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VOJAŠKE AVTOBIOGRAFIJE: JIH SPODBUJATI, ODSVETOVATI ALI PREZRETI?

MILITARY AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: ENCOURAGE, DISCOURAGE OR IGNORE?

Povzetek   Eden izmed vsakih 6000 napotenih vojakov kmalu po končani napotitvi na mednarodno operacijo ali misijo objavi avtobiografsko knjigo o svojih izkušnjah. Vojaški spomini so torej neizogibna posledica napotitev. Kako naj se obrambne organizacije odzovejo na te vojaške avtorje? Ali naj jih spodbujajo, odvračajo od pisanja ali ignorirajo? Na to vprašanje v tem članku ponujamo argumentiran odgovor. Navajamo profile vseh pisateljev vojaških spominov iz Afganistana, ki prihajajo iz sedmih držav, in sicer ZDA, Združenega kraljestva, Nemčije, Kanade, Avstralije, Belgije in Nizozemske, ter vrste zgodb, ki jih pišejo. Majhna večina piše pozitivne zgodbe. Negativne zgodbe opisujejo predvsem razočaranje nad tem, kako je obrambna organizacija ali družba na splošno poskrbela za udeležence, ter izkušnje s posttravmatsko stresno motnjo (PTSM). Zanimivo se izkaže, da je na podlagi vrste dela in tega, ali pripadniki še vedno delajo za obrambno organizacijo, mogoče napovedati, ali bo pisatelj napisal pozitivno ali negativno zgodbo. Priporočljivo je, da vojaške organizacije, ki si želijo objavo pozitivnih knjig, še posebej spodbujajo k pisanju individualno napotene pripadnike, ki delujejo na področju bojne podpore in so pripadniki stalne sestave.

Ključne besede   *Vojaški pisatelji, Afganistan, spomini, avtobiografije, veterani.*

Abstract   Of every 6,000 soldiers deployed, one publishes an autobiographical book about their experiences shortly after the war. Military memoirs are therefore an inescapable consequence of deployments. How should defence organizations react to these soldier-authors: should they be encouraged, discouraged, or ignored? A substantiated answer to that question is given in this article by providing a profile of all writers of military Afghanistan memoirs from seven countries (the US, the UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, Belgium and the Netherlands) and the kind of plots they write. A small majority write positive plots. The negative ones specifically deal with

disillusionment about the care the defence organization or society at large provided, and experiences with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is interesting that it proves to be possible to predict whether a writer will write a positive or a negative plot based on the type of work they do and whether they still work for the defence organization. Military organizations interested in getting positive books published are advised to particularly encourage writing by individually deployed personnel who work in combat support positions and are on active service.

Key words   *Military writers, Afghanistan, memoirs, autobiographies, veterans.*

Introduction   In the United States, service personnel who had just returned from Iraq and Afghanistan were helped to write a short story about their experiences by well-known writers. It not only resulted in the bestselling book *Operation Homecoming* (Carroll, 2008), but also in an Oscar nomination for the documentary about the project (Robbins, 2007).

Inspired by *Operation Homecoming*, a similar project was started in the Netherlands with a similar outcome: a bestseller called *Task Force Uruzgan* (Bemmel, 2009). Although the initiative for this book came from the Dutch quality newspaper *De Volkskrant*, it was embraced by the Dutch Ministry of Defence (MoD), who offered not only locations for the 'literary training camp' sessions, but also allowed the writers to attend during working hours.

This active support for writing activities is not a matter of course, however, as research into international military autobiographies shows that defence organizations do not seem to actively encourage their personnel to write books; on the contrary, the number of soldier-authors who specifically indicate that they have been encouraged by their MoD is just as low (7%) as the number of soldier-authors who have been actively discouraged (6%) (Kleinreesink & Soeters, 2016).

On the one hand, MoDs may be concerned about the negative image that could be created by these books, and might therefore choose to discourage soldiers from writing their deployment stories. On the other hand, for any organization, creating a good, or at least realistic, image is important to ensure its continuity, and for organizations that are dependent on politics, such as the armed forces, public support also helps in furthering their cause. This can be a reason to encourage soldiers[1] to write books about their experiences.

