

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

CALLED TO SERVE:

THE MILITARY MOBILIZATION OF UNDERGRADUATES

A Dissertation in

Higher Education

by

Mark C. Bauman

© 2009 Mark C. Bauman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2009

The thesis of Mark C. Bauman was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dorothy H. Evensen
Professor of Education
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee
In Charge of Graduate Programs in Higher Education

Robert Hendrickson
Professor of Education

Kathleen Bieschke
Professor of Education

Robert D. Reason
Associate Professor of Education

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research question: What is the process by which undergraduate students, recalled for military duty, prepare for mobilization, separate from their institution and then re-enroll upon their release from active duty, and how is this process affected by meaning? Using the grounded theory tradition, 24 participants were interviewed who had stopped-out of college for the purposes of military deployment. Deployments ranged from 12 to 20 months and generally required a withdrawal from college for a similar amount of time. Of the 24 participants, four were women and one was African American. Interviews were conducted and the subsequent data coded for categories and concepts.

Findings revealed a three-phased undergraduate military mobilization process. Phase 1 involved the time leading up to one's mobilization where participants struggled to balance their student identity with their military identity. Phase 2 encompassed the time immediately before mobilization to the time immediately before returning home, toward the conclusion of one's deployment. Individuals in Phase 2 were entirely immersed into the military culture for this extended period and largely disconnected from their student identities. Of those interviewed, only one participant remained truly connected to her undergraduate institution throughout her entire deployment. Also during Phase 2, conditions and events while "in country" greatly influenced the success with which participants transitioned home. Phase 3 involved the return and transition back to home, school, and civilian life. During this phase, individuals struggled to shake off the reflexive actions and prolonged stress from their time "in the box." Participants described numerous challenges, from reacting to loud noises and certain smells, to reaching for their weapon and driving in the middle of the road. Two individuals expressed thoughts of

suicide. Student identities, initially on a reasonable balance with one's military identity, were largely pushed aside in Phase 3. Member checks and peer audits supported the validity of the three phases, and the concepts contained within.

Conclusions from this study included the need for institutions to take more notice of its student-veteran population. Institutions should connect with all military personnel, whether deployed or not, in an effort to build meaningful relationships. For those who must stop-out of college for military duty, the institution should remain connected during this time. Colleges could consider identifying individuals willing to serve as "student-veteran mentors" who could then facilitate these connections during deployment. Additionally, universities must be ready to offer a full range of personal, academic and transitional support to the veteran upon his or her return home. Finally, institutions should consider starting a student-veterans group, thereby offering peer-assistance to fellow veterans on the campus.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
Chapter 2 – Review of Literature.....	5
Historical Development	5
Second World War- New Students on College Campuses	5
The Second World War and Psychological Research.....	9
Comparing the Second World War with Today’s Conflicts.....	11
The Vietnam War.....	14
Comparing the Vietnam War with Today’s Conflicts	18
Mental Health Challenges – Understanding an Important Problem in Returning Veterans.....	21
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	22
Stress and Coping	24
Impact of Prolonged Stress and War Zone Exposure	27
Suicide.....	29
Development of Military Psychological Screening	31
Post-Deployment Screening Procedures.....	33
Help Seeking and the Returning Veteran.....	37
Available Research – Identifying the Knowledge Gap.....	39
Conference Presentation and Recent Publications.....	39
Use of the World Wide Web.....	41
Stopping Out	43
Summary	47
Personal Connection	50
Chapter 3 – Research Methods	52
Grounded Theory	52
Pilot Study.....	54
Pilot Findings.....	58
Phase 1 – Premobilization/Throttling Up	59
Phase 2 – Separation/Complete Break (Brake).....	65
Phase 3 – Re-Entry/Throttling Down	66
Transitioning to the Larger Study	70
Site and Participant Selection	70
Final Participants	72
Procedures.....	75
Data Collection	79
Data Analysis.....	80
Validity	81
Research Relationship.....	82
Tentative Model.....	83

