

Class, Competence and Sexual Prejudice: An
Analysis of Representations of British Military
Leadership in British film and TV from 1940-2021

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This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the:

Master of Arts: History

At the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

March 2022

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract:

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the relationship between the portrayal of senior British military leadership, class, and competence, as well as perceptions of servicewomen. It will do this by focussing on cinematic and television productions created between 1940-2021 with some mainstream examples such as *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) and more niche projects like *Get Some In!* (1975-78) being considered. In terms of class, it will argue that portrayals of commissioned and non-commissioned Officers have developed somewhat since 1940 with the caveat that certain tropes and stereotypes are still very much used in the present day. It will then argue that films and television series have tended to portray NCOs and commissioned officers as being competent and incompetent respectively. As with class, it will also argue that portrayals have largely remained stagnant, especially with the portrayals of NCOs, despite changes taking place. Finally, the dissertation will analyse portrayals of servicewomen and how historically they have been portrayed in different ways to their male counterparts. A particular focus will be placed on the sexualisation of women and the ignoring of their professional accomplishments be they fictional or real.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks must go to Dr Alexander Scott for his support and supervision throughout the writing of this dissertation and Dr Thomas Jansen for his support, encouragement, and advice.

I owe thanks to those who gave time to listen, discuss, and criticise early drafts of this dissertation. In particular I owe thanks to Dr Ian Richards for his dedicated support and guidance which supported the creation and writing of this project during the Covid-19 pandemic

Methodology and Introduction

Introduction:

Between 1940 and the present-day, scores of British films and television series have been providing audiences with portrayals of British military leadership. These range from the more popular productions, such as *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) and the *Sharpe* (1993—2008) series of films, which show commissioned officers to be dunces and NCOs as capable leaders, to more obscure productions such as *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and *Petticoat Pirates* (1961) which examine the contributions of women to the British Army and Royal Navy respectively.¹ These productions have attracted some scholarly attention. Barbara Korte, for instance, researched the character of Richard Sharpe (Sean Bean) from the *Sharpe* (1993-2008) series within the context of the perceived relationship between nationalism and heroism.² Nick Webber and Paul Long, as well as others, have also explored *The Monocled Mutineer* (1986) and *Blackadder Goes Forth* within the context of how the British press represented First World War veterans.³ Previous research has, however, been limited to specific case studies, and as yet there is no British equivalent to Yvonne Tasker's *Soldiers Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War II*, which explores shifting trends in how Hollywood films portray the military over the course of several decades.⁴ This dissertation fills this gap. It offers a longitudinal

¹ 'Episode 1: Captain Cook', *Blackadder Goes Forth*, BBC One, 28th September 1989. < https://www.britbox.co.uk/series/Blackadder_Goes_Fourth_52510 > [Accessed: 6th December 2021]; *Sharpe's Eagle*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1993); *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

² Barbara Korte, 'Heroic Affect and structures of National Feeling on British Television: 1990s Sharpe vs. 2010s The Last Kingdom', *Journal of European Popular Culture*, 11.2 (2020), 105-117 (pp. 105-110).

³ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 'The last post: British press representations of veterans of the Great War', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7.3 (2014), 273-290 (pp. 274-277); Tim Shipman, 'Michael Gove blasts 'Blackadder myths' about the First World War spread by television sit-coms and left-wing academics', *Daily Mail Online*, 3rd January 2014. < <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html> > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁴ Yvonne Tasker, *Soldier's Stories: Military Women in Cinema and Television since World War II* (London: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 19-255.

analysis of film and television representations of British military leadership from the 1940s onwards, focusing on three key areas: competence, class, and gender.

The Aims and Objectives

The three areas described above have been chosen because each of these concepts have influenced a great many portrayals of British military leadership within film and television. Primarily they have influenced how characterisations are maintained by those involved in the production process as well as how the narratives surrounding officers and non-commissioned officers are constructed. To a lesser extent these concepts have also influenced how films are received by the public and the debates which take place amongst historians and film theorists who debate the influence of class, competence, and sexism on film and television. In short, the dissertation seeks to explore three areas:

1. To identify the influences governing how the examined representations are depicted, with a particular tie into Film Theory, with a focus being placed on the works of Stuart Hall and R. A. Rosenstone and others.
2. To Identify any trends that existed, and still exist, in how commissioned and non-commissioned officers are presented on-screen within the context of class, competency, and prejudice.
3. To identify the reasons behind the changes that took place in how commissioned and non-commissioned officers are presented on screen between 1940-2021 within the context of class, competency, and sexism towards servicewomen.

Methodology and Literature Review

This dissertation is split into three main chapters entitled Competence, Class, and Sexism. Chapter 1 will cover competence and it will argue that competence has been used as a component in the portrayals of military leadership throughout the examined period in multiple ways. It will also suggest that certain tropes associated with officers and NCOs have persisted into the present day even though they no

longer have a foundation in actual reality. Chapter 2 will focus on how class is portrayed, and it will argue that officers have typically been shown as coming from the upper echelons of society whereas NCOs were traditionally drawn from the lower end of the social scale. As with Chapter 1, it will highlight how some aspects of the portrayals have been reused multiple times between 1940 and 2021. Chapter 3 focuses on the portrayal of female military leadership and how female servicewomen have consistently been treated differently to men. A focus will also be placed on why servicewomen are sexualised despite their positions with the armed forces.

In terms of primary sources, care has been taken to ensure that a range of films and television series produced between 1940 and 2021 have been selected for inclusion within the dissertation. To facilitate the above, it was decided that the research would focus on films and TV series which make the British Armed Forces their main subject. In the first instance films were located using secondary sources written by authors such as James Chapman's *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945* which explores films from World War II and film reviews from both past and present.⁵ Once the films and television series were selected, it was then necessary to establish if watchable copies of the potential sources still existed. For instance, one possible source was the TV series *The Regiment* (1972-1971) which detailed the lives of two military families during the late Victorian and early Edwardian era.⁶ Unfortunately, no physical or digital copy of the series appears to remain in existence which means the series could not be included in this study. Thankfully some series from this era have survived such as *Redcap* (1963-1966) and *Wings* (1977-1978) which both provide excellent material with regards to the portrayals of competence and class.⁷ Many of the films identified still exist thanks to both physical releases and the rise of online streaming.

The locating of secondary sources however was somewhat easier even though there is a lack of specialist material covering the topics discussed in this dissertation. Online repositories such as JSTOR and the National Archive's online and digitisation

⁵ James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State, and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 1998), pp. 180-184.

⁶ Jeff Evans, *The Penguin TV Companion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 501.

⁷ Episode 1: 'It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964; 'Episode 7: Time Out of War', *Wings*, BBC 1, 13th February 1977.

services allowed for the location of several excellent sources including Judy Suh's 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', which examines the portrayal of women within propaganda/documentary films from the Second World War.⁸ She argues that the *Gentle Sex* (1943) provides an excellent view of the work undertaken by servicewomen in the British Army.⁹ Due to the niche subject of this dissertation though, there is very little published material which directly relates to the material covered in the forthcoming chapters. Consequently, many of the journal articles and books mentioned in this dissertation will be largely used to justify and argue original conclusions. For example, Mercy Ette's 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq' will be used to suggest that there has been a long-standing bias against servicewomen within the British media at large.¹⁰ To initiate the above the next chapter will look at competence in order to understand how it relates to the portrayal of professionalism of senior non-commissioned and commissioned officers.

Despite the originality of the conclusions within this dissertation, it does mostly complement the already existing conclusions put together by historians who have analysed the same issues being covered here. For instance, in Chapter 2 it will be argued that the portrayal of commissioned officers as being scions of the upper classes has been retained right into the present day. This notion is argued by multiple authors such as Nick Webber, Paul Long, and to a lesser extent James Chapman who notes that many films about the Royal Navy from the 1940s romanticised the life and work of naval officers.¹¹ In Chapter 3 the dissertation also complements the existing scholarship which explores the representations of servicewomen on screen. It will concur with Barbara Green's view that the first films depicting servicewomen, most notably *The Gentle Sex*, were used to persuade viewers that organisations like the Auxiliary Transport Auxiliary were not hotbeds of

⁸ Judy Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 40.1 (2012), 54-76 (pp. 58-60). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43798814> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022].

⁹ Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', pp. 54-76.

¹⁰ Mercy Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', *Media, War and Conflict*, 6.3 (2013), 249-261 (pp. 250-254). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26164655> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2021].

¹¹ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 'The last post: British press representations of veterans of the Great War', pp. 274-277; Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State, and Propaganda 1939-1945*, pp. 180-184.

vice.¹² Essentially, this dissertation confirms and supports most of the arguments contained within the cited sources. The dissertation will therefore largely seek to adapt these conclusions and use them to create the foundation for original research and arguments. As this dissertation is largely an original piece it will deviate from the existing scholarship in many ways as it will cover subjects that have been largely unexplored by other historians or film theorists.

¹² Barbara Green, *Girls in Khaki: A History of The ATS in the Second World War* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2012), p. 150.

Chapter 1: Competence: The Incompetents and the Professionals

Introduction:

In films and television, officers and non-commissioned officers are often shown as having opposite degrees of competence. An officer is often shown to be incompetent in both their duties and in how they are expected to behave professionally as shown in the film *Conduct Unbecoming* (1975) and the series *Piece of Cake* (1988).¹³ An NCO on the other hand is mostly shown to be professional and extremely competent, as highlighted in *Redcap* (1964-1966).¹⁴ This of course is a generalisation of the portrayal of competency when it comes to Officers and NCOs, for not all films and TV series show officers to be incompetent and the NCOs to be paragons of professionalism. The TV Series *Get Some In!* (1975-1978), for instance, portrays Corporal Marsh (Tony Selby) as an NCO who is good as a drill instructor but terrible in other aspects of being an NCO.¹⁵ By contrast *Soldier Soldier* (1991-1997) does portray officers being competent both in terms of their jobs and professional behaviour.¹⁶ This chapter seeks to understand why some films and television series, especially have often shown officers to be incompetent and NCOs to be extremely competent. It will also seek to understand why some of them do the complete opposite with NCOs being the incompetents and the officers being the competent individuals, and how and how these representations are created within the context of the historical changing of trends in how officers and NCOs have been portrayed on film.

¹³ *Conduct Unbecoming*, dir. by Michael Anderson (Lion International, 1975): '1 September 1939', *Piece of Cake*, London Weekend Television (LWT), 2nd October 1988.

¹⁴ 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964.

¹⁵ 'Episode 1: Call Up', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 16th October 1975.

¹⁶ 'Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991; *Eye in The Sky*, dir. by Gavin Hood (Entertainment One, 2015).

What is meant by competence?

Within the British Armed Forces competence has been strictly defined for both officers and NCOs. For instance, according to *The Queen's Regulations for the Army* the competency of officers is measured both in their professional and social capacity.¹⁷ For instance, they read: 'Commissioned officers in the British Army have a special responsibility for leadership'.¹⁸ This quote alludes to the fact that officers are only considered competent if they are good leaders and the ensuing articles links this to the army's values and standards. The regulations also state that an officer must enforce the army's values and standards which includes concepts such as, moral courage, self-discipline, and lawful behaviour.¹⁹ This means that a competent officer cannot just be leader but also one who acts in accordance with the army's values and standards through their personal behaviour. This is the same in the other Armed Services, though there are some differences in their respective values and standards.²⁰ With regards to NCOs and warrant officers, their competency is also based on the Armed Forces' values and standards as they are also expected to promote and enforce them. However, they are not the same type of leader and do not promote them in the same way as their commissioned counterparts.²¹ An NCO's competence and authority are based on their time in service and the qualifications they hold, whereas a commissioned officer's authority is derived largely from the fact they hold the Queen's commission and command positions.²²

Of course, visual media can deviate from the established understanding of what a competent officer and NCO looks like. Films and TV series which try to provide a

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence, *The Queen's Regulations for the Army* (London: Defence Council of the United Kingdom, 1975), pp. 35-37. <

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/440632/20150529-QR_Army_Amdt_31_Jul_2013.pdf > [Accessed: 11th February 2022].

