps experiences, which is a natural limitation on the conclusions I reach. Through this study, I am making a claim that the common denominator of my participants' military experience is training, and that training is mundane—the stuff of "everyday life," as von Clausewitz (1976) suggests. Furthermore, I model a novel approach in emphasizing the mundane and taken-for-granted dimensions of military experience and in making direct connections between military regulations and service members' experiences. The regulations were created to direct service members' action in preparation for war and are considered effective when action is directed. However, I argue that the regulations have second-order effects that are worthy of consideration. As far as I know, scholars have not considered how the regulations regularly affect service members and might become the basis for behaviors and attitudes that are common to those who have served in the US military and persist into their civilian lives. This study makes a step toward the sort of knowledge we need to seek what veterans have in common. This study also makes a step toward a methodology for seeking: it might not provide us answers, but it might help us ask better questions.

Phenomenology is a way forward for asking questions of, and with, veterans. This approach is not novel—Morrow & Hart (2014) make the same suggestion in their study of student-veterans (p. 33). The big, open-ended questions that are typical of phenomenology are the questions that give veterans space to start reflecting on their experiences. In this study, the

phenomenological approach has helped me to discern both expectations that service members might have, and the specific meaning various veterans attach to those expectations. Identifying veterans' expectations is important, and quantitative research can be very useful for gathering and sorting through a list of such expectations. But the hard work of figuring out what these expectations mean for any particular veteran is still an unavoidable task and is essentially qualitative—maybe even essentially phenomenological—in nature.

Phenomenological interviews give participants an opportunity to have some input into the direction of the conversation and bring their own priorities into the research process. I think it mattered to my participants that they were given wide latitude to roam across their experiences. I would have missed so many important moments—important to my participants—had I taken more control over the interview. Phenomenology guided the interview guide, scaffolded my relationship with each participant, and let them take a hand in my research. But this study also suggests a level of detail and specificity that we should expect from veterans' responses—both in the places where I got it right and in the places where I missed opportunities.

Scholars in my home field of Writing Studies might benefit from a methodology that lends itself so well to a focus on narrative and that respects the cultural contributions of storytelling. When we take the time to not only hear the words, but to strive to understand why those words were chosen, we can gain new insights into how knowledge is produced in the most mundane settings.

And so, with respect to Veterans Studies: the bonds of service can be generalized, and the term "camaraderie" is one way this often happens—but they should not be. To generalize too quickly leads to an inadequate understanding of military service, which necessarily means an inadequate understanding of what it means to be a veteran. And in the context of a

phenomenological study, we should be slow to generalize from the findings, no matter how persuasive such findings might be—the context that surrounds an experience is, to a phenomenologist, of the utmost value. However, phenomenological methodology, with its intense focus on individual lived experiences, can inform quantitative research and thus support generalization. This study, for example, might suggest the need to incorporate questions about relationships and relationship formation into the survey tools used by the Veterans Health Administration, or entities such as Pew and Rand that routinely undertake large-scale studies of service members and veterans.

In my view, others working in Veterans Studies would benefit from methodologies that encourage veterans to set some of the terms of the research, and qualitative work should be in conversation with quantitative work (Watkins, 2012). Participatory action research is one such approach. Shawn Wilson (2008) describes a process in which researchers work with communities to establish research goals and to teach community members to conduct research themselves (p. 115). Veterans Studies would benefit greatly from qualitative research that seeks to bring veterans into the process as active participants and as researchers. One reason which this study suggests is that surveys of military experience and veteran experience need to ask questions that connect the two more clearly.

Nonetheless, my contribution to the recent conference was grounded in the research and findings I present in this study. I believe that if Veterans Studies has a future, it is in individual veterans' pasts. By this, I mean that military experience is still an understudied phenomenon, and without a greater understanding of military experience in all its varieties *and* commonalities, it will remain impossible to speak cogently with veterans about the connections between their military past and their veteran present. An essential element of military service is the scaffolding

that the military provides for the formation of relationships between service members. These scaffolds are rarely remarked upon in the scholarly literature, and yet they are the basis for what service members come to expect in service—and what they might come to expect in their post-service lives. For that reason, it is important that scholars draw clear lines from phenomena to expectations.