Chapter 4 – Findings	84
Categorical Model.....	84
Forming/Setting the Stage.....	86
Building the Box	86
Finding the Pasture	90
Phase 1: Hurry Up and Wait	94
Out in the Pasture or In the Box.....	95
Can You Keep a Secret?	96
Now What?	99
Understanding Phase 1.....	105
Phase 2: In the Box	109
Clean Break.....	111
Box Buddies.....	113
Hard Chargers Hit the Wall	114
Over There	116
Living and Working in the Box (conditions).....	117
Bombs and Bullets and Buddies (events)	121
A Box within A Box	126
Understanding Phase 2.....	130
Phase 3: Coming Home	134
When the Box Breaks	136
When Home is not Home.....	142
Allies, the Unconcerned and the New Enemy	145
Square Peg, Round Hole.....	152
Understanding Phase 3.....	155
Negative Case	160
Summary: Bringing it all Together	161
Modeling the Process	166
Member Checks and Peer Audits.....	168
 Chapter 5 – Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations.....	 174
Discussion	174
The New GI Bill.....	174
Identity Formation	177
Breaking Free from the Box	180
At Risk Nature of Student Veterans.....	182
Conclusion	185
Recommendations.....	186
Limitations and Future Research	191
Researcher Reflections.....	193
 Appendix A – Enlisted Rates and Ranks	 195
 Appendix B – Glossary.....	 196
 References.....	 198

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Tentative model of the undergraduate military mobilization process based on the pilot study	83
Figure 2 – Categorical model of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	85
Figure 3 – Forming and setting the stage portion of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	86
Figure 4 – Phase 1 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	94
Figure 5 – Phase 2 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	110
Figure 6 – Phase 3 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	134
Figure 7 – Complete model of the undergraduate military mobilization process.....	167

List of Tables

Table 1 – Demographic details on pilot study participants.....	58
Table 2 – All participants (including pilot phase)	73

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The United States has been engaged in conflict in the Middle East for more than six years. Beginning first with Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and then more recently with Operation Iraqi Freedom, the United States has stretched the resources of its all-volunteer military force. National Guard and reserve personnel are providing much of the military strength in these conflicts. The utilization of these part-time, reserve troops is the largest since the Korean War (Griffith, 2005). As of February 10, 2009, 63,864 soldiers from the Army National Guard and 28,530 Army reservists were mobilized in support of military efforts (Defense Link, 2009). Another 6,241 Navy reservists, 8,965 Air National Guard, 6,045 Air Force reservists, 7,349 Marine reservists, and 733 Coast Guard reservists were also mobilized, the vast majority of whom are based in the Middle East (Defense Link, 2009). Some researchers suggest that these soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are ready and willing to serve in an active duty capacity. Kirby and Naftel (2000) found that "...reservists welcomed the opportunity to put their skills and training into practice in real-world deployments..." (p. 273). However, the timing of National Guard and reserve personnel mobilization is often "...unpredictable and the duration of their active duty may not be known when they are deployed..." (Reeves, Parker & Parker-Konkle 2005, p. 932) resulting in uncertainty for both the reserve members and their families.

Although they may be ready to serve, these part-time military members are different from their active duty counterparts. "Unlike full-time members of the armed services, the families of those in the reserves and the guard do not reside on bases, are geographically distant from each other and may feel isolated in their communities" (Darwin & Reich, 2006 p. 481). Additionally, mobilized reservists may have family, vocational, or educational commitments that must be

interrupted for lengths of time ranging from 12 to 24 months. While research about the stress of reservists separating from their families and employment is available (e.g., Griffith, 2005; Hammelman, 1995), little is known about undergraduate students who are also members of the reserve force recalled for active duty. In an interview conducted by Tuhus (2007), Jack Mordente, Director of Veterans Affairs at Southern Connecticut State University for more than 30 years, stated that 20 percent of the 400,000 personnel from reserve and National Guard units who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan since 2001 are college students. Much like their non-student counterparts, these 80,000-strong reserve and National Guard members are challenged by issues of separation from family and employment. However, what is different for these undergraduates is that they must also separate from their educational endeavors, an aspect of the mobilization process that is specific only to student-military members. This separation often spans two or more academic terms with a precise date of return uncertain. Upon demobilizing, the individual must then attempt to return to college, transition back into the academic culture, and press forward.