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 35-37.

²⁰ The Royal Navy, *Our People* (2022) < <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-people> > [Accessed: 11th February 2022].

²¹ Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 95. < https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt18mbbzj.13?refreqid=excelsior%3A96c9eded014d4e57d592d71d79850560&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents > [Accessed: 11th February 2022].

²² National Army Museum, *British Army Ranks* (2022) < <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/british-army-ranks> > [Accessed: 11th February 2022].

credible view on the competence of officers and NCOs appear to match the long-standing definitions of competence which are accepted by the British Armed Forces. This view is supported by James Chapman who takes the view that realistic films from the Second World War show officers and NCOs to be competent in their work, as those responsible for creating wartime propaganda wanted to give audiences a realistic view of what it was like for those fighting. Of course, his views are limited in this situation as he only applies them to films made between 1943-1945.²³ The above idea though can be seen if publications on leadership, such as *Serve To Lead*, which was created by the British Armed Forces, are examined and applied to films and television, as for instance in a series like *Soldier Soldier*, which shows officers to be competent in their roles.²⁴ The characterisations, especially that of Colonel Dan Fortune (Miles Anderson), appear to adhere to the ideals of competence for officers which are prescribed by the British Army in *Serve to Lead*.²⁵

This is seen most notably in the first episode of *Soldier Soldier*'s second series, 'A Man's Life'. During the episode Colonel Fortune survives a helicopter crash involving himself, his regiment's padre, and two flight crew. Throughout the episode Fortune puts the needs of the injured men before himself and it is also shown that he willingly puts himself at risk.²⁶ The series also shows traditional portrayals of NCOs in that they obey their officers to the letter and enforce discipline within their units.²⁷ A traditional view is also repeated in the series *Redcap* and the film *In Which We Serve* (1942), through the characters of Sergeant Mann (John Thaw) and HMS *Torrin*'s Chief Petty Officer Hardy (Bernard Miles) respectively.²⁸ Of course, this is not always the case, as films and television series can be subversive in how they portray officers and NCOs. In the ITV series *Pathfinder* (1972–1973), for instance, the final episode of the second series shows an officer who shirks his duty as he lacks confidence in his own capabilities to command a bomber.²⁹ This is a rare

²³ James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State, and Propaganda 1939-1945* (London: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 1998), pp. 180-184.

²⁴ Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991.

²⁵ British Army, *Serve To Lead* (London: IndieBooks, 2013), pp. 13-107; 'Episode 1: A Man's Life', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 21st September 1992.

²⁶ 'Episode 1: A Man's Life', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 21st September 1992.

²⁷ 'Episode 1: A Man's Life', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 21st September 1992.

²⁸ *In Which We Serve*, dir. by Noël Coward (British Lions Film, 1942); 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964.

²⁹ 'Episode 13: In the Face of the Enemy', *Pathfinders*, ITV, 25th January 1973.

example though, as the officer doubts his capabilities within the context of his job as a bomber commander rather than as an officer in general.³⁰ In terms of NCOs, film and TV series, a popular trope is showing NCOs as being incompetent, be it through some defect on their part or the message being conveyed in the film.

The reason the above is important is because the definition of 'competence' appears to be defined in part by the film or television series in question. For instance, as described *Redcap* conveys the idea that an NCO should only be considered competent if they can perform their duties and are conscientious in how they present themselves. Mann is presented as the ideal NCO as he performs his duties both by the book and with due consideration to his superior officers.³¹ As an example, in episode 1 'It's What Comes After' and episode 3 'Epitaph for a Sweat', Mann is continually pressured to stop or scale down his investigations. Each time it happens, Mann sticks to his orders and carries them out to the letter.³² The view presented here is somewhat realistic as it does correspond to an image which is conjured up by military historians. Haythornthwaite and more recent historians have long maintained that the role of an NCO primarily was to follow and carry out orders.³³ It should be said though that Mann's competence should be considered differently to a more traditional NCO. Mann can act differently to other NCOs through his position as a Special Investigation Branch detective from the RMP as he has more authority than other NCOs of the same rank. As such in the first episode, he can persuade a colonel to allow him entry into the Officer's Mess of the unit he is investigating in that episode.³⁴

Under normal circumstances a sergeant would never be given entrance to the officer's mess, even if they demanded entry, as only the members of a mess can freely enter it.³⁵ This also works vice versa, as to this day an officer cannot enter a

³⁰ 'Episode 13: In the Face of the Enemy', *Pathfinders*, ITV, 25th January 1973.

³¹ 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964.

³² 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964; 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964; 'Episode 3: Epitaph for a Sweat', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend Television, 31st October 1964.

³³ Philip Haythornthwaite, *Redcoats: The British Soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2012), p. 97.

³⁴ 'Episode 1: It's What Comes After', *Redcap*, ABC Weekend TV (ABC), 17th October 1964.

³⁵ Byron Farwell, *For Queen and Country: A Social History: of the Victorian and Edwardian Army* (London: Allen Lane, 1981), pp. 60-67.

Sergeants Mess as it is the home of the sergeants, colour sergeants, and warrant officers unless absolutely required.³⁶ This is highlighted in the television series *Wings* (1977-1978), which depicts the life of a Royal Flying Corps flight in WWI. In the episode 'Time out of War', Second Lieutenant Charles Gaylion's (Michael Cochrane) presence in the Sergeants' Mess causes enough resentment amongst the NCOs that it comes to the attention of their Officer Commanding, Captain Triggers (Nicholas Jones).³⁷ This episode and others present the idea that Sergeant Farmer (Tim Woodward) and Second Lieutenant Gaylion are having their competence questioned by their fellow officers and NCOs because they are associating as friends rather than as an officer and his subordinate NCO. In this case *Wings* is suggesting that officers and NCOs from the First World War were considered less competent if they socialised with each other as personal acquaintances.³⁸ The same is shown in the drama *Piece of Cake* with the relationship between Pilot Officer Hart (Boyd Gaines) and non-commissioned member of his flight.³⁹ With both depictions in *Wings* and *Piece of Cake*, it is evident that productions carry the idea officers and NCOs were considered incompetent to a certain extent if they interacted outside of their professional capacities.

The Motivations Behind the Portrayals of Competence

If it is the case that the definition of 'competence' is changed according to the needs of the film or television series being examined, what are the motivations behind the ways in which 'competence' is dealt with in the above-named films and television series and other examples? As this is a history dissertation, it is worth re-stating the tried and tested idea of historical accuracy. In other words, films and TV series may construct portrayals of competence in a certain way in order to make them feel more historically accurate.

³⁶ 'Episode 6', *In the Highest Tradition*, BBC One, 11th December 1989. < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p00jsgw2/in-the-highest-tradition-episode-6> > [Accessed: 12th February 2022].

³⁷ 'Episode 7: Time Out of War', *Wings*, BBC 1, 13th February 1977.

³⁸ 'Episode 7: Time Out of War', *Wings*, BBC 1, 13th February 1977.

³⁹ 'Episode 2: October 1939', *Piece of Cake*, London Weekend Television (LWT), 9th October 1988.

Film and television, of course, have always had a contentious relationship with both history and historians. Clive Coultass, for instance, in his article 'British Feature Films and the Second World War', suggests that historical films often do not reflect the actual historical reality of the period that they represent. Granted, this paper is from 1984 but the academics have tended to treat films and television series with caution into the present day.⁴⁰ This is shown by Marnie Hughes-Warrington in her work *History Goes to The Movies* and Robert A. Rosenstone in *History on Film/Film History*, who both suggest that films can be problematic as there is always an element of fictionality contained within them.⁴¹ It should be remembered that films with fictional plotlines can be historically accurate in a broad sense. *Wings* is an excellent example of this, which highlights Gaylion's military competence being questioned when he socialises with Sergeant Farmer.⁴² Documents produced by the Armed Forces during the First World War and afterwards have routinely suggested that competent officers and NCO's must not socialise with each other. A pamphlet created in 1942 by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff makes it clear that a competent officer was not supposed to socialise with non-commissioned soldiers outside of their duties as it states, 'be friendly without being familiar'.⁴³ *Wing's* historical accuracy is further reinforced as research undertaken by historians, most notably G.D. Sheffield, supports the view that doing the above was viewed as a less competent move on the part of both officers and NCOs. He cites multiple letters from both NCOs and officers who took a dim view of fraternisation between the ranks.⁴⁴

Of course, historical accuracy might not be the main thing governing the portrayal of a soldier's capabilities, as plot points and messages contained within visual media can also have some influence over these portrayals. The film *Conduct Unbecoming* and the TV series *Get Some In!* perhaps highlight this better than most other series and films. Despite their settings both *Conduct Unbecoming* and *Get Some in!* should not be classed as war films or series for they merely use the British military for their

⁴⁰ Clive Coultass, 'British Feature Films and the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19.1 (1984), 7-22 (pp. 9-10). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260423> > [Accessed: 12th February 2022].

⁴¹ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History of On Film* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 102-103; Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 94.

⁴² 'Episode 7: Time Out of War', *Wings*, BBC 1, 13th February 1977.

⁴³ The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, *Comrades in Arms: Three Talks to Junior Officers or Officer Cadets to assist them in the Handling of their Men* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Officer, 1942), p. 7.

⁴⁴ G. D. Sheffield, *Leadership in The Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), pp. 123-124.

setting and the source of the drama in the former and the comedy in the latter.⁴⁵ *Conduct Unbecoming* details the unofficial court martial of Second Lieutenant Millington (James Faulkner) after he allegedly assaults Mrs Scarlet (Susannah York). The film does an excellent job of establishing that Millington deliberately fosters the view amongst his fellow officers that he is an incompetent officer. This is with the aim of failing his probation so that he can return to England. This is largely done through scenes which he shares with Second Lieutenant Drake (Michael York) at the start of the film, in which he deliberately breaks regimental tradition and disobeys the instructions of the senior subaltern, Lieutenant Fothergill (Michael Culver).⁴⁶ This allows the audience to use Drake as point of reference to identify why Millington would be considered a less than stellar addition to the regiment.

Unlike *Conduct Unbecoming*, *Get Some In!* is set during the 1950s against the backdrop of National Service, which required young men to serve in the Armed Forces for two years. It details the basic training of young men named Richardson (David Janson), Smith (Robert Lindsay), Lilley (Gerard Ryder), and Leckie (Brian Pettifer), under the direction of Corporal P. Marsh.⁴⁷ Marsh's apparent competence or incompetence appears to be a source of comedy throughout the show however the comedy surrounding it does change over time. At the start of the comedy, a lot of the laughter stems from him being a caricature of a drill instructor. In the first episode the camera is used to great effect to show Marsh as an imposing figure and the fact that he is petty and forceful towards those juniors in rank. For example, the camera work in one scene is set up so that Marsh is standing on a step above an airman who is on all fours painting stones. The camera in this scene is used effectively as it highlights Marsh both in terms of rank and how he sees himself as a drill instructor.⁴⁸ It is worth remembering though that in the RAF corporal was the lowest NCO rank, during the 1950s with lance corporal only being introduced to the RAF Regiment in 2010.⁴⁹ As previously explained, Marsh is shown as largely being competent in his

⁴⁵ *Conduct Unbecoming*, dir. by Michael Anderson (Lion International, 1975); 'Episode 1: Call Up', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 16th October 1975.

⁴⁶ *Conduct Unbecoming*, dir. by Michael Anderson (Lion International, 1975).

⁴⁷ 'Episode 1: Call Up', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 16th October 1975.

⁴⁸ 'Episode 1: Call Up', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 16th October 1975.