In this study, I suggest three specific expectations that service members might carry with them into civilian life:

- Relationships are scaffolded over time, and by time.

- Relationships are scaffolded by clear obligations.

- Relationships are scaffolded through action.

The scaffolds discussed in this study are largely practices, customs, and especially regulations that provide parameters for relationship development, and that might become expectations for relationship development. Not every veteran will share these expectations. But every veteran experiences military training, which means that veterans are likely to harbor expectations formed by military training. Understanding how military experience has shaped veterans' understanding of relationships and care is particularly important to discussions about transition from military to civilian life, because understanding the transition is necessarily a matter of understanding what does and what does not persist from military to civilian identity. The nature of transition is a key conversation in the Veterans Studies community—especially at intersection points with the field of Writing Studies.

The college writing classroom is a key space of transition that may benefit from a deeper understanding of the ways in which military experiences can shape veterans' understandings of relationships and care. Because first-year writing courses are an almost universal requirement in

higher education, every veteran on campus will take such a class. In first-year writing courses, veterans may be asked to write about their experiences, and many may choose to write about their military experience. Scholars' concerns about such writing has led to the development of books like Hart & Thompson's (2020) *Field Guide* to student-veterans in writing courses. The authors suggest that student-veterans might find college courses frustrating to navigate because the "aims and methods" are "fuzzy" or lack precision (p. 77). Other articles refer to veterans' feelings that campus is too undisciplined (Morrow & Hart, 2014). These articles offer a plausible explanation: that veterans value discipline and institutional authority that is expressed in particular ways. This may be so—that veterans still identify themselves as service members, in some way. However, I would suggest an alternative explanation, which is not mutually exclusive of other explanations: that service members expect teacher-student relationships to function as leader-subordinate relationships, built from clear mutual obligations. If this is so, a student-veteran may become frustrated with an open-ended writing assignment or grading rubric because they can't be sure what obligations they have to the teacher, or what obligations the teacher has to them.

Of course, the same could happen in a workplace where the requirements of the job are not clear enough for a veteran to see a relationship they recognize as meaningful, with either a boss or a co-worker. For instance, Diego told me a little bit about the job he took after retirement from the US Army, with Border Patrol. He saw the training and leadership as wanting. But he also understood—and tried to explain—that he had expectations that were not necessarily applicable in civilian life.

…It's very different dynamics [in Border Patrol] than in the military. Their mindset… it's not that it's bad, it's just they're not exposed to the mindset that [service

members] are exposed to.. so, they think what they're doing as supervisors and as leaders is... [I] don't know how to say it. It's just, it's not that we're above people, but leadership was our thing. So when you see leadership somewhere else, [and it's] not being done in a certain way, it's kind of like… that's leadership, but not to its fullest extent.

Diego came to expect a certain things of leadership and of his relationship with his supervisors—his relationship with his squad leader, Morris, was the model he carried with him. Morris set Diego's expectations, and because of Morris, Diego expected a certain kind of commitment on the part of his leaders toward their subordinates: fair, firm, and friendly. He found, instead, an overarching interest in the paycheck, and he experienced disappointment that leaders did not feel a greater obligation to the people with whom they worked. Diego knew that better leadership could contribute to a much more fulfilling experience on the job, but he also knew that his expectations as a soldier were not going to be applicable to Border Patrol. So, he made a mental note and moved on, because he understood his expectations well enough to do so.

As Diego's experience illustrates, to speak of service members' expectations about relationships, rather than their identity, can be a helpful way to talk of transition (Schultz, Caterino, Fox Garrity, & Daly, 2022). When we talk about the three expectations of time, obligation, and action, we are really talking about expectations about how relationships are formed and what sustains them. These expectations are reasonable, if we understand why they exist, but they might be difficult for service members to replicate when they separate from the military.