As the Dutch Department of Defence public relations formulates it in its ISAF[2] Stage III communication plan:

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[1] *In this article the term 'soldier' is used colloquially as a synonym of 'military personnel', not as an indication of rank.*

[2] *ISAF: International Security Assistance Force, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan.*

[…] it is essential that the perception of Dutch society does not differ from reality. Knowledge of the operation and insight into the modes of operation will lead to an understanding of the complex circumstances and to an appreciation for the way in which Dutch servicemen operate in them. The social support that is created in this way is important, especially in crisis situations[3] (DV&C, 2006 pp 4-5).

This article explores military autobiographies from seven different countries to provide a substantiated answer to the question: should the MoD actively encourage or discourage book writing by military authors?

In order to do this, the article will provide a scientific profile of the 'writing soldier': who are these soldier-authors, what kind of stories (positive or negative) do they write, and is it possible to predict who will write what kind of story?

For the article every military Afghanistan autobiography published in the US, the UK, Australia, Germany, Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands in the first decade of the war in Afghanistan (2001-2010) was researched; a total of 54 books.

1 THEORY

Military memoirs have been written since ancient times. The first military memoir that has survived to this day was written in the fourth century BCE by the Greek historian and soldier Xenophon (Lee, 2005). Time and again historical research in different countries has shown that soldiers are prolific writers. After religious writers, they are usually the largest or second largest category of writers (Bjorklund, 1998; Harari, 2008; Baggerman, 2010). The *Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis*[4] database, for example, shows that of the 5,033 'egodocuments' written between 1813 and 1914, 399 (8% of the total) were written by military personnel (Instituut, 2019).

Over the centuries, the writers of these types of texts have changed. Whereas in earlier history mainly kings, noblemen and senior officers wrote books about their war experiences, from the beginning of the mid-eighteenth century more and more junior officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and common soldiers began to write, drawing in a reading audience.

This change of rank also changed the content of the writing. A general officer, with political influence and strategic responsibilities, will write a very different memoir from that of a private, whose tactical experience of war is often limited to what he or she can see immediately in front of them. Common soldiers mainly describe war from their own experiences. This writing style became so popular that by the end of

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[3] *My translation*

[4] *Institute for the History of the Netherlands*

the twentieth century senior commanders had begun to take over the writing style of the common soldiers to increase their own credibility (Harari, 2007). The Israeli historian Yuval N. Harari calls this a change from eyewitness to 'flesh-witness'. During the Renaissance, military memoirs were still fact-based eyewitness accounts, while contemporary military autobiographers gain authority by the very fact that they tell the story as they lived it "in the flesh". These stories are not so much about the facts, but more about what it felt like.

To these flesh-witnesses, war becomes a revelatory experience, providing the flesh-witness with new knowledge and new experiences. According to Harari, these revelatory experiences can be represented by two different types of stories: growth stories (he calls them 'narratives of positive revelation') that deal with positive experiences ('naive youth becomes wise veteran'), and disenchantment stories that deal with negative ones ('naive youth expects to become a hero, but war turns out to produce victims, not heroes') (Harari, 2008). With this, Harari departs from what most scientists have come to consider typical twentieth century military stories; following American literary scholar Paul Fussell (Fussell, 1975/2000) in his landmark study of military memoirs from the First World War, mainly written by conscripts, they assume that contemporary soldiers mainly write disenchantment stories. Harari does not agree, but he also acknowledges that he does not have precise numbers about the division between growth and disenchantment plots (Harari, 2008, p199).

This lack of quantitative insight is a general problem among researchers into military memoirs. Many claims are made about who writes and what they write about, but hardly anyone substantiates these claims with numbers.

In this article I would like to bridge that gap by quantitatively answering the following questions based on a complete set of international military memoirs:
– Who writes military memoirs? How representative are they of military personnel in general?
– What do they write about? Do they write positive or negative plots? Growth, disenchantment or other types of stories?
– Can we predict which soldier-authors will write positive or negative stories?

Based on this information, we can provide a substantiated answer to the question: should the MoD actively encourage, discourage, or ignore book writing by military authors?