⁴⁹ Royal Air Force, *New Rank for the RAF Regiment* (2010) <

<http://www.raf.mod.uk/news/archive.cfm?storyid=F2704E04-5056-A318-A8A32544D3DCB41E&rss=true> > [Accessed: 12th February 2022].

duties as a drill instructor which quite often sees him being used as the straight man.⁵⁰ One notable exception to this is when he is briefly promoted to acting sergeant after which he gets thrown out of the Sergeants' Mess for behaving inappropriately. In other words, Marsh is shown to be competent in his duties as a corporal but incompetent when comes to behaving appropriately as a sergeant.⁵¹

Some at this point may be questioning though why much is being made of how an officer or NCO is portrayed in terms of how they act rather than how well they do in their jobs. Uniquely to the British Armed Forces an NCO and officer's competence is not just measured by how well they do their job but also by how they conform to the values and standards of the Armed Forces. Many manuals, for instance, have been published by various authors outlining the above, especially in the case of officers. Two such manuals are *Advice to Officers of the British Army* and Stocqueler's *The British Officer: His Position, Emoluments, and Privileges*. The former, appears to be a satire criticising the behaviour of officers and NCOs as it is written in a tongue in cheek manner.⁵² For instance, it makes fun of junior subalterns for not learning about their trade and mocks them for not liking officers who were attentive to their duties. Bernard Fergusson, who wrote the introduction to the 1946 edition, implies that the work is important as it both criticised the behaviour of the officers at the time it was published and because it highlights how people of period did not like the behaviour of officers and NCOs, and the army in general.⁵³ From this dissertation's point of view, the book is significant as it confirms that people even in the 1780s were concerned about the behaviour of officers. *The British Officer: His Position, Emoluments, and Privileges* confirms that this concern over behaviour lasted into at least the 19th Century as it confirms that British Army expected captains in the army in achieve a certain manner which was laid in the Queen's regulations.⁵⁴ For instance, the 1844 regulations make it clear that captain needed to be competent in

⁵⁰ 'Episode 1: Call Up', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 16th October 1975.

⁵¹ 'Episode 1: Erks', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 6th January 1977.

⁵² *Advice to Officers of the British Army* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), pp. 26-91; Joachim Hayward Stocqueler, *The British Officer: His Position, Emoluments, and Privileges* (London: Smith, Elder & CO, 1851), pp. 27-86.

⁵³ *Advice to Officers of the British Army*, pp. 7-9.

⁵⁴ Stocqueler, *The British Officer: His Position, Emoluments, and Privileges*, pp. 56-61.

the duties of a field officer within two years of being appointed to the rank of captain.⁵⁵

The above shows how the official views of the Armed Forces on the behaviour of officers and NCOs have been carried forward from 18th-19th Centuries right into the present. As this is the case, this concept is well entrenched within certain examples of film and television, especially in the case of documentaries. This can best be seen in *How to Make a Royal Marines Officer* (1989) and *Commando: On the Front Line* (2007), which were produced by the BBC and ITV respectively.⁵⁶ *How to Make a Royal Marine Officer* goes to great lengths to explain how an officer is not only expected to be a competent leader but also a gentleman. During the first episode of the documentary, mostly through interviews with trainee officers and others, it is very clear that when someone joins the Royal Marines as an officer they are expected to conform to the values and standards. During the episode this aspect of an officer's competency is reinforced as a colour sergeant outlines the standards of dress expected, whereas in Episode 2 it is shown through rehearsals on how to interact with the soldiers under an officer's command.⁵⁷ *Commando: On the Front Line* also shows that the Royal Marines are particular about the behaviour of the other ranks. This documentary is constructed in such a way to show that a capable Royal Marine is expected to maintain a certain persona. The messages contained in the documentary present the idea that a competent marine maintains both the values and standards of the corps irrespective of whether they are an officer, NCO, or the most junior of marines.⁵⁸

But why would TV shows and films replicate the above dynamic even if they are fictional pieces? In truth, it is most likely the case that their creators want to create a sense of apparent realism to make their respective projects believable for their

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 56-61.

⁵⁶ Royal Marines, *How to Make a Royal Marines Officer: Part 1* [Video]. 2012 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv-pxrUNhmw> > [Accessed: 13th February 2022]; Royal Marines, *Commando: On the Front Line: Episode 1 - The Shock of Capture* [Video]. 2012 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYF-qDopam0&list=PL1B8C32E97662A26F&index=1> > [Accessed: 13th February 2022].

⁵⁷ Royal Marines, *How to Make a Royal Marines Officer: Part 1*; Royal Marines, *How to Make a Royal Marines Officer: Part 2* [Video]. 2012 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ime0t2I_eKE > [Accessed: 13th January 2022].

⁵⁸ Royal Marines, *Commando: On the Front Line: Episode 1*.

audiences, especially if they are set against the backdrop of historical events. Sheldon Hall for instance argues that there is a concept called 'authenticity of impression' which he describes as "a convincing illusion". In other words, Hall is suggesting that a director can create a fictional film which manages to create a convincing illusion of historical accuracy so that looks as if it is conveying actual events from the historical record.⁵⁹ Of course, his suggestion may be a little biased as he worked on the film *Zulu* (1964), which took liberties in how it depicted the Battle of Rourke's Drift.⁶⁰ It changed certain events of the battle and the director Cy Endfield inserted anti-war and anti-racist messages into the film, which also seem to influence the unhistorical aspects of the film.⁶¹ Hall's point is perhaps correct, as creating a believable cinematic presentation is a key aspect of making films in the eyes of both historians and film theorists. The Marxist Stuart Hall suggests that filmmakers and those involved in television production consciously try to communicate certain messages to an audience as they watch the film. He suggests that if an audience is from the same socio-economic background as the content creators, they are extremely likely to invest themselves in the film and create a positive view of it.⁶²

If one combined the writings of Stuart Hall and Sheldon Hall, then it is possible to make the following proposition: It is the case that films, and TV series present the competence of officers and NCOs in the way they do to construct the messages that are to be placed in the film. For, instance the film *The Way Ahead* (1944), has been described as 'glorying in a nation's girding up its loins to go and conquer its enemies'.⁶³ This quote elucidates the fact that towards the end of the film great pains were taken to show that British soldiers could defeat the enemy and perform well when under extreme pressure. According to the British Film Institute, the film was created this way to persuade those on Home Front that their sacrifices for those on the frontlines were necessary. To persuade the audience of this, the films creators, Carol Reed, Peter Ustinov, and Eric Ambler, provide an accurate portrayal of a

⁵⁹ Sheldon Hall, *Zulu: With Some Guts Behind It* (Sheffield: Tomahawk Press, 2005), P. 429.

⁶⁰ *Zulu*, dir. by Cy Endfield (Diamond Films, 1964).

⁶¹ *Zulu*, dir. by Cy Endfield (Diamond Films, 1964).

⁶² James Procter, *Stuart Hall* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 57-74.

⁶³ *The Way Ahead*, dir. by Carol Reed (Two Cities Films, 1944); Variety, 'The Way Ahead: British Made', *Variety*, June 21st 1944. < <https://archive.org/details/variety154-1944-06/page/n107/mode/1up?view=theater> > [Accessed: 13th February 2022].

soldier's competence to persuade the audience to continue supporting the troops in the field as they could end the war.⁶⁴ This is unsurprising, given that the film was released on D-Day which may have been a calculated move to galvanise support for what was seen to be the start of the final push to defeat Nazi Germany.⁶⁵ The above also happens in more modern films such as *Eye in The Sky* (2015) which looks at the issues surrounding the use of drones. It portrays the army officers as being competent in their roles as intelligence analysts and drone operators. However, this competence is tempered by officials from Whitehall who differ about sanctioning an attack when it becomes evident civilian targets will be hit. In this case competence is used to convey that it does not matter how competent a military is if their civilian superiors cannot agree on a decision.⁶⁶ Essentially, in this film competence is used to criticise Britain's military complex whereas *The Way Ahead* galvanises support for it.

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter the portrayal of competence seems to vary depending on the nature of the film and television. These variations include differing versions of what constitutes a competent officer and NCO. *In Which we Serve*, and *Conduct Unbecoming* give the viewer a more traditional view of the competent NCO and officer. Both show officers to be competent in their profession and the patterns of behaviour they were expected to maintain. Whereas *Soldier Soldier* and *Redcap* show a more traditional view of an NCO who is both conscientious in his duty and who dutifully follows the orders of his immediate superiors. Some films and television series show a more subversive version of both officers and NCOs. *Conduct Unbecoming* presents Second Lieutenant Millington to be an incompetent officer as he is attempting to show himself to be useless as a means to leave the army and return to England, whilst the latter series of *Get Some In!* also shows less than competent NCOs including Marsh when he attempts to retrain as a nursing attendant. It is also evident that certain films and television series portray

⁶⁴ British Film Institute Screen Online, *Way Ahead, The (1944)* (2013) < <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/460745/index.html> > [Accessed: 13th February 2022].

⁶⁵ British Film Institute Screen Online, 2013.

⁶⁶ *Eye in The Sky*, dir. by Gavin Hood (Entertainment One, 2015).

competence in certain ways to ensure certain messages are conveyed to the audience. As seen with *The Way Ahead* and *Eye In The Sky* portrayals of competence have been used to both support and criticise the Armed Forces. In times of war competency has been used to support the Armed Forces whereas it has also been used to criticise the handling of the recent Wars on Terror.

Chapter 2: Depictions of Officer's and NCOs within the context of Class.

Introduction:

In the TV film *Sharpe's Eagle* (1993) there is a character called Lieutenant Colonel Sir Henry Simmerson (Michael Cochrane), who serves as an antagonist towards the main character of the film, First Lieutenant Richard Sharpe (Sean Bean).⁶⁷ A central aspect of this antagonism is Sir Henry's belief that officers of the British Army can only be drawn from the upper classes of British society. As a soldier from the ranks and the backstreets of Yorkshire, Richard Sharpe is a personification of Sir Henry's dislike of officers who are not classed as gentlemen.⁶⁸ This is characterised in the notable quote:

'You should be wary of this one, McRae. He thinks because Wellington raised him up from the sewer that it somehow makes him a gentleman. Don't know your place, do you Sharpie?'.⁶⁹

Despite Sharpe's elevation to the gentry through his commissioning by Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington Simmerson detests Sharpe as he was introduced to the gentry rather than being born into it. *Sharpe's Eagle* is not the only film to portray soldiers along class lines especially when class can be used as a tool to influence portrayals of both officers and NCOs. Interestingly though, depictions based on class lines have remained largely constant for officers, whereas for NCOs the depictions vary wildly. In the case of the officers, they are largely portrayed as coming from the upper classes, quite often the nobility and social elite, with certain labels and stereotypes being ascribed to them due to their associations with the upper classes.⁷⁰ NCOs on the other hand are nearly always portrayed as coming from the

⁶⁷ *Sharpe's Eagle*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1993).

⁶⁸ *Sharpe's Eagle*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1993).

⁶⁹ *Sharpe's Challenge*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 2006).

⁷⁰ Tim Shipman, 'Michael Gove blasts 'Blackadder myths' about the First World War spread by television sitcoms and left-wing academics', *Daily Mail Online*, 3rd January 2014. <

lower classes. Quite often there is a difference in how the senior NCO is portrayed in relation to the junior NCO. Within the military circles, the senior NCOs to date are placed hierarchically above their juniors both through their privileges and responsibilities.⁷¹

The main aim of this chapter will be to investigate how class is used within film and television to influence and create portrayals of officers and NCOs. The films that will be the focus of the chapter will be *The Charge of The Light Brigade* (1968), The *Sharpe* (1993-1997) series of films and the film *Zulu* (1964).⁷² In terms of television series, the main focus will be on certain episodes of the comedies “*Allo ‘Allo!*” (1982-1992) and *It Ain’t Half Hot Mum* (1974-1981). Other series will be looked at where appropriate, especially those which use class as a source of contention when it comes to portraying British military leadership. The reason is because these films contain some of the notable references to class within British cinema. Despite their setting, each film contains messages and viewpoints which relate to the issues of the period they were made in. *The Charge of the Light Brigade* for instance is seen as a criticism of the Vietnam War and the follies associated with it.⁷³ *Zulu* also carries an anti-war message which is a modern creation and a theme of Welsh nationalism.⁷⁴ In other words, despite being set in the past, class is used in these films to interact with the issues of the time in which they were made.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2532923/Michael-Gove-blasts-Blackadder-myths-First-World-War-spread-television-sit-coms-left-wing-academics.html> > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁷¹ The Army Board of the Defence Council, *The Reserve Land Forces Regulations* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2016), pp. 185-186. <

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/826095/AC_72030_Reserve_Land_Forces_Regulations_Amendment_3.pdf#:~:text=The%20Reserve%20Land%20Forces%20Regulations%202016%20provide%20for,of%20both%20the%20Army%20Reserve%20and%20Regular%20Reserve. > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁷² *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968); *Zulu*, dir. by Cy Endfield (Diamond Films, 1964).