The purpose of this study is to examine the military mobilization process as it affects voluntarily enlisted undergraduate students. The primary research question is:

What is the process by which undergraduate students, recalled for military duty, prepare for mobilization, separate from their institution and then re-enroll upon their release from active duty, and how is this process affected by meaning?

Also examined in this study are psycho-social factors (i.e. peer network, family, military friends) and institutional factors (i.e. veterans affairs office, counseling center, veterans support groups) that influence the undergraduate military mobilization process. Through qualitative

methods, and by specifically following the grounded theory tradition, the end objective of this study is to provide a theoretical model that explains this process.

Based on informal conversations with deployed and returned military members, I have developed a preliminary framework for understanding the mobilization process for undergraduates recalled for military duty. This framework was employed during the initial pilot study. However, in that this research is inductive in nature, I expected that the data gathered during this pilot work would greatly guide – and possibly change – this initial thinking.

This study will span what is initially considered to be three phases of the military mobilization process. The first phase – “*pre-mobilization*” – is where students “throttle up” in preparation for extended military duty. The notion of “throttling-up” comes from my perception that military members enter the initial phase of their mobilization as hard-charging, which reflects an intense operational tempo and stringent demands even before they fully deploy. The second phase – “*separation*” – is where students withdraw from their institution and remain marginally connected or even disconnected from it for the expanse of their deployment. The third phase – “*re-entry*” – arrives as students return from their military service and seek to re-enroll at their undergraduate institution.

Although the broader research question was presented above, it is important to delineate the sub-questions under consideration for each phase.

1. **Pre-Mobilization:** What is the process by which students come to know they will be mobilized and how do students adjust to, and cope with, this change?
2. **Separation:** Does the institution take an active role in recognizing and/or assisting its mobilized students? Once the student has separated from the institution, what is the

process by which he or she remains connected to the institution? How does this connectedness (or lack thereof) during one's separation influence the return process?

3. **Re-Entry:** What is the process by which students return to an institution of higher learning upon being released from active duty status? What is the decision making process regarding one's return to college?

Simply stating the above phases and their associated research questions is insufficient to justify this work. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate a need for the undertaking. This need can be exemplified by establishing that the current research attempts to fill a defined *void* in our current knowledge of the subject, seeks to address a *new* situation currently facing American college campuses, and is *important* to a particular audience. Throughout the literature review, and supported by data from the pilot study, I will attempt to solidify that this research convincingly addresses all three elements.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

The review of literature provides a brief history of the interconnectedness between college and war with particular emphasis on the Second World War and the Vietnam War. Also chronicled in the literature review are the various mental health challenges faced by military personnel upon their return to civilian life. Research is also presented that reflects a non-military phenomenon similar to the enrollment interruptions experienced by demobilized students, known as “stopping-out.” The concept of “stopping-out” is defined, and relevant studies presented. Although the stopping-out literature does not feature the experiences of military members, the parallel experiences are noteworthy and inform the direction of the current research. The literature review concludes with insight into my personal affiliation with this research topic.

Historical Development

The Second World War –New Students on College Campuses

The interplay between college and war is not a new phenomenon. Perhaps the most notable example of such interconnectedness is the Second World War, which advanced this nation onto the global stage in a way not previously realized. Between 1940 and 1945, 16 million military personnel were involved in the Second World War, a number that far eclipses any other conflict in United States history. This large number was due, in part to President Roosevelt’s implementation of the Selective Training and Service Act (also referred to as the Selective Service Act), commonly known as “*the draft*” (Mettler, 2005 p. 26). The draft required that all men between the ages of 21 and 36 register for possible military service. Although a draft existed, many from this generational cohort enlisted of their own accord. Bound and Turner (2002) noted that voluntary enlistments during this time were substantial and largely triggered by

the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Still another group of young men wanted to join, but often met resistance. Mettler (2005), who refers to this Second World War cohort as the “civic generation,” suggested that “...many young men desired to volunteer, but family members – often their mothers – dissuaded them” (p. 27). In total, approximately ten million men were drafted during the course of the Second World War (Bound & Turner), a figure which accounts for more than 60 percent of all personnel. Whether by draft or by voluntary enlistment, serving in the military was “...the thing to do...” (Mettler). American men *wanted* to serve their country, and, in turn, their country was grateful. Beyond the military effort, another ten million civilians were involved in the state-side war-effort, producing munitions and other war related employment (Mettler, 2005).