2 METHODOLOGY

In order to answer these questions, autobiographical books written by military personnel that dealt for at least 50% of the text with their deployment experiences in Afghanistan were researched. Every Afghanistan memoir, traditionally or self-published between 2001 and 2010 and written in English, German or Dutch was researched, as long as it came from a country that has close military ties with the

Netherlands: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Australia and the Netherlands itself.[5]

The choice of Afghanistan memoirs had both an academic and a personal background. Academic, since the Afghanistan mission has been the largest mission for the Netherlands and many other countries in the past 20 years, which makes insight into Afghanistan veterans very relevant, and personal, as I have been deployed to Afghanistan myself and have written a military autobiography about this period (Kleinreesink, 2012). My book is not part of the research as it was published after 2010.

This first decade of the war, between 2001 and 2010, was chosen in order to look specifically at immediate memoirs (Hynes, 1997), i.e. memoirs that were written during or directly after a war. This type of memoir (in contrast to retrospective memoirs, written long after the war) can influence a war still in progress, and is therefore most interesting for an MoD looking to develop a strategic communications policy on the subject.

2.1 Who?

During the analysis phase, each book was read at least five times and the necessary data on the author (such as age, gender, type of deployment, still working for the MoD or not) and the plot were collected in a SPSS database. When it was not possible to find specific data in a book, additional methods were used, such as internet searches or directly contacting the author.

In addition, a separate database was created with comparison data on the seven countries in order to be able to estimate representativeness. This database holds data on the armed forces per country when it comes to gender, age, rank, branch of service and status (reservist versus full-timer). Where possible, data from 2010 was used from the *Military Balance* (IISS, 2002-2011). Where these were not available, country specific sources were used.[6] The total number of books published during the period researched (n = 54) is large enough (> 50) to be able to calculate statistical significance (p < 0.05).

This database also holds an estimate of the number of soldiers deployed to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2008[7]. This was calculated by multiplying the number of posts a country fulfils in Afghanistan (according to the *Military Balance)* by the average rotation factor (RF) per country, as in some countries a post is

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[5] *For a complete overview of all 54 researched books, see Appendix H of Kleinreesink, 2014 or Chapter 10 of Kleinreesink, 2017.*

[6] *US: (DoD-US, 2011); UK: (MoD-UK, 2011); Canada: (Park, 2008); Germany: U Michl, email 1 May 2012; the Netherlands: R. van Leeuwaarden, email 31 January and 9 March 2012.*

[7] *Only the numbers until 2008 are taken into consideration as it is on average two years after a deployment before an autobiography is published (in the period 2001-2010).*

normally filled for an entire year, whereas in other countries an average rotation period only takes four months (Table 1).

Country	Posts 2001-2008	RF	Estimated # Soldiers
Australia	2.632	2	5.264
Belgium	2.096	3	6.288
Canada	11.510	2	23.020
Germany	20.771	2 - 3	53.434
The Netherlands	8.084	2	16.168
United Kingdom	28.030	2	56.060
United States	151.414	1	151.414

2.2 What?

In order to gain insight into the kind of stories that soldier-authors write, I have used Norman Friedman's plot theory (Friedman, 1955). Friedman distinguishes fourteen different plots. A plot describes the development of the main character during the story; for instance, 'a protagonist who was sympathetic and full of ambition is subjected to a crucial loss which results in his utter disillusionment' is an example of a degeneration plot. An advantage of Friedman's plot analysis is that it clearly distinguishes between positive and negative stories. The example given is of a negative plot.

Also, Friedman's plot theory makes it possible to quantitatively test Harari's theory, as Friedman distinguishes two different disenchantment plots (disillusionment and degeneration) and two different growth plots (maturing and education). The ten other plots (such as action and sentimental plots) are not growth or disenchantment stories.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Who?

The majority of the books come from the US (41%) and the UK (28%). These are also the countries that deployed most military personnel to Afghanistan. The variance in the numbers of books published in each of the seven countries researched is almost entirely explained by the estimated number of soldiers that were deployed to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2008 per country[8] (Figure 1).

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[8] $R^2 = 0.85$, slope $= 0.15$, $p = 0.003$, $r = 0.92$ (extremely large-sized effect). This model does suffer from a smaller sample size (7) than normally expected for reliable results (10-15 per predictor).