⁷³ Mark Connelly, *The Charge of The Light Brigade* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2003), pp. 55-58.

⁷⁴ Robin Turner, ‘How Stanley Baker made Zulu his ‘Welsh western’, *Wales Online*, 28th March 2013. < <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/how-stanley-baker-made-zulu-2143977> > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

'An Officer and a Gentleman'

For many years the Armed Forces believed that officers could only be recruited from 'gentlemen' and aristocrats. As defined by Evan Wilson, the status of gentlemen was linked to land, as it was only applied to individuals who owned a landed estate which generated a large enough income for them live off without the need to perform manual labour.⁷⁵ It is accepted however by Wilson and others, such as Rory Muir, that the status was also hereditary as it could be claimed by anyone who descended from a land-owning family. Due to its hereditary nature, there were many gentlemen who took up paid work as they were not in line to inherit their family's estates.⁷⁶ According to Muir in his work *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune*, only a handful of professions were considered suitable for a gentleman to take up.⁷⁷ Out of these professions the Armed Forces formed the cornerstone, which resulted in many young gentlemen joining the British Army or the Royal Navy and later the Royal Air Force and its forebears during the 20th Century.⁷⁸ It is unsurprising then that film and television portray many officers as being part of the upper classes and gentlemen. This is perhaps more apparent in the period dramas set during the 19th century and early 20th century such as *Charge of The Light Brigade* which portrays officers of the British Army as being gentleman and members of the social elites. This is largely done through antagonism demonstrated by Colonel the Lord Cardigan (Trevor Howard) towards Captain Nolan (David Hemmings).⁷⁹ This antagonism is largely due to Nolan being an 'Indian officer' as he saw active service there just after joining Cardigan's regiment, the 15th Light Dragoons.⁸⁰

The important thing about this hostility is that the film creates the idea that Cardigan feels antagonistic towards Nolan due to the latter's professionalism.⁸¹ The film creates the idea that Nolan is an experienced officer who disapproves of the attitudes of his fellow officers who treat soldiering with the attitude of amateurs. As a

⁷⁵ Evan Wilson, *A Social History of British Naval Officers 1775-1815* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), p. 187.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 187; Rory Muir, *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune* (London: Yale University Press, 2019), pp. 194-242.

⁷⁷ Muir, *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune*, pp. 194-242.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 194-242.

⁷⁹ *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968).

⁸⁰ *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968).

⁸¹ *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968).

consequence, Cardigan and the other officers of the 15th Light Dragoons see him as an ungentlemanly officer, as he takes his profession seriously.⁸² Now, it could be argued that this dynamic was created by the film's producers to facilitate criticism of the British Army which took part in the Crimean War. Even if this is true, this dynamic does have a solid foundation. Several historians have perpetuated the view that many officers during the 19th century, especially the latter half, viewed people who studied or took the profession of arms seriously with some mistrust. The historian Philip Haythornthwaite attests to this in his work *Picton's Division at Waterloo*, in which he states that officers were very often appointed to positions based on their birth and social standing.⁸³ Archival material shows that even right to the start of the 20th century, an officer's birth was still a deciding factor in who could become an officer. In the National Archives there is a document entitled 'Memorandum on Entry and Training, and Employment of Officers and Men of The Royal Navy and of the Royal Marines' from 1902 which states:

'Now, however, as always the highest type of naval officer is that wherein great professional knowledge is added to force of character. The dangers within the Navy itself is lest insufficient importance should be attached to the results of study and lest the value of what is called the practical character should be placed higher than it deserves'.⁸⁴

The above quote is important as it shows that the Royal Navy, by 1902, had accepted that its officers needed to be properly trained and that an officer's education needed to take priority over their birth or 'practical character' as the memorandum calls it. It shows that despite the navy recognising that birth could no longer be prioritised over an officer's academic training, birth was still considered to be an important factor when it came to the training of officers. This is reinforced in the document as it openly states the assumption that only public-school pupils could obtain the required character to become officers.⁸⁵

⁸² *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968).

⁸³ Philip Haythornthwaite, *Picton's Division at Waterloo* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2016), pp. 8-9.

⁸⁴ 'Memorandum on the Entry and Training and Employment of Officers and Men of the Royal Navy and of The Royal Marines', Kew, The National Archives, CAB 37/63/166, p. 2. <

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6174912> > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁸⁵ Kew, The National Archives, CAB 37/63/166, pp. 2-4.

It should be stressed though that this idea of an officer being a gentleman is not just described in terms of birth. It is also presented in film and television as giving officers certain behaviours and attributes, be they good or bad. These attributes and behaviours are quite often the source of humour in comedic projects. Two cases exist in the BBC shows *'Allo 'Allo!* and *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*. Both show British officers as being somewhat dense. In *'Allo 'Allo!* most of the comedy which hinges on this comes from Flight Lieutenants Fairfax (John D. Collins) and Carstairs (Nicholas Frankau), who are English pilots, who are being hidden by the French Resistance. During numerous conversations these characters talk about doing activities at public school and going to institutions and gatherings in which the British social elites took part in. The comedic element comes through as the dialogue is used to show them as being upper class dunces and lacking common sense.⁸⁶

In *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* the comedy stemming from class quite often comes from Captain Tarquin Ashwood (Michael Knowles), who is depicted as being profoundly dense.⁸⁷ Denseness for some reason appears to be a popular trope associated with mostly junior officers with it famously being attached to Lieutenant George Colthurst (Hugh Laurie) from *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989).⁸⁸ This denseness seems to be a surprisingly realistic take on the junior officer as some historians have written at length about the apparent lack of intelligence in the officer corps of the British Army. David French, for instance, who has researched the regimental system of the British Army, makes a damning assessment of the British Army's officers who served between the World Wars. According to his research the regimental system gave very little incentive to junior officers to study their profession or improve themselves. French implies that an officer in the Army did not necessarily have the intelligence to solve the issues that may come to their attention during their service.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ 'Episode 1: The British are Coming', *'Allo 'Allo!*, BBC One, 7th September 1984. < [https://www.britbox.co.uk/programme/'Allo 'Allo!-55104](https://www.britbox.co.uk/programme/'Allo%20'Allo!-55104) > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁸⁷ 'Episode 1: Meet the Gang', *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*, BBC One, 3rd January 1974. <

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Meet-the-Gang/dp/B01BH6GTR8/ref=sr_1_1?crid=211KRIQRB28I0&keywords=it+aint+half+hot+mum+complete+box+set&qid=1638802403&s=instant-video&sprefix=it+ain%2Caps%2C165&sr=1-1 > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁸⁸ 'Episode 1: Captain Cook', *Blackadder Goes Forth*, BBC One, 28th September 1989. < https://www.britbox.co.uk/series/Blackadder_Goes_Forth_52510 > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁸⁹ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, The British Army, and the British People 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 149-151.

This denseness associated with the Army does not seem to be assigned to the other Armed Forces as much. Junior officers of the Royal Navy, for instance, tend to be shown as having their wits about them and possessing an understanding of their craft. In the *Hornblower* (1998-2006) series of films for instance, the main character, Horatio Hornblower (Ioan Gruffudd), starts as a naïve midshipman but he eventually goes on to pass his examination for promotion to the rank of lieutenant.⁹⁰ Likewise in the film *Battle of Britain* (1969), the officers are still shown to have a certain patrician attitude, but they are still shown to understand their craft especially in the case of the pilots.⁹¹ Interestingly, this would suggest that the stereotype of denseness is mostly associated with the Army within film and television rather than the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. There again this could be perhaps down to the subject matter which film and tv series discuss. For instance, Mark Connelly has implied that in retrospect *The Charge of The Light Brigade* could have been an attempt by Tony Richardson, the film's director, to draw parallels between the events depicted in the film and the Vietnam War which was being fought at the time of the film's making. More specifically, Connelly justifies this by suggesting that there are commonalities between several of the film's scenes and how the Vietnam War was presented on television.⁹² He cites the fact that *The Charge of The Light Brigade* shows soldiers breaking up an anti-war protest in a similar fashion to how American and British authorities did. Richardson may have shown British officers to be dense patricians to provide some criticism of both the Vietnam War and the elites who suppressed the rights of free speech. By extension it could also be argued that the criticism of the class-based officer corps was a veiled critique of American officers who were perceived to be mismanaging the conduct of the campaigns in Vietnam.⁹³

Of course, films about the Royal Navy and RAF are also influenced by the film's actors and makers. This perhaps is most evident in the film *Mutiny on The Bounty* (1962) which stars Marlon Brando as the leading mutineer Lieutenant Fletcher

⁹⁰ *The Even Chance*, dir. by. Andrew Grieve (Meridian Broadcasting, 1998). < https://www.britbox.co.uk/programme/Hornblower_53650 > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

⁹¹ *Battle of Britain*, dir. by. Guy Hamilton (United Artists, 1969).

⁹² Connelly, *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, p. 47.

⁹³ David Card and Thomas Lemieux, 'Going to College to Avoid the Draft: The Unintended Legacy of the Vietnam War', *The American Economic Review*, 91.2 (2001), 7-102 (pp. 7-100) < <https://davidcard.berkeley.edu/papers/vietnam-war-college.pdf> > [Accessed: 6th December 2021].

Christian.⁹⁴ Brando chose to portray Fletcher Christian as an arrogant and pompous caricature of an 19th century English gentlemen. The characterisation included a dislike of officers from the lower classes and the presumption, in the opening scenes of the film, that his status would allow for some latitude when he is late for embarkation.⁹⁵ This portrayal of Fletcher Christian is somewhat controversial as Brando was panned by critics for both his performance and the fact that he portrayed Fletcher Christian to be a fop who antagonised the *Bounty's* captain William Bligh. In this instance, Brando's portrayal does the film a disservice as it creates a representation which is not historically accurate and over the top.⁹⁶ In reality, Fletcher Christian was not a lieutenant but a master's mate, which was a senior non-commissioned officer and scion of the lower classes. He was also a friend of Bligh as they had previously served together and came from similar social backgrounds.⁹⁷ The antagonism largely started in the latter part of *Bounty's* voyage when Bligh prioritised his mission and enacted harsh discipline on his crew.⁹⁸ Brando's portrayal is an excellent example of how an actor can influence a film's depiction of class if their characterisation makes it a central part of the character they are portraying.

Mutiny on The Bounty though is an American film, despite it being a good example of how an actor's characterisation can influence the portrayal of class. There is however an equivalent case study in the shape of Michael Cochrane who played Sir Henry Simmerson in the *Sharpe* series of films. Throughout the series Simmerson is portrayed as an arrogant aristocrat who believes in the superiority of his own class and possesses a disdain for the lower classes. This is quickly established in his first appearance in *Sharpe's Eagle* where he is the Commanding Officer of the fictional South Essex.⁹⁹ This characterisation of Simmerson is very similar to other roles that Cochrane has played both before and after his time as Simmerson. In the 1970s he played Second Lieutenant Gaylion in *Wings* and more recently he played Reverend

⁹⁴ *Mutiny on The Bounty*, dir. by. Lewis Milestone (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1962).