Although the collective social sentiments regarding the war and the American soldiers were largely positive, the nation was fearful of another national depression once 26 million military personnel and civilians were released from war efforts and returned to the labor market. In addition, the nation had not yet forgotten a post-First World War incident involving the “Bonus Army” that marched on Washington and protested President Hoover’s unwillingness to give financial assistance to military personnel. This incident illuminated to the nation “...the dirty secret of veteran mistreatment...” which evoked “...revulsion at what the government had done” (Humes, 2006 p. 17). Hilliard (1943) wrote in anticipation of returning Second World War veterans that “...in comparison with the First World War, the American people seem to be considerably more interested in doing some thinking about post-war conditions...” (p. 92) by actively facilitating the veterans’ successful resumption of civilian life.

As a result of these collective forces – and collective fears – in 1944 the federal government enacted the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act – often referred to as the GI Bill

(Mettler, 2005). This legislation was intended to both ameliorate national concern and provide opportunities for the millions of returning veterans who had served a grateful nation. The effect of the GI Bill was widespread as it allowed every veteran, regardless of age, socioeconomic background, minority status or other previously limiting factors, the opportunity to earn a baccalaureate degree or receive vocational or technical training (Nam, 1964; Wilson, 1994; Roach, 1997; Blair, 1999). Nam (1964) noted that "...in the fall of 1947, 1.2 million, or seven out of ten, of the men enrolled in colleges or universities were veterans of World War II" (p. 28). A decade after the close of the Second World War, "...2.2 million veterans had attended college under the law's provisions" (Mettler, p. 7). The presence of veterans on American campuses stretched college enrollment from a pre-war number of 1.3 million in 1939 to a postwar number of more than 2.2 million in 1949 (Bound & Turner, 2002). Clearly the GI Bill had a substantial impact on post-secondary educational access for the returning veteran.

Throughout the war effort, a majority of the nation endeavored to show its support, through work, military service and a number of other avenues. American higher education was no exception in its supportive efforts. Historical researchers indicated that post-secondary institutions actively accepted and prepared for this massive influx of returning veterans (e.g. Cronbach, 1944; Klein, 1945; Ritchie, 1945). Authors from this era often sought to call attention to the differences between military and civilian life. Williamson (1944) noted that "...self-responsibility and self-direction of civilians differ markedly from the military chain of command, segregated care in feeding and housing [and] separation from family and community life" (p. 88). The transition from military life, with its emphasis on order and discipline, to the more individually oriented collegiate setting could itself be problematic. But this change of *physical* surroundings can be particularly complex when coupled with the *personal* experiences of

returning service members – experiences that were both positive and negative. Titus (1944) provided a cogent analysis of the returning service members from this era:

The veterans went away from us as boys; they return to us as men. As such, they will present to us at least three significant demands. They will want us to treat them like men; talk with them, not at them, in a straightforward manner; make decisions on the basis of rule, fact, and situation. They will be in a hurry. They will have lost years of time and will feel that they must not lose any more unnecessarily. They will be asking for additional credit for this and exemptions from that. They will expect assignments appropriate for full-grown men, not a program for half-grown youths. (p. 73).

The military mobilization experience – or more specifically the *war zone experience* – as Titus captured, fundamentally changed its participants. Kraines (1945) concurred, stating that returning veterans would possess a “...much more adequate conception of the nature of society and the role of the individual in it than they had before their war experiences” (p. 291) as compared with those not involved in the conflict. Reglein (1943) also agreed, stating that veterans would likely return with a fundamentally different outlook compared with their traditional counterparts. Elder (1987) and others (e.g. Newby, McCarroll, Ursano & Zizhong, 2005) indicated that mobilization experiences provided soldiers with accelerated personal growth, maturity, and a heightened sense of global awareness. Conversely, Klein (1945) suggested that returning service personnel may present problems and challenges as a result of their service that demand or deserve special attention. Kraines (1945) echoed the view that the military mobilization experience was not entirely positive, suggesting that some service

personnel would return from war with "...grudges and intense resentments which will greatly affect their adjust-ability both to college and to civil life" (p. 291).