Figure 1:
Relationship
between books
published and
No. of soldiers in
Afghanistan per
country
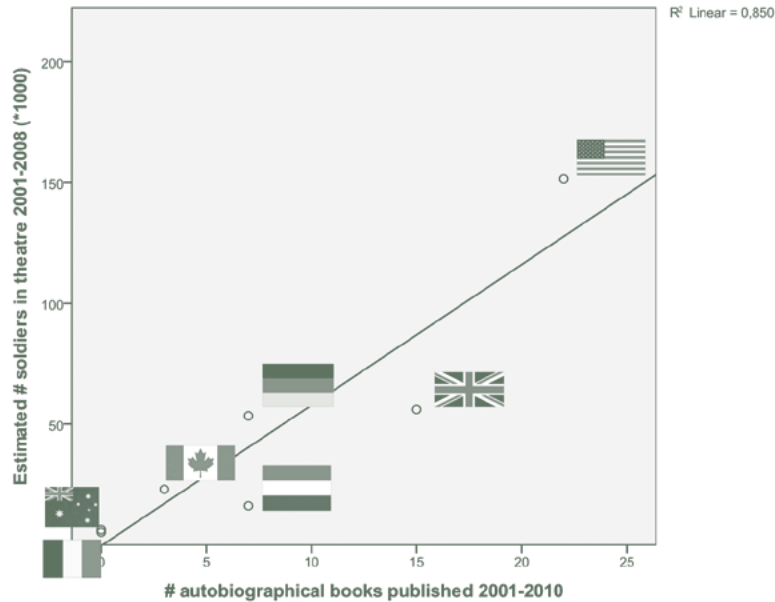
On average one book is produced per 6,000 soldiers deployed, with a mean publication time of two years after deployment[9]. Since Belgian and Australian deployment figures are around this threshold number, no autobiographical mission-specific books were published there at all. In Canada three books were published, in the Netherlands and Germany seven, in the UK fifteen and in the US twenty-two.

How representative are these soldier-authors? When it comes to the division between male/female, they are very representative. Four of the 54 Afghanistan memoirs (7.4%) were written by women: each country, with the exception of Canada, had one female writer. That may not sound like much, in neither relative nor absolute terms, but it is not significantly different[10] from the normal population, since the percentage of female soldiers varies between 8.8% in Germany to 14.7% in Canada.

The same goes for branch of service. The division of soldier-authors across the service branches does not differ significantly[11] from the normal military population. Most writers have an Army background.

Representiveness starts to decline when it comes to the division between conscripts, reservists and full-timers. During the research period, only Germany still had active conscription, and conscripts could only be deployed to Afghanistan on a voluntary

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[9] $M = 2.31, SD = 1.89.$

[10] $X^2 (4, N = 54) = 2.40, p > 0.05.$

[11] $X^2 (12, N = 54) = 18.09, p > 0.05.$

basis. An estimated 500 to 600 conscripts did so[12], a fraction of the threshold number (6,000) for writing a book. So it is not surprising that there are no author-conscripts among the writers of these 54 books.

For the US, Canada and Germany the ratio of reservists against full-timers conforms to the normal ratio in these countries. However, in the Netherlands there are more reservist writers (5 out of 7; 71%) than should be expected from a country in which only 7% of its soldiers is reservist. The opposite is the case in the UK, which has a large percentage of reservists (32%), but not one writing reservist[13]. Part of the explanation for these phenomena can be found in the way the military book market functions. In all countries, full-time soldiers are eight times more likely to be published by a traditional publisher than reservists[14]. In the UK, military books are (almost) exclusively published by traditional publishers, explaining the absence of reservists. In the Netherlands, however, few military books are published by traditional publishers, and most military writers resort to self-publishing their book, something which may lead to more reservist-writers. The military book markets of the other countries function in between these extremes.

Also when looking at the rank of soldier-authors, they are only partially representative of the average soldier. Despite the fact that in the 20th century more and more military autobiographies were written by the lower ranks, two-thirds of the 21st century's soldier-authors are still officers. Of the 54 books, 36 are written by officers, fourteen by NCOs, and four by enlisted men. The number of non-commissioned officers that write, however, is consistent with the percentage of NCOs in the countries in this study[15].

There are two aspects in which military writers are clearly not representative. First of all age; soldier-authors are on average 40 years old[16], the youngest 25, the oldest 61, and over-40s are in the majority (58%). Military book writers are not representative of the normal military population when it comes to the distribution of age[17]. Writing books is something for the older soldier, either because it is more their medium, whereas younger soldiers may be more attracted to other public media such as blogs, or because it takes an objectivity that comes with maturity to write books.