⁹⁵ *Mutiny on The Bounty*, dir. by. Lewis Milestone (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1962).

⁹⁶ Brendan Gill, 'The Current Drama', Review of *Mutiny on The Bounty*, directed by Lewis Milestone. (1962).

⁹⁷ Glynn Christian, *The Truth about the Mutiny on HMAV Bounty* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword History, 2021), pp. 11-12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-87.

⁹⁹ *Sharpe's Eagle*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1993).

Travers in the award-winning *Downton Abbey*.¹⁰⁰ A commonality exists though in these roles as Cochrane has mainly played members of the upper classes who are portrayed as having a belief that they are superior due to their social class. This is shown in *Wings* as Gaylion believes that only gentlemen can become officers and it is implied that Reverend Travers supports the Edwardian class systems as he relies on patronage for his income and residence.¹⁰¹ Given that Cochrane specialises in upper class characters it is perhaps unsurprising that there are many similarities between his portrayals, especially their attitudes towards the lower classes. It is perhaps correct to argue therefore that his experience with these characters informed his portrayal of Sir Henry Simmerson as Cochrane played the character in four of the *Sharpe* films between the 1990s and 2010s.¹⁰²

The NCO and the Gutter

In contrast to the portrayal of officers in film and television there seems to be a greater variance in the portrayals of NCOs. On one extreme there is the sadistic Obadiah Hakeswill (Pete Postlethwaite) from *Sharpe's Siege* who belittles and bullies the soldiers under his command, right through to the more modern portrayal of Sergeant Georgie Lane (Michelle Keegan) from *Our Girl* (2013-2020).¹⁰³ This variation in the portrayals appears to be down to fact that whilst the officer corps saw very little change until the late 20th century, the NCO corps underwent several revolutions during the same period.¹⁰⁴ Before and during the first decades of the 19th century it is widely held that only a modicum of education with a basic understanding of literacy was required for advancement within the British Army.¹⁰⁵ Philip Haythornthwaite subscribes to this view, as does J. D. Ellis who researched the NCO establishment of the 28th Regiment of Foot as it stood on the eve of Waterloo. Ellis

¹⁰⁰ 'Episode 1: The Volunteer', *Wings*, BBC One, 2nd January 1977; 'Episode 6', *Downton Abbey*, ITV 1, 21st October 2012. < https://www.britbox.co.uk/programme/Downton_Abbey_44525 > [Accessed: 7th December 2021].

¹⁰¹ 'Episode 1: The Volunteer', *Wings*, BBC One, 2nd January 1977; 'Episode 6', *Downton Abbey*, ITV 1, 21st October 2012.

¹⁰² *Sharpe's Eagle*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1993); *Sharpe's Peril*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 2008).

¹⁰³ *Sharpe's Siege*, dir. by Tom Clegg (ITV, 1996); 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016. < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p03lsv5y/our-girl-series-2-georgie-elvis> >

¹⁰⁴ French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, The British Army, and the British People 1870-200*, pp. 170-176.

¹⁰⁵ Philip Haythornthwaite, *Redcoats: The British Soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military), pp. 96-98.

though goes further than Haythornthwaite as he proved the above through a statistical analysis of the named regiment.¹⁰⁶ By the modern period however the NCOs have become thoroughly educated professionals with a degree or higher especially in the case of the NCOs attached to the technical branch of the Armed Forces.¹⁰⁷ This trend also took place in the Royal Navy but to a lesser extent, as its NCOs have always needed a certain level of technical expertise. In the RAF development also happened but mostly during the 1920s and 1930s.

So, what effect does this variation have on the portrayal of NCOs within the context of class? Perhaps the most noticeable thing is how NCOs portrayed within the context of education and knowledge. For instance, in the television film *Retribution* (2002) the character Styles (Sean Gilder) is shown as a boatswain's mate which was a senior rating during the age of sail.¹⁰⁸ In a later film the character is shown as being illiterate, as he must sign with a mark, as he cannot enter his name in HMS *Hotspur's* books.¹⁰⁹ This makes sense in the context of the Royal Navy of the Napoleonic Era as the boatswain's mate largely performed practical tasks associated with maintaining the masts and rigging of ship.¹¹⁰ It therefore seems logical for someone in Styles's position to not read and write. In other contexts, though series such as *Soldier Soldier* (1991-1997) and *Our Girl* need to show that NCOs have high standards of education, irrespective of their roles. This is especially the case in the latter as it depicts some of the knowledge and training that NCOs from the Royal Army Medical Corps need to learn and maintain.¹¹¹ What is interesting though is that despite their differences all the above examples use training and education to justify the character's position and rank within the military hierarchy, as it is their training knowledge which gets them their position and not their social class. It seems that in general film and television portray NCOs, with some notable exceptions, as coming from the lower end of the class system even if it is not always explicitly stated.

¹⁰⁶ J. D. Ellis, 'Promotion with the Ranks of the British Army: A study of the Non-Commissioned Officers of the 28th (North Gloucestershire) Regiment of Foot at Waterloo', 81.327 (2003), 216-227 (pp. 216-226).

¹⁰⁷ The British Army, *Regular Soldier* (2021) < <https://apply.army.mod.uk/what-we-offer/regular-soldier> > [Accessed: 7th December 2021].

¹⁰⁸ *Retribution*, dir. by Andrew Grieve (Meridian broadcasting, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ *Loyalty*, dir. by Andrew Grieve (Meridian broadcasting, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Gregory Freemont-Barnes, *The Royal Navy 1793-1815* (Botley: Osprey Publishing, 2007), pp. 33-34.

¹¹¹ 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016.

The above is unsurprising as for most of the military's history NCOs were predominantly recruited from the lower classes as Britain's social elites held a near hegemony over the officer corps. This hegemony therefore blocked most members of the lower classes from the corps up until the late 20th Century. C. B. Otley's paper 'The Educational Background of British Army Officers' shows this through a statistical study of the educational background of army officers from the 19th century through to the 1970s when the paper was published. He argues that even after World War II, when the hegemony of upper classes began to decline, it still took decades for non-public school individuals to make up half of Sandhurst's intake during the mid-1960s.¹¹² It should be said though that most of the non-public school students came from the grammar schools which suggests the officer corps was still dominated by more affluent members of society.¹¹³ As people from the lower classes were largely excluded from the officer corps prior to World War II it is understandable why NCOs are nearly always portrayed as being from the working class. To a certain extent though this does do a disservice to historical representations in film, as at times of crisis the NCO corps may at times have included people from the upper classes.¹¹⁴ Examples of this take in Australian series such as *Anzacs* (1985), where the socially elite Martin Barrington (Andrew Clarke) rises to the rank of sergeant before being commissioned.¹¹⁵ Even the American series *The Rat Patrol* includes Sergeant Jack Moffit (Gary Raymond) who is a publicly educated individual from the social elites.¹¹⁶

To a certain extent the above could be indicative of a key difference between British film and television and the Australian and American traditions. Unlike British film and television works from Australia and the US have routinely suggested that it was more acceptable for someone from more affluent sections of society to join the NCO corps instead of the officer corps. *Anzac*, of course, is a more famous example of this from Australia, but both the series *Anzac Girls* (2014), and *Gallipoli* (2015) carry the idea

¹¹² C. B. Botley, 'The Educational background of British Army Officers', *Sociology*, 7.2 (1973), 191-209 (pp.192-208). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42851337> > [Accessed: 7th December 2021].

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.192-208.

¹¹⁴ G. D. Sheffield, *leadership in The Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of The First World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000), pp. 103-135.

¹¹⁵ 'Episode 4: Fields of Fire', *Anzacs*, Nine Network, 30th October 1985.

¹¹⁶ 'Episode 1: The Chase of Fire Raid', *The Rat Patrol*, ABC, September 12 1966.

that Australian productions have tended to vary the social backgrounds of NCOs.¹¹⁷ In *Anzac Girls*, Private Pat Dooley is shown as coming from a middle-class family, whilst in *Gallipoli* it is suggested that the Australian Forces were more concerned about the ability of a soldier rather than their social background.¹¹⁸ In America on the other hand there are some similarities with the British tradition as it seems to be accepted that officers do come from the traditional elites.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, though American film and television has seemingly always been proud of the fact that anyone can theoretically join the United States Armed Forces and rise through the ranks irrespective of their social class. This is quite often associated with films and television series about World War II such as *To Hell and Back* (1955), *The Pacific* (2010), and some more modern productions.¹²⁰ It should be admitted though that the United States in past decades has tended to romanticise its Armed Forces and ignore the darker elements of its actions. More recent productions have tried to show a more realistic take on military matters.

In contrast to the above, the British tradition of film making seems to be more rigid when it comes to the portrayal of class. In 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalization' by Stephen C. Shafer, it is suggested that the British Film industry has had a long-standing issue with portraying working-class characters.¹²¹ To justify this point Shafer examined the writings of the film maker Lindsey Anderson who was critical of British cinema when it came to class as shown in the quote:

¹¹⁷ 'Episode 4: Love', *Anzac Girls*, ABC 1, 31st August 2014; 'Episode 6: If only...', *Gallipoli*, Endemol Australia, 9th March 2015.

¹¹⁸ Episode 4: Love', *Anzac Girls*, ABC 1, 31st August 2014; 'Episode 6: If only...', *Gallipoli*, Endemol Australia, 9th March 2015.

¹¹⁹ Todd South, 'Army ROTC must find more officers than it has in years, and here's how it's happening', *Defence News*, 16th October 2019, < <https://www.defensenews.com/news/your-army/2019/10/16/army-rotc-must-find-more-officers-than-it-has-in-years-and-heres-how-its-happening/> > [Accessed: 7th December 2021].

¹²⁰ *To Hell and Back*, dir. by Jesse Hibbs (Universal Pictures, 1955); 'Episode 1; Part 1', *The Pacific*, HBO, 14th March 2010.

¹²¹ Stephen C. Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalization', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 59 (2001), 3-14 (pp. 3-6.).

'The 'aims' of the filmmakers "were not supported ... partly because amongst the British themselves resistance to change [and the] acceptance of the strait-jacket of middle class social-artistic conformism was too strong'.¹²²

Anderson's quote is used by Shafer to suggest that when filmmakers tried to make films about the working classes in past decades they largely conformed to attitudes and practices of the established ways of approaching cinema. It is implied that British film has tended to portray class in a consistent manner irrespective of the social changes which took place during the latter parts of the 20th Century.¹²³ Granted Anderson and Shafer do admit that there are several films which are the exception to the rule, which primarily came out during the 1950s and 1960s.¹²⁴ But they state that most films largely sidestepped the working classes, as the British public did not support films which made attempts to portray and understand the working class.¹²⁵

Whilst the above claims have never been applied to films depicting the military, it is possible to apply them to the said films and discover that portrayals of class with regards to NCOs has remained stagnant. To this day British film and television has been very consistent in maintaining the idea that NCOs are normally drawn from the lower social classes of society. If these portrayals of Colour Sergeant Frank Bourne (Nigel Green) from *Zulu* and Sergeant Georgie Lane from the later series of *Our Girl* are compared to each other.¹²⁶ Both conform to the notion that NCOs are recruited from the lower classes despite the larger differences in their portrayals. Bourne is portrayed as a typical Victorian NCO who is a stickler for Queen's Regulations and loyal to his officers. Georgie Lane on the other hand is shown as being far more relaxed than Bourne and freely socialises with her subordinates, something which

¹²² Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3.

¹²³ Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3.

¹²⁴ Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3; Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Paul Ryan (London: Plexus, 2004), pp. 390-397.

¹²⁵ Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3.