Civilian life *is* disorienting for some veterans, especially if they have no means to examine the expectations they might have carried from the military into civilian life. I do not, however, want to advocate for veteran-specific pedagogical techniques because I don't believe

that there is enough research to be assured that we know what veterans really have in common. And I don't believe that the relationship scaffolds that service members come to expect would do well on a campus classroom because the ethical foundation of the modern university is individualism, and collectivist approaches to leadership won't work well in such contexts. Furthermore, it likely would be fruitless to suggest that civilian relationships would benefit from the sort of checklist approach that makes military relationships effective. Most civilians would regard it is a serious infringement on their autonomy to commit to the obligations that are normal in the military. Fewer still would commit to the purpose of the US military, which is often to deliver violence on behalf of the nation.

Nevertheless, the experience of military service members suggests that the obligations to share goals amidst shared risks leads to unexpected rewards. Service members often seem to find powerful bonds with each other in the preparations for war; the commitment to training is itself sufficient for memorable and meaningful relationships. Service members may give up something of themselves to serve, although my participants rarely mentioned any sense of personal sacrifice, in terms of autonomy or otherwise. The obligation that limits one person binds two people to each other. If we were to formulate a general rule for civilians reluctant to learn from the military, we might say that the more precisely we know what we can count on others for— especially when our knowledge is based on past actions—the stronger the relationship is likely to be.

Appendix: Study Materials

Table 1: Study Participants, in Order of Interview

Pseudonym	Phase	Service	Specialty	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Corps
Porter	1	Army	Munitions testing	Man	White	Enlisted
Casey	1	Army	Communications	Woman	Korean-American	Officer
Perry	1	Marines/Army	Infantry	Man	White	Enlisted
Francesca	1	Army	Human Resources	Woman	Hispanic	Enlisted
Jackson & Kerry	1	Army	Intelligence	Man	White	Enlisted
		Army	Intelligence	Woman	White	Enlisted
Shea	1	Army	Intelligence	Woman	Black	Enlisted
James	1	Navy	Medic	Man	White	Enlisted
Chanda[31]	2	Navy	N/A	Woman	White	N/A
Dylan	2	Army	Intelligence	Man	White	Enlisted
Martin	2	Navy	Medic	Man	White	Enlisted
Elliott	2	Army	Infantry	Man	Korean-American	Officer
Cassidy	2	Army	Preventative medicine	Woman	Black	Enlisted
Madhav	2	Army	Supply	Man	Indian-American	Officer
Devon	2	Army	Infantry	Man	White	Enlisted
Gabriel	2	Army	Infantry	Man	Hispanic	Enlisted
Harvey	2	Army	Infantry	Man	White	Enlisted
Diego	2	Army	Infantry	Man	Hispanic	Enlisted
Roland	2	Army	Infantry	Man	White	Enlisted
Valentina	2	Marines	Mechanic	Woman	Hispanic	Enlisted

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[31] Chanda was a military spouse and therefore not part of the analyzed sample for this study.

Phase 1 Interview Guide

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research question: *What is it like to experience RELATIONSHIP in the military?*

RACE	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how and why you joined the military? (Probes: Was there anyone in your life who was influential in helping you to make your decision? Have any of your friends or family members served in the military?)

2. Can you tell me about your service history? (Probes: What was basic training like for you? Did you deploy overseas? If so, when and where did you deploy? What was that experience like for you?)

3. Tell me about a normal day for you in the military. (Probes: How about a normal day in garrison? On deployment? What part of the day did you most look forward to? How did other people figure into your routine? Who did you work with on a regular basis? What did you count on others for in your daily life? What did others count on your for? Can you tell me about your physical training?)

4. Tell me a bit about (a person/the people) you served with in the military. (Probes: Who do you stay in touch with? What do you remember most about [that person]? Do you remember a particular time that you felt that way about them? What do you miss about them?)

5. Can you remember the earliest time at which you felt connected to people you served with? (Probes: What sort of events or moments made you feel connected? What was it like to be in that moment?)

6. How have you shared your military experiences with other people? (Probes: With whom did you share? How did it feel to share your experiences? In what ways do you think the experience of talking to fellow vets about your service is different from talking to civilians?)

7. Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to share about yourself or your experiences in the military?

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Phase 2 Interview Guide

Research question: What was it like to experience the relationships that you found most important during your military service?

RACE	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how and why you joined the military? (Probes: Was there anyone in your life who was influential in helping you to make your decision? Have any of your friends or family members served in the military?)

2. Can you tell me about your service history? (Probes: What was basic training like for you? Did you deploy overseas? If so, when and where did you deploy?)

3. *The set of questions in the left-hand column is meant to locate both everyday <u>sites or contexts</u> of key relationships and the most generative relationships to explore in detail; the question in the right-hand column is meant to elicit narratives that illuminate the relationship.*

A. Tell me about a normal day for you in the military. (Probes: How about a normal day in garrison? What part of the day did you most look forward to? Who were your "battle buddies"? Who do you recall from physical training? Who do you recall from the rifle range?)

B. Can you tell me about superiors or subordinates that you worked with? (Probes: How would you describe your relationship with them? How did that relationship play out in your daily life?)

C. How did other people figure into your daily life? (Probes: Who did you work with on a regular basis? What did you count on others for in your daily life? What did others count on your for?)

Tell me a bit more about your relationship with X. (Probes: How did you meet them? What is your earliest memory of them? What stories come to mind when you think about your relationship with them? Do you stay in touch with them?)

4. Is there anything we haven't covered that you would like to share about yourself or your experiences in the military?

Phase 1 Recruitment Flier

MILITARY CULTURE FROM A MILITARY PERSPECTIVE

The University of Michigan, Joint Program in English and Education, seeks

VETERANS OF US MILITARY SERVICE AT ANY TIME AFTER 9/11

to participate in interviews about their experiences with military service

Time Required: 2 interviews, each $1 - 1\frac{1}{2}$ hours
Compensation: $50

For more information please contact
Michael Hoffman
mrmike@umich.edu
text: 734-604-1542

IRB #HUM00173508
Principal Investigator: Meg Sweeney

Phase 2 Recruitment Message

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your expressed interest in participating in my dissertation research. I am writing to follow up with a little more information.

I am asking for one interview of 2-3 hours with you, with compensation set at $50. The first part of the interview will cover your biography and your service history. The second part will largely concern stories about relationships you developed with peers, mentors, and subordinates in the service. The rationale for collecting this information and putting it to use in my dissertation is as follows:

> *Over the last twenty years there has been a good deal of interest in how veterans transition from military to civilian life. And military culture, which is understood to be different from civilian culture, is highly respected in our country. However, there remains a fundamental need to develop a better picture of what exactly "military culture" is. By conducting interviews with my fellow veterans and listening to their stories, their experiences, and their perspective on military service, I hope to help both vets and civilians understand why military service continues to be meaningful after we separate from the military.*

For the time being, I am planning to conduct interviews digitally—but hope to return to face-to-face interviews as the outlook on coronavirus improves. I am planning to interview in May and June.

Thanks again for your interest, and please let me know what questions you have.

Phase 2 Message to Participants

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am writing because our scheduled interview is coming up next week, and I want to confirm a few things with each of you.

First, the time of the interview. The "placeholder" timeframe for the interviews is currently 9:30 am - 12:00 pm, EDT. Under coronavirus circumstances, I want to check with each of you that that time works, and to figure out a different time if need be. Let me know. We will need up to three hours.

Second, location. I will send an invite to a Zoom meeting once I've got both a time and an email address to which to send it. (So if I don't have email yet, please respond to this message at mrmike@umich.edu.)

Third, compensation. I will need an address to which to send compensation when the interview is completed.

And fourth: interruptions. I'm sure I will be interrupted at least once by one or both of my kids. You may have family, friends, pets, that need attention during the interview. Don't sweat it, please.

Thanks again for your willingness to help with my dissertation research. My focus is on important relationships in the military—good or bad—so I will be asking you to be as detailed and specific as you can about those relationships: how they started, why they were meaningful, what you remember most, what it means today. I'm looking for stories from you, so the interview questions will be big and open-ended, for the most part.

Let me know what questions you have

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