The second aspect in which soldier-authors are not representative is the way in which they are deployed, either in a team or individually. Although no public data

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[12] *G. Kümmel, email 4 July 2013.*

[13] *US: X^2 (1, N = 22) = 0.16, p > 0.10; Canada: X^2 (1, N = 3) = 0.88, p > 0.10; Germany: X^2 (1, N = 7) = 2.68, p > 0.10; the Netherlands: X^2 (1, N = 7) = 19.44, p < 0.01; UK: X^2 (1, N = 15) = 2.55, p > 0.10.*

[14] *X^2Fisher (1, N = 54) = 10.99, p = 0.002*

[15] *NCOs: X^2 (4, N = 54) = 5.75, p > 0.10; Officers: X^2 (4, N = 54) = 79.20, p < 0.001; Enlisted: X^2 (4, N = 54) = 17.82, p < 0.01.*

[16] *M = 39.9; SD = 9.6*

[17] *X^2 (9, N =26) = 39.58, p < 0.001. NB: for the US no age distribution data was available, and for nine of the books, the age of the writer was not traceable.*

is available on the percentage of individually deployed military personnel, the J1[18] from the Dutch Defence Operation Centre estimates that the number would not exceed 10% of all military personnel deployed to Afghanistan in any of the countries researched. However, exactly half the books were written by individually deployed soldiers. This would only not be significantly higher than expected if 35% or more of all military personnel deployed to Afghanistan were individually deployed[19], and 35% is an unrealistically high percentage.

This fits the data from Polish research into Afghanistan veterans (Iwanek, 2011). When asked with whom they most often shared their mission memories, the majority (76%) preferred to do so with colleagues who had also been to Afghanistan, and only 48% (also) did so with colleagues who had not participated in the mission. As sharing mission experiences is easiest for military personnel who have been deployed with their own team and more difficult for individually deployed personnel, this may result in a greater motivation for individually deployed personnel to share their stories with the outside world in the form of books, than for personnel deployed with their own unit, who have more outlets to discuss their experiences. It also indicates a self-help motive for the individually deployed: a way of dealing with their experiences in the absence of like-minded colleagues.

We can conclude that soldier-authors are to a certain degree (gender, branch of service, number of writing NCOs) representative of the normal military population. However, they are not entirely representative, as they are older and higher in rank than the average soldier, and consist of a disproportionally large percentage of individually deployed personnel. In two of the five countries (the Netherlands and the UK) the ratio of reservists against professionals was also not representative.

3.2   What?

The next question is: how positive or negative are these soldier-authors in their books? Do 21st century volunteer forces still mainly describe being disillusioned by war, as did their mainly conscripted predecessors from the First World War?

Looking at the basic storylines by following the main character's development during the book, what catches the attention is that a (small) majority of the books have a positive plot: 31 out of 54 (57%). The division of the books is as Harari predicted: the majority (69%) describe revelatory experiences, either growth plots (30%) or disenchantment plots (39%). Other stories (such as action and admiration plots) make up the remaining 31% of the books.

We can therefore cautiously conclude that contemporary military memoirs are no longer only negative. However, a large minority (43%) of soldier-authors still write negative stories, nearly all of them disenchantment plots.

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[18] J1: The personnel department responsible for deploying all military personnel, regardless of branch of service. Here: Verweij, 26 March 2013.

[19] $X^2 (1, N = 52) = 3.91, p \approx 0.05$.

There are two kinds of disenchantment plot. The first are degeneration plots; these are stories in which the main character's personality changes negatively, mainly because their deployment has resulted in them suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Six of the books (11%) describe such outcomes. This is remarkable, since memoir researchers (Hynes, 1997; Woodward & Jenkings, 2013) assume that PTSD stories need reflection time and therefore only appear long after a war. This may have to do with the attention given to the early detection of PTSD symptoms in contemporary armed forces, which allows for less of a taboo around PTSD. The symptoms are more clearly recognized and treated, and so soldiers can more quickly enter their experiences into book form than earlier generations, when PTSD or its precursors such as 'shell shock' were experienced as a personal failure, instead of something that can happen to anyone.

The second kind is the disillusionment plot, in which it is not the main character's personality that changes negatively, but their thinking. Disillusionment plots are about shattered ideals instead of shattered souls. Fifteen books (28%) describe this kind of negative story.