¹²⁶ *Zulu*, dir. by Cy Endfield (Diamond Films, 1964); 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016.

has become accepted within the Armed Forces relatively recently.¹²⁷ Despite the changes in how NCOs are depicted taking place between the 1960s and the present, the lower-class element of the portrayals has remained a key feature of the portrayals of British military personnel. The possible reasons for these portrayals are wide ranging and different authors have offered their opinions on it. Shafer as stated puts it down to the fact that British people were resistant to films that challenged assumptions about class.¹²⁸ Geoffrey Field though goes further by suggesting that British media did not challenge class structures due to a perceived shift in the British media's attitudes from collectivism to a narrative which favoured individuality.¹²⁹

Conclusion

It is evident that some trends surrounding class have continued into the present day when it comes to the portrayal of British NCOs and officers. Despite the breaking down of the traditional class system, officers are still portrayed as largely coming from the upper classes whilst NCOs come from the bottom of society. In the case of NCOs this is possibly down to British filmmakers' apparent hesitancy to portray the working classes as officers especially from the late 1960s onwards. Shafer and Anderson link this to the changing socio-political face of Britain as transferred from the sense of collectivism to individualism between the late 1960s and the Thatcherite years. They do not link this to military films per se, but they suggest that this applies to the British film industry in general. The theory can be applied to television series as they appear to follow the same rule when it comes to NCOs. By the same token, the portrayal of officers coming from the upper class has survived despite the public schools' hegemony over commissions ending. Notable exceptions exist to this trend such as the *Sharpe* series, but these portrayals are far less common. It seems to be the case that, unlike the Australian and American traditions, there is a hesitancy on the part of the British to move away from the standard portrayals of military leadership within the context of class. A hesitance which seems to stem from the fact

¹²⁷ *Zulu*, dir. by Cy Endfield (Diamond Films, 1964); 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016.

¹²⁸ Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3.

¹²⁹ Geoffrey Field, 'Social Patriotism and The British Working Class: Appearance and Disappearance of a Tradition', *International and Working-Class History*, 42 (1992), 20-39 (pp. 20-35).

that that traditional class roles are still engrained within the British film and television traditions as argued by Lyndsay and Field.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Shafer, 'An Overview of the Working Classes in British Feature Film from the 1960s to the 1980s: From Class Consciousness to Marginalisation', p. 3.

Chapter 3: Prejudice and the Portrayal of Servicewomen

Introduction:

Since at least 1940, women have been a staple feature of military films be they civilian characters or members of the Armed Forces. The latter have been largely ignored by historians and film theorists despite the prevalence of publications discussing the portrayal of women in television and film. This is somewhat surprising given that women can now serve in every job role within the British Army, Royal Navy, and the Royal Air Force.¹³¹ This chapter will attempt to provide some much-needed attention to the above and attempt to provide an examination into how servicewomen have been portrayed both in the past and the present. This chapter will argue that initially film and television portrayed women as being unequal to their male counterparts. In films such as *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and *Petticoat Pirates* (1961), servicewomen were shown to be unsuitable for military service in certain roles and positions.¹³² It will then go onto argue that between the 1960s and 2000s the portrayals of servicewomen remained relatively unchanged until women were fully integrated into the armed forces between the 1990s and early 2000s. To do this, the chapter will make use of productions such as *Redcap* (2003-2004), *Soldier Soldier* (1991-1997), and *Ultimate Force* (2002-2008).¹³³ The chapter will also make use of these productions to highlight how women are still treated differently to male soldiers in film and television despite the growth in the number of women holding senior ranks within the British Armed Forces.

¹³¹ British Army, 'All British Armed Forces roles now open to Women', *British Army*, 25th October 2018. < <https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2018/10/women-in-ground-close-combat-roles/> > [Accessed: 19th January 2022].

¹³² *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹³³ 'Episode 1: H-hour', *Redcap*, BBC One, 7th January 2003. < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3M93UHOTgQ> > [Accessed: 19th January 2022]; 'Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991. < https://www.britbox.co.uk/watch/All_the_Kings_Men_58901 > [Accessed: 19th January 2022], 'Episode 1: Deadlier than the Male', *Ultimate Force*, ITV 1, 8th January 2005. < https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/B08965YDX8/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s3 > [Accessed: 19th January 2022].

Sexism: From Damsels to Frontline Soldiers

In 1943, the Oscar-nominated director Leslie Howard released a film called *The Gentle Sex*. The film depicts the lives of several women who join the Auxiliary Transport Service during the Second World War, from their basic training to their eventual deployment on the home front. When an audience watches the film for the first time it would not be surprising if they found the film a little hypocritical. On the one hand, the film does an excellent job of establishing that women who served in the Army were highly capable in their assigned positions. It highlights how the members of the Auxiliary Transport Service served as drivers, anti-aircraft gunners, and in a myriad of other roles with high standards of professionalism and skill.¹³⁴ On the other hand, despite the complimentary narrative, there is a veneer of sexism that is largely owing to Leslie Howard's narrations which appear when the film changes focus to a different character. Judy Suh discusses this in her article 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism'.¹³⁵ She states that the film's narrative presents the idea that women were not suitable for paid work and, by extension, employment in tasks relating to the making of war.¹³⁶ At the same time the film also makes it clear that characters are only doing the jobs they are shown to be doing because of the unusual circumstances created by the war. It is implied that the women are only working because they are needed to replace the men being sent to fight the enemy.¹³⁷

This, of course, is not the only film to depict female characters in a condescending light. The film *Petticoat Pirates* tells the story of a group of Wrens from the Women's Royal Naval Service who take over a warship to prove to the Admiralty that they can perform the same roles as their male counterparts.¹³⁸ Led by Chief Officer Anne Stevens (Anne Heywood), the group interposes itself in an international exercise and causes consternation for the Royal Navy during their adventures. Interestingly, large

¹³⁴ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943).

¹³⁵ Judy Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 40.1 (2012), 54-76 (pp. 58-60). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43798814> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022].

¹³⁶ Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', pp. 58-60.

¹³⁷ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943).

¹³⁸ *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

parts of the film show the women, especially Stevens, as being equally skilled as the men. This complimentary narrative stops however once their ship gets caught in a horrendous storm during which Chief Officer Stevens emotionally asks the male Lieutenant Pattinson (John Turner), who was detained when Stevens took over the ship, to assist their escape. The last ten minutes of film uses this scene and the unsuitability of the Wrens as sailors to elicit comedy, which is based on the principle of the women being incompatible with sea-going appointments. The sexism also permeates at the start of the film through the actions of Stoker Drake (Charlie Drake), who peeks into the women's changing facilities and makes lewd allusions towards their sexuality. Put simply, until the Wrens put to sea they are sexualised and made out to be inferior to their male counterparts.¹³⁹

How can it be possible for films to be both complimentary and disparaging towards women within the same narrative? According to the British Film Institute, *The Gentle Sex* was designed to convince the British public that the 'the ATS was a suitable environment for women of all backgrounds, and not a hotbed of sexual promiscuity'.¹⁴⁰ According to Barbara Green the *Gentle Sex* needed to disprove the notion that it was a 'hotbed of sexual promiscuity' as many people in society believed it to be an organisation full of vice, thanks to a campaign run by the newspapers owned by Lord Beaverbrook.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, this could support the view that the sexism was intentionally built into the film so that it could catch the attention of the ATS's critics. It is noticeable the film's narration continually plays on the views of the sceptics to create sympathy for the women who joined the ATS. For instance, at the end of the film the narrator provides an account of what could happen to the characters in the future. As expected, their futures mostly revolve around becoming mothers and homemakers. It is apparent that by doing this the film attempts to imply that by going through the hardships that they face the main characters will be able to return to more feminine activity after the war has been won through their efforts.¹⁴² The film therefore caters to its audience by suggesting that the use of women is only

¹³⁹ *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁴⁰ British Film Institute, *The Gentle Sex* (2022). < <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b6aaf2058> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022].

¹⁴¹ Barbara Green, *Girls in Khaki: A History of The ATS in the Second World War* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2012), p. 150.

¹⁴² *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', pp. 58-60.

temporary and that they will return to the home once they have helped win the war. By doing this the film is reassuring the public that society will return to the pre-war status quo.¹⁴³

Petticoat Pirates on the other hand, whilst hypocritical, does not portray women in the same way as *The Gentle Sex*. Whilst *The Gentle Sex* sees women as a temporary convenience for the Armed Forces, *Petticoat Pirates* does not.¹⁴⁴ Despite its narrative, *Petticoat Pirates* does a decent job of showing that by the 1960s the WRNS were a competent and excellent component of the Naval Service. With this being the case, most of the sexism present in the film is largely derived from the scepticism of the male characters about a woman's suitability to serve on the ships of the Royal Navy. For instance, in the opening scene which shows a conversation between Mary, a superintendent (Maxine Audley) from the WRNS and the male Commander-in-Chief (Cecil Parker) who shoots down her proposal to allow women to serve onboard ships. He insinuates that women were unsuitable for service at sea as they would distract the men from their duties. This is later repeated with comments from other male personnel to the same effect right through the film. Even though these comments are prejudiced, they do show that the cinematic portrayal of women within the Armed Forces had slightly evolved from the portrayals of the 1940s.¹⁴⁵ Sexism is still present in the films, but it seems to have moved from films doubting women's membership of the Armed Forces to questioning how they should be deployed.

It should be said though that whilst the above does show changes in how servicewomen were represented between the 1940s and 1960s the above evolution seems to have stagnated between the 1960s and the early 2000s. This is perhaps down to the fact that women could only be employed in non-combat roles until 2016, with all roles being opened to women by 2018.¹⁴⁶ This largely came about since the British Government did not allow equal opportunities for women despite the

¹⁴³ Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', pp. 58-60.

¹⁴⁴ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁴⁵ *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁴⁶ The National Army Museum, *A timeline of Women in the Army* (2022). < <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/timeline-women-army> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022].

advances within civil society. For instance, the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act was not applied to the Armed Forces, which allowed them to keep women out of certain positions and trades. Even as late as 2002, the Ministry of Defence defended this policy as it claimed that the inclusion of women in combat roles would degrade the military's cohesion as a fighting force.¹⁴⁷ Between the 1960's and 2000's there was some progression th especially when it came to showing how women could perform in the field. Both TV series *Redcap* (2003-2004) and *Soldier Soldier* (1991-1997) showed female protagonists who performed well under field conditions, as part of the Royal Military Police and Adjutant General's Corps respectively. They also show that women can operate under the same conditions as men and in some cases do better than them when it comes to performing their duties.¹⁴⁸

Despite the changes in the 90's in how women are presented within British military films and television series very few have portrayed women in a leadership position where they have responsibility for combat troops. Some British films and series have done an excellent job of showing the capabilities of servicewomen who serve with the combat arms of The British Army, with the most notable examples being *Soldier Soldier*, *Eye in The Sky* (2015), and the series *Ultimate Force* (2002-2008).¹⁴⁹ The former shows women serving in combat both as officers and NCOs, whilst the latter has Trooper Becca Gallagher (Heather Peace) performing missions for the special forces.¹⁵⁰ These films and series however, and others like them, do not show women leading soldiers into combat as it is their direct superiors who direct the fighting. Gallagher is the SAS's equivalent of a private, whilst the other examples have the female leadership supporting male counterparts who have command over them. This seems to be something that has been especially picked up by some commentators.¹⁵¹ Jared Greenhouse, for instance, finds it odd that American cinema ignores servicewomen even though the US Armed Forces in 2013 opened all occupations up to women. It is implied by Greenhouse that there are not enough

¹⁴⁷ National Army Museum, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ 'Episode 1: H-hour', *Redcap*, BBC One, 7th January 2003; 'Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991.

¹⁴⁹ 'Episode 1: Deadlier than the Male', *Ultimate Force*, ITV 1, 8th January 2005; 'Episode 1: H-hour', *Redcap*, BBC One, 7th January 2003; 'Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991; *Eye in The Sky*, dir. by Gavin Hood (Entertainment One, 2015).

¹⁵⁰ *Eye in The Sky*, dir. by Gavin Hood (Entertainment One, 2015); Episode 1: Deadlier than the Male', *Ultimate Force*, ITV 1, 8th January 2005.