The disillusionment plots from the First World War dealt with shattered illusions about war. The mainly conscripted, male soldiers expected that war would turn them into heroes, but in reality war turned out to be awful and turned them into victims instead. In contemporary military memoirs these shattered romantic ideals of war can barely be seen, as only one book deals with this type of disillusionment (Bury, 2010). Apparently, 21st century full-time soldiers know better what to expect from war, possibly also thanks to their writing predecessors from previous wars.

Instead, in these 21st century how-war-shattered-my-ideals narratives, two other ideals are more often shattered: that of a caring armed forces and that of a caring society. Half the disillusionment plots were written by writers who were disappointed by their own armed forces. In some cases the soldiers felt they had been treated unfairly by the military, such as the story of an American reservist whose team, on their return to the US, are kept more or less imprisoned for four weeks without any explanation, because (it later turns out) they had been given a very dangerous anti-malaria medicine that needed to get out of their system (Skelly, 2010). But most are simply disappointed in their expectations of working in efficient and effective armed forces, with enough equipment in both quality and quantity, in which they are recognized by their superiors and colleagues for their work and hardship. These are complaints that can also be found in positive plots, but they are not so prevalent there as in the disillusioned-with-the-armed-forces books.

The other type of disillusioned authors, the disillusioned-with-society writers, are also disappointed by the recognition they receive, but in their case it is that of society at large. On their return they had expected more interest from their friends and also from the press, more money for the Defence organization or for wounded veterans, or more insight from politicians.

The disillusioned writers not only complain, but they also offer solutions, which vary from a list of military materiel that is required (Wohlgethan, 2010) or initiating a charity (Tootal, 2009), to writing a detailed, new political strategy (Lindemann, 2010). Their criticism is related to real and recognizable problems and in a democratic society contributes to the debate about deploying the military.

3.3 Plot predictions

In order to find out whether it is possible to predict who will write positive and who will write negative plots, a number of author characteristics were statistically tested. Most of them (such as rank, age, multiple deployments, branch of service[20]) do not influence the type of plot. There were only two author characteristics that tested significantly: still working for the Defence organization when the book was published, and the type of work: either combat or combat support.

3.3.1 Working for the MoD

In general, soldier-authors who wrote negative plots no longer worked for the Defence organization at the time their book was published. Active service members were nine times more likely to write positive plots than former soldiers[21]. This probably has three main reasons: first of all, 'you don't bite the hand that feeds you': people are more tempted to write positively about the organization they work for and must keep functioning in. Secondly, we know from social-psychology and organizational sciences that people who have left an organization are more prone to be negative about their former employer, to fit with their new beliefs about this organization as no longer positive, in order to solve their cognitive dissonance[22]. Thirdly, people who are disillusioned by their experiences are more likely to leave the defence organization and then write negative stories.

3.3.2 Combat/Combat support

The second author characteristic that influences plot is the type of work the author primarily does: combat or combat support. Combat supporters (such as medical personnel, logisticians) have a weapon mainly for defensive use. Combatants (such as infantry, fighter pilots), on the other hand, are specifically trained to use their weapons offensively. Combatants write negative plots almost four times more often than combat supporters. This probably has to do with the fact that combat is less likely to lead to positive stories. Combatants have a greater chance of incurring direct losses in their own teams (and seeing death on the other side as well) and less chance of seeing what the (positive) effect of their work is. The very nature of their

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[20] *Rank: $X^2* (3, N = 54) = 0.411, p = 0.938$; Age: Negative plots: $M = 39.0$; $SD = 8.9$; Positive plots: $M = 40.6$; $SD = 10.2$; $t(43) = -0.570, p = 0.572, r = 0.09$ (small effect); Multiple deployments: $X^2 Fisher (1, N = 53) = 0.012, p = 1.000$; Branch of service: $X^2 Fisher (1, N = 54) = 1.95, p = 0.200$*

[21] *$X^2 Fisher (1, N = 51) = 12.48, p = 0.001$. For three authors it is unknown whether they still worked within the Defence organization at the time their book was first published.*

[22] *Cognitive dissonance: the idea that if a person knows various things that are not psychologically consistent with one another, they will, in a variety of ways, try to make them more consistent (Festinger, 1962, p 93).*

work is troublesome; using violence is difficult and taxing, even for professional soldiers (Collins, 2008).