¹⁵¹ Episode 1: Deadlier than the Male', *Ultimate Force*, ITV 1, 8th January 2005.

representations of female leadership in military films or the media in general.¹⁵² An equivalent piece does not seem to exist within British cinematic discourses, but this dissertation suggests that, like with American cinema, British films and television series have tended to avoid showing servicewomen in leadership positions.

The lack of depictions of women as officers could be down to an aversion on the part of the British media to describe servicewomen as soldiers. In 2013 Mercy Ette wrote an article entitled 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq' which examines the British Media's treatment of service women who died during the Iraq War (2003-2011).¹⁵³ She contends that British newspapers tended to ignore a servicewoman's professional standing by not using their ranks or referring to the responsibilities they held at the time of their deaths whereas as male soldiers were referred to by their ranks and had their military status acknowledged. She contends that British newspapers reinforced the idea that women could not be soldiers as their professional status was not acknowledged by the press.¹⁵⁴ Whilst she does not talk about film, it could be argued that film and television tend to portray servicewomen in a different way to their male counterparts even in the present. The recent TV series *Vigil* (2021) portrays one of its principal characters, Surgeon Lieutenant Tiffany Docherty (Anjali Mohindra), as having an affair with the submarine's married coxswain. Very little is mentioned about her professional career as she is mostly as a plot point to create tension in the series. Her fellow male officers however, Commander Newsome (Paterson Joseph) and Lieutenant Commander Prentice (Adam James) have their credentials fully acknowledged.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Jared Greenhouse, 'Why aren't Women portrayed in War Movies?', *Huffington Post*, 7th August 2015. < https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/why-arent-women-portrayed-in-war-movies_n_55c50a80e4b0f1cbf1e50c6d > [Accessed: 23rd January 2021].

¹⁵³ Mercy Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', *Media, War and Conflict*, 6.3 (2013), 249-261 (pp. 250-254). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26164655> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2021].

¹⁵⁴ Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', pp. 250-254.

¹⁵⁵ 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022. < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000zx0w/vigil-series-1-episode-5> > [Accessed: 25th January 2022].

Female Incompatibility

Despite the differences between the films and television series described above, they appear to suggest an element of incompatibility between the 'ideals' of femininity and the performance of military duties. A key part of *the Gentle Sex*'s narrative, for example, is the highlighting of the incompatibility between the feminine ideals of the 1930s and the work undertaken by women in military service.¹⁵⁶ The film is not unique in this, though as some writers also conformed to the idea that you could praise women for their work during the war yet highlight how their femininity would make them incompatible with war work at the same time. J.B. Priestley is one such author who does this in his 1943 work *British Women Go to War*. He is full of praise for the women who took part in the defence of the nation and suggests that women should be given both senior command and staff appointments. He does limit this praise though by suggesting that they should be given authority in areas which fell within the feminine domain including: 'public health, housing, feeding, children, feminine and domestic affairs'.¹⁵⁷ Like Priestley's work, *The Gentle Sex* carries the idea that women have proven themselves by taking on non-feminine roles whilst also implying that women are perhaps better suited to the roles that have long been applied to them.¹⁵⁸

The above does not explain why this perceived incompatibility between femininity and work in the armed forces exists in the film. This incompatibility most likely exists as prior to the Second World War membership of the British Army had long been seen as the preserve of men. Before the latter stages of the 19th Century, British social tradition dictated that only men could join the army or any other occupation of a martial nature. It would be wrong to say though that woman never played a role in the fighting of wars. Until just after the Crimean War, a British Army battalion relied on the wives and mothers of the rank and file to perform certain domestic tasks whilst on campaign. According to Barton C Hacker, women who followed the army were used as cooks, sewers, child carers, as well as for other tasks that were required. They simply performed the same roles that were normally assigned to them

¹⁵⁶ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943).

¹⁵⁷ J. B. Priestley, *British Women go to War* (London: Collins Publishers, 1943), p. 33.

¹⁵⁸ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943).

by wider society, the only difference being they performed these roles during a military campaign.¹⁵⁹ Some would also go on to assist with background tasks during battle such as helping wounded troops, with a notable instance of this happening during the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.¹⁶⁰ This was the way of things until the development of military nursing, which was spearheaded by the likes of Mary Seacole and Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War of 1853-56. It was only from 1881 that women could join the armed forces, as this was the year in which the women could first join the army as nurses.¹⁶¹

It is evident that women have always played a role, even though their relationship to the Armed Forces has changed over time. This change in position seemingly has also shaped how films and television series interact with the issues surrounding femininity. *The Gentle Sex* for instance was made in a period where the employment of servicewomen in non-medical roles was still a novel idea and a convenient solution to the need to send more soldiers to the front lines.¹⁶² It was not until after the Second World War that women could officially be allocated non-medical roles during peace time. It would explain why *Petticoat Pirates* does not criticise the competence of women as it had been recognised that they could perform military duties. The film however does still suggest that society still felt that femininity was somehow incompatible with holding combat roles.¹⁶³ It should be remembered that despite the advances in women's rights during the 1950s and 60s the combat arms of the nation were still primarily seen as the preserve of the male gender.

This meant that throughout the decades there has remained a sense that being female is somehow incompatible with combat roles. Despite this the treatment of women in film and television has developed with femininity being seen to be compatible within the limitations of the roles assigned to them before they could join the combat arms. A striking testament to this is an episode from the ITV

¹⁵⁹ Barton C. Hacker, 'Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance', *Signs*, 6.4 (1981), 643-671 (pp. 650-651). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173736> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022].

¹⁶⁰ Katherine Astbury, 'Witnesses, wives, politicians, soldiers: the women of Waterloo', *The Conversation*, 12th June 2015. < <https://theconversation.com/witnesses-wives-politicians-soldiers-the-women-of-waterloo-42648> > [Accessed: 24th January 2022].

¹⁶¹ National Army Museum, 2022.

¹⁶² *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); National Army Museum, 2022.

¹⁶³ *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

documentary series *First Tuesday* (1983-1993), which contains material which focuses on the first female cadre of officers to be trained at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.¹⁶⁴ The episode focuses on two things, the first being the historic decision to train women at Sandhurst and the second being the changing attitudes of the army towards women and femininity. The tone of the documentary makes it clear that by the later eighties the British Army was committed to creating some sense of equality between the service men and women.¹⁶⁵ By sending female officers to Sandhurst the army confirmed its belief that female officers were to be completely held in same regard as male officers, having trained at and graduated from the same military establishment.¹⁶⁶ The documentary makes it clear though that at the time of its premiere women were still viewed as being unequal in some ways to their male counterparts. It is correct in making this assumption as the documentary uses the Sovereign's Parade to highlight this by stating that whilst the male officer cadets carried swords females did not.¹⁶⁷ This shows inequality as the male officers carry swords irrespective of their roles whereas women were barred from doing so.¹⁶⁸

Despite the changes in the attitudes towards femininity in the Armed Forces though there are certain portrayals associated with femininity that are still used even in the present. One of these portrayals is the sexualisation of women, be they NCOs or commissioned officers. In both the film *Petticoat Pirates* and *Vigil*, servicewomen are sexualised but in different ways. In *Petticoat Pirates* the WRNS sunbathe on the deck of their stolen ship in full view of the few male crew left on board. The servicemen make jokes at their expense with the senior Petty Officer, remarking that their bodies would distract men from doing their jobs if women were allowed to serve on warships.¹⁶⁹ In *Vigil* on the other hand, Surgeon Lieutenant Docherty is shown to be in an adulterous relationship with the submarines' coxswain. The relationship is used largely to create drama and drive the series' plotline as it is part of the police procedural genre.¹⁷⁰ Whilst there is sexualisation in *Vigil* it is worth remembering

¹⁶⁴ 'Episode 1: An Officer and a Lady', *First Tuesday*, ITV 1, 1st October 1985. < https://www.britbox.co.uk/series/1985_52800 > [Accessed: 25th January 2022].

¹⁶⁵ 'Episode 1: An Officer and a Lady', *First Tuesday*, ITV 1, 1st October 1985.

¹⁶⁶ 'Episode 1: An Officer and a Lady', *First Tuesday*, ITV 1, 1st October 1985.

¹⁶⁷ 'Episode 1: An Officer and a Lady', *First Tuesday*, ITV 1, 1st October 1985.

¹⁶⁸ 'Episode 1: An Officer and a Lady', *First Tuesday*, ITV 1, 1st October 1985.

¹⁶⁹ *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁷⁰ 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022.

though that there was female involvement in the writing and directing of the series contributed by Chandni Lakhani and Isabelle Sieb respectively.¹⁷¹ This involvement could explain why Warrant Officer Class 1 Elliot Glover (Shaun Evans), the coxswain, and Docherty are shown to be equal partners in their clandestine affair.¹⁷² This means that unlike *Petticoat Pirates*, which shows women to be the junior in male-female relationships *Vigil*, shows both in the relationship to be equal. Out of the two portrayals it is perhaps the former which could be classed as being worse than the latter. This is because *Petticoat Pirate* seemingly sexualises the characters for the comedic purposes, whereas *Vigil* uses sexualisation in a more meaningful fashion as it brings something to the plotline.¹⁷³ It is evident that women are still sexualised in film and television despite the changes in how they are regarded by society.

A lack of modern representations?

In 2015 Lieutenant Commander Paula Higgins took command of the Faslane Patrol Boat Squadron which guards the UK's submarine base in Faslane Scotland.¹⁷⁴ Even more recently, Lieutenant Colonel Lyndsey Kelly was recently made the head of No.1 Army Training Regiment which makes her responsible for nearly all soldiers who undergo basic training before joining their regiments and corps.¹⁷⁵ These appointments make it clear that servicewomen are being promoted to senior positions and appointments which have previously been denied to them. Considering that this is becoming a more common occurrence, it is worth asking why so few films or television series offer depictions of female soldiers in leadership roles be they officers or SNCOs. Some commentators have offered views of this issue though they largely stem from America, where representations of women have become popular

¹⁷¹ Karen Hyland, 'Vigil on BBC One: Cast, filming location, episode details – is it worthy of all the hype?', *Entertainment Daily*, 29th August 2021. < <https://www.entertainmentdaily.co.uk/tv/what-is-vigil-on-bbc-one-about-who-stars-and-when-does-the-thriller-start/> > [Accessed: 10th March 2022].

¹⁷² 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022.

¹⁷³ 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022; *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁷⁴ Express and Star, 'Wolverhampton Royal Navy officer first woman in top nuclear role', *Express and Star*, 9th July 2015. < <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/2015/07/09/wolverhampton-royal-navy-officer-first-woman-in-top-nuclear-role/> > [Accessed: 25th June 2022].

¹⁷⁵ Forces News, *Husband hands Army regimental command to his wife* [video]. 2022 < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSTu1Aur_M4 > [Accessed: 25th January 2022].

debate subjects in the perceived 'culture wars.' The author Gayle Lemmon, for instance, has implied that women are ignored as servicemen are associated with glorious heroics whereas servicewomen are not. There is merit in Lemmon's words as there does seem to be a tendency in the media to favour servicemen over servicewomen, as shown previously in this chapter. It should be stated though that Lemmon focusses purely on combat centred films rather than military themed films in general.¹⁷⁶

Some suggest that the above has come about through how women and men are treated on screen. Noah Berlatsky has drawn a distinction between how violence is portrayed when it comes to men and women. He claims that men associated with violence tend to be portrayed as heroes defeating villains, in a similar fashion to Lemmon, whereas women's relationship to violence is based around sexuality and them being a victim of a distasteful act.¹⁷⁷ There is some merit to Berlatsky's words as in *Get Some In!!* Corporal Marsh (Tony Selby) is not afraid to resort to physical violence in clashes with male airman but refuses to engage in any form of physical contact with Corporal Wendy (Jenny Cryst) as he feels it is wrong to hit a woman.¹⁷⁸ Other examples on the other hand, including *Our Girl* (2013-2020), do show women to be heroic through the use of violence by defeating evil although the series still has incidents when the violence is connected to a women's sexuality or being a victim of trauma.¹⁷⁹ This is unsurprising given that evidence presented by Mercy Ette suggests that the British media has an issue with associating servicewomen with violence resulting from the defeat of an enemy.¹⁸⁰ Her research confirms Berlatsky's opinions as her study substantiates the idea that women are not considered by the British media to be heroes who can perform martial feats. Instead, the media has tended to focus more on the traditional roles attributed to women such as motherhood and homemaking.¹⁸¹ Berlatsky's claims have merit as it has been

¹⁷⁶ Greenhouse, 'Why aren't Women portrayed in War Movies?', 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Noah Berlatsky, 'Why violence against women in film is not the same as violence against men', *The Guardian*, 29th July 2016. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/29/the-killing-joke-batgirl-violence-against-women-men> > [Accessed: 25th January 2022].

¹⁷⁸ 'Episode 4: Marsh's Wife', *Get Some In!*, Thames Television, 27th January 1977.

¹⁷⁹ 'Episode 1', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 14th September 2016. <

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b07w43j6/our-girl-series-2-episode-2?seriesId=p0452svl> > [Accessed: 15th March 2022].

¹⁸⁰ Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', pp. 250-254.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 255.

proven that culturally speaking the British media has long held the tradition of disassociating servicewomen from soldier like actions.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is fair to say that there has been some improvement in how servicewomen are portrayed in film and television. During the 1940s they were portrayed as being unsuitable for military service and out of place within a military environment. By the 1960s however this had changed somewhat, as by this point films had started to show that women were an indispensable part of the Armed Forces. This however came with the caveat that women were portrayed as only being suitable for support roles rather than combat. It is also evident that servicewomen were very often sexualised by male characters with the aim of highlighting the differences between male and female especially when it came to highlighting the femininity of servicewomen. This type was largely owed to the fact that within British culture soldiering was always considered a male preserve and unsuitable for those considered female. This tradition appears to have caused the British media to treat servicewomen differently to their male counterparts. Generally, it appears that servicewomen to large extent are used for emotional plotlines based on sexual violence and trauma rather than being heroic on the battlefield. It is evident that even in the present day some tropes and stereotypes from the 1940s are still used despite advancements within both civil and military society.

Conclusion

Portrayals of class and competence within the context of military leadership seem to follow a traditional view that officers are inexperienced gentlemen whereas NCOs are experienced soldiers and socially inferior. This is unsurprising in certain productions such as *Wings* (1977-1978) and *Charge of The Light Brigade* (1968), as they depict periods of history in which officers went largely untrained and were drawn from the socially exclusive public schools, with NCOs coming from the largely uneducated working classes.¹⁸² However, this trope is still very present in more modern productions such as *Soldier Soldier* (1991-1997) and *Our Girl* (2013-2020), despite recruitment practices for officers and NCOs becoming more egalitarian since the 1970s, due to the rise of the state education system, as argued by Botley and other authors.¹⁸³ The retention of this trope can be attributed to both the lack of creative variety within British cinema and television as well as a lack of change in the membership of the officer and NCO corps and society. In the case of creativity, authors such as Anderson and Danny Leigh have argued that British film and television have tended to favour portrayals that are preferred by audiences from the top of the socio-economic spectrum.¹⁸⁴ Leigh does state however that there are exceptions to this, with a particular focus on films by Ken Loach. In other words, both authors imply that the class system is reinforced in films because British films and television series are dominated by actors, directors, and producers from the social elites.¹⁸⁵

The retention of the class line portrayals of military leadership could also have been retained due to cultural assumptions about the Armed Forces. In 2005, the Select

¹⁸² 'Episode 7: Time Out of War', *Wings*, BBC 1, 13th February 1977; *The Charge of The Light Brigade*, dir. by Tony Richardson (Woodfall Film Productions, 1968).

¹⁸³ 'Episode 1: All the King's Men', *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 10th June 1991; 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016. < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p03lsv5y/our-girl-series-2-georgie-elvis> > [Accessed: 23rd February 2022]; C. B. Botley, 'The Educational background of British Army Officers', *Sociology*, 7.2 (1973), 191-209 (pp.192-208); Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth Century Military* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), p. XI.

¹⁸⁴ Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Paul Ryan (London: Plexus, 2004), pp. 390-397; Danny Leigh, 'British Cinema's exclusion of the Young, Skint and State Educated is a National Shame', *The Guardian*, 8th September 2018. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/08/no-room-at-the-top-where-are-cinemas-few-working-class-stories-> > [Accessed: 23rd February 2022].

¹⁸⁵ Leigh, 'British Cinema's exclusion of the Young, Skint and State Educated is a National Shame', 2018.

Committee for Defence recognised that within British society there was a widely held belief that the army recruited the rank and file from the most deprived communities and more recently some news outlets and politicians have criticised the military for creating an officer corps which follows the norms and values of public schools.¹⁸⁶ This confirms what is argued in Chapter 1, which suggests that portrayals of military leadership have tended to conform to the values and standards of the armed forces, which in the case of the officers are heavily influenced by public school traditions as shown by David French and others.¹⁸⁷ It also confirms that British culture does assume that NCOs are largely drawn from the lower classes. The competence aspect of the portrayals enters the picture when it is remembered that officers have comparatively less experience than NCOs when they take up their first commands.¹⁸⁸ The current assumption within military circles is that a relatively inexperienced or incompetent officer would be backed by a competent NCO with many years of service.¹⁸⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that portrayals of competent NCOs and incompetent officers have been relatively consistent between 1940 and 2021 as the British Armed Forces and content creators still favour this portrayal.

As with the above there has also been much consistency in how female military leadership has been portrayed on screen. Between the 1940s and 2021 servicewomen have been both sexualised and unacknowledged both in cinema and wider society. As shown by Judy Suh and Mercy Ette, there has been a tendency in British film and television to treat female military leadership differently to their male counterparts.¹⁹⁰ In *The Gentle Sex* (1943) and *Petticoat Pirates* (1961) female leaders are shown to be unnatural, despite acknowledgment that female officers and

¹⁸⁶ Parliament of the United Kingdom, *Analysis of socio-economic and educational background of non-officer recruits* (2005) < <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmdfence/63/63we13.htm> > [Accessed: 23rd February 2022]; Jonathan Beale, 'Are too many Army officers privately educated?', *BBC News*, 15th June 2019. < <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48607943> > [Accessed: 29th March 2022].

¹⁸⁷ David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, The British Army, and the British People 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 149-151; Mansfield, *Soldiers as Workers: Class, Employment, Conflict and the Nineteenth Century Military*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁸ Army University Press, *The Officer, NCO Relationship* (2017) < <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/Archives/2017/November/Officer-NCO-Relationship/> > [Accessed: 23rd February 2022].

¹⁸⁹ Army University Press, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Judy Suh, 'Women, Work, and Leisure in British Wartime Documentary Realism', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 40.1 (2012), 54-76 (pp. 58-60). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43798814> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2022]; Mercy Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', *Media, War and Conflict*, 6.3 (2013), 249-261 (pp. 250-254). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26164655> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2021].

NCOs could perform their duties with the same skill and expertise as their male counterparts.¹⁹¹ The situation has improved in recent years since female officers and NCOs have been portrayed in recent productions as being on an equal footing to male leadership. Surgeon Lieutenant Dougherty in *Vigil* (2021) has both her accomplishments and abilities acknowledged whilst Georgie Lane from *Our Girl* is shown to be an excellent NCO. That being said, both characters are put in questionable situations by the creators of their respective productions to create story lines.¹⁹² As explained in Chapter 3, Lieutenant Dougherty is shown to be in a relationship with a married coxswain, whilst in *Soldier Soldier* a character is shown to be the victim of sexual assault.¹⁹³ Current scholarship suggests that despite the improvements in how women are portrayed on screen they are still largely used to create drama associated with victimhood rather than creating strong characters and story lines associated portrayals of men.¹⁹⁴

In recent years films and television programs have shown more officers as being appointed from the working classes. Whilst this is still a late development, when British productions are compared to comparable projects from Australia and the USA, it is still a welcome step forward. The same cannot be said for NCOs, who are still portrayed as largely coming from the lower end of society.¹⁹⁵ Portrayals centred on competence have also become more varied over the period being examined. It is evident that during the 1940s that depictions of competent leadership were used to show audiences that Britain could win the Second World War.¹⁹⁶ More recently, depictions of competence, or incompetence, have been used to great effect to criticise the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite this, there are tropes which date back to the 1940s that are still quite common despite the advance with regards to the issues of portraying female military leadership. British film and television series

¹⁹¹ *The Gentle Sex*, dir. by Leslie Howard (General Film Distributors, 1943); *Petticoat Pirates*, dir. by David Macdonald (Warner-Pathé Distributors, 1961).

¹⁹² 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022. <

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000zx0w/vigil-series-1-episode-5> > [Accessed: 25th January 2022]; ; 'Episode 1: Georgie and Elvis', *Our Girl*, BBC One, 31st August 2016.

¹⁹³ 'Episode 5', *Vigil*, BBC One, 19th September 2022; "Episode 9: Asking For It", *Soldier Soldier*, ITV 1, 19th October 1996.

¹⁹⁴ Noah Berlatsky, 'Why violence against women in film is not the same as violence against men', *The Guardian*, 29th July 2016. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/29/the-killing-joke-batgirl-violence-against-women-men> > [Accessed: 25th January 2022].

¹⁹⁵ Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2005.

¹⁹⁶ 'The Way Ahead: British Made', *Variety*, June 21st 1944. < <https://archive.org/details/variety154-1944-06/page/n107/mode/1up?view=theater> > [Accessed: 13th February 2022].

have certainly moved away from suggesting that women are unsuitable for military service. They now actively show women as being able to perform the same jobs as male soldiers as well as acknowledging their professional status. This though is tempered by the fact that some female characters are still sexualised and treated differently to male soldiers so that elements of emotional trauma and drama can be inserted into television and film productions.¹⁹⁷

Overall, this dissertation has contributed something new to the existing body of scholarship as unlike many of the cited studies by Nick Webber, Paul Long, and Barbara Korte which explore depictions of military leadership within the context of competence, class, and sex using specific case studies.¹⁹⁸ This dissertation has attempted to show how these depictions have changed and developed over time between the 1940s and the present day. As explained in the introduction, no other scholar has attempted to do this within British Academia. This dissertation therefore fills a gap as it gives readers the chance to discover how the depictions of senior British military leadership has changed overtime. It also contributes to scholarship as it affirms several key consensuses which have been held by historians and films theorists for many years. This includes the notion that female characters have historically been treated very differently from their male counterparts. It also reaffirms the view that British films and television series have tended to be resistant to change and present a worldview which represents the social elites rather than the working classes.¹⁹⁹ Whilst the conclusions are rather general, the dissertation has proven to be unique as it has shown that these conclusions can be applied to portrayals of military personnel. Essentially, the dissertation has shown that portrayals of military personnel suffer from the same issues surrounding, class, competence, and sexual prejudice, as depictions of people who are not connected to the military.

¹⁹⁷ Noah Berlatsky, 'Why violence against women in film is not the same as violence against men', 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Nick Webber and Paul Long, 'The last post: British press representations of veterans of the Great War', *Media, War & Conflict*, 7.3 (2014), 273-290 (pp. 274-277); Barbara Korte, 'Heroic Affect and structures of National Feeling on British Television: 1990s Sharpe vs. 2010s The Last Kingdom', *Journal of European Popular Culture*, 11.2 (2020), 105-117 (pp. 105-110).

¹⁹⁹ Mercy Ette, 'Gendered frontlines: British press coverage of women soldiers killed in Iraq', *Media, War and Conflict*, 6.3 (2013), 249-261 (pp. 250-254). < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26164655> > [Accessed: 23rd January 2021]; Lindsay Anderson, *Never Apologise: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Paul Ryan (London: Plexus, 2004), pp. 390-397.

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<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b07w43j6/our-girl-series-2-episode-2?seriesId=p0452svl> > [Accessed: 15th March 2022].

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