3.3.3 Combination

Of these two, the most important variable for predicting whether someone will write an overall positive or negative story is 'working for the MoD'. Logistic regression shows that work alone can predict at 30%[23] whether a plot will be positive or negative, which is considered to be a large effect[24]; adding the variable 'Combat/Combat Support' to the model only raises this to 33%. Of those who still worked for the MoD, 80% will write a positive plot, whereas former soldiers will mostly (69%) write a negative plot (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Plots for the combination combat/combat support and working for the MoD
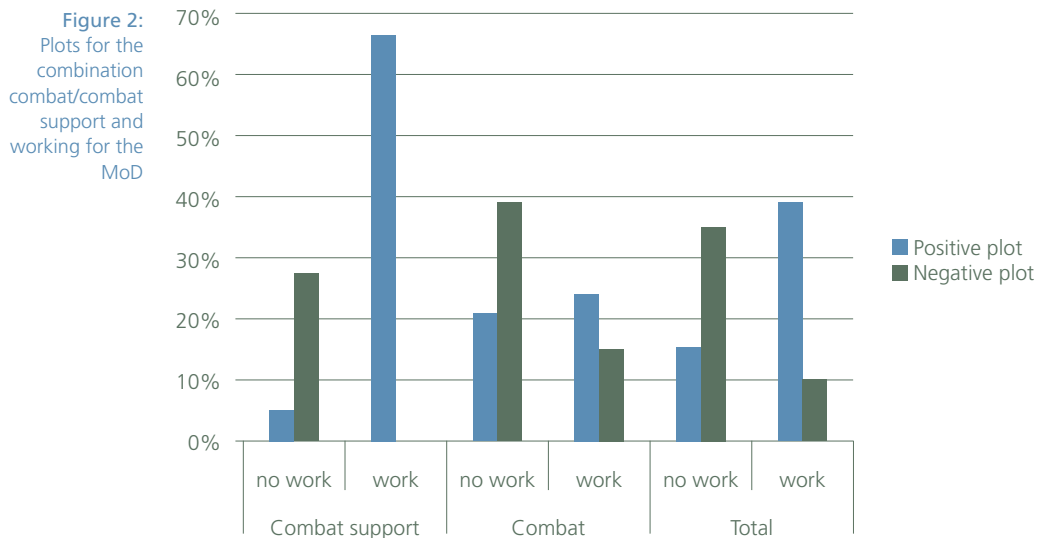
Conclusion Based on the data from this research it is possible to provide recommendations to defence organizations on how to react to the production of books by soldier-authors. Should they actively encourage, discourage or ignore book writing by military authors?

The data show that in Western countries nowadays the production of military memoirs is an almost unavoidable consequence of deploying soldiers; the number of military memoirs published during and right after a war by both traditional publishers and

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23 $R^2 = 0.30$ (Nagelkerke).

24 Model X^2 (1) = 13.09, p = 0.000. Work: β = -2.19, SE = 0.66, p = 0.001. Odds ratio = 0.11, 95% CI for odds ratio = 0.03-0.40. Constant: β = 1.39, SE = .50, p = 0.006.

self-publishers can even be predicted by a formula[25]. The data also show that the most reliable variable in predicting whether a book has a positive or a negative plot is 'working for the MoD': whether the soldier-author was still working for the MoD when their book was first published. Furthermore, the research shows that combat support soldiers (who are in the majority in modern armed forces) write far more positive plots than combatants, and that full-time soldiers are eight times more likely to be published by a traditional publisher (rather than self-publishing) than reservists.

For Western military organizations that are first and foremost interested in positive publications in any medium, the recommendation with regard to (potential) soldier-authors is to try to stimulate them to write while they are still in employment, and to especially encourage those with a combat support background. Good places to look for willing writers are individually deployed soldiers, as they make up 50% of the writers. It may actually help them as well, as writing will provide them with an extra outlet for coping with their deployment experiences.

For military organizations which are focused on providing a realistic image (irrespective of whether that is positive or negative) and which are particularly interested in getting the stories published by traditional publishers, the recommendation is to particularly encourage full-timers to write.

In both cases, whether looking for positive or realistic books, the advice is: encourage book writing.

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[25] *No. of books = 1.2 + 1.5 * (estimated no. of soldiers in area of operations/10,000).*

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