The Second World War and Psychological Research

Empirical research conducted and published *during* this era (1940s to 1950s) which examined the traumatic or psychological impact of the Second World War seems unusually lacking. Writings regarding the return and readjustment of service personnel were often theoretical in nature (e.g. Kraines, 1945; Klein, 1945). Karon and Widener (1997) suggested a nefarious reason for why such research is generally unavailable: "...the data itself may have been repressed" (p. 338). Given the passage of time, it is unlikely that this assertion can be validated. However, what does seem clear is that while there was interest in a soldier's response to the stress of combat (Lazarus, 1993), the lack of scholarly production seems connected with our lack of psychological understanding of war related phenomenon. For example, through the First World War, what we might consider today as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), was referred to as "shell-shock" (Lazarus, 1993). Lazarus (1993) further explained that the perspective from the First World War had been "...neurological rather than psychological...shell-shock expressed a vague but erroneous notion that the dysfunction resulted from brain damage created by the sound of exploding shells" (Lazarus, 1993 p. 2). Research that examined the veteran from the Second World War is actually more prevalent from 1980 to the present. Topics considered within this time frame included repressed memories and PTSD (Karon & Widener, 1997), psychological adjustment of survivors from the Second World War (Bramsem, 1999), assessment of mental disorders in combat veterans (Allain & Sutker, 1996), and prisoners of war (Engdahl, Frazier & Port, 2001). Although published 50 or more years after the conflict, each demonstrated the *current* presence of mental health challenges, PTSD and

more general psychological trauma. This increase in research – and subsequent findings of genuine mental health challenges – was likely the result of a greater understanding of the psychological impact of war – most notably through the concept of PTSD, which first appeared in the 1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Parrish (2001) who penned a reference manual for military veterans and PTSD, argued that up until the 1980s – and in some cases into the 1990s – that

...most combat veterans were diagnosed with “shell shock,” which didn’t warrant long term treatment. Other combat veterans were merely diagnosed with “bad nerves” which not only didn’t warrant long term treatment, but also induced a “get over it” attitude from the military and medical communities (p. 3).

Although a deep understanding of the psychological and interpersonal challenges faced by returning veterans from the Second World War is at best elusive, one conclusion is clear: these veterans would be returning from the war effort and entering the nation’s campuses on the tails of the newly enacted GI Bill. As a result, campus leaders in the 1940’s actively planned and prepared for the arrival of returning service personnel. Cunnigim (1944) stated that institutions throughout the United States examined their housing, curricular offerings and other such provisions in an effort to address the soon-to-be surging student population. Howard L. Bevis (1944), former President of The Ohio State University, wrote that “...for more than a year our University Committee on Postwar Planning has been at work” (p. 84). This committee sought to address the comprehensive needs of the “demobilized student.” As a result of this planning, The Ohio State University faculty offered a number of course selections designed to fit the unique needs of demobilized students. Bevis cited the creation of a “Twilight School” offering a full slate of university coursework in the evenings. Similarly, Goodier (1946) noted that faculty

groups on the Illinois State Normal University campus actively sought to educate themselves on issues surrounding veterans' needs. Additionally, the creation of an organization of veterans at Illinois State University, entitled "Golden Eagle," provided support to incoming student soldiers by their fellow veterans.

A sample of the historical literature reveals that significant attention was also given to housing issues (Shaw, 1947), curricular changes (Bevis, 1944; McGrath, 1945; Reglein, 1943), counseling and mental health services (McGrath, 1945; Ritchie, 1945; Williamson, 1944), and student personnel services (Cunninggim, 1944). In response to the returning veterans, many campus leaders, administrators, faculty, and other constituents at post-secondary institutions attempted to improve or adjust various services and programs so that veterans' social and academic transitions to college life would be successful.

Comparing the Second World War with Today's Conflicts

Although insight from the Second World War is instructive, important differences arise when compared to the current situation in the Middle East, both in the military and on campus. There are three main areas relevant to this paper where the Second World War and the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are different: the national sentiment regarding the conflict, the military personnel involved, and the campus response to returning service members.

First, although war is not something to be sought, a large majority of Americans viewed the Second World War as necessary and just. Moreover, a large portion of the nation was directly impacted through military service or by working in one of the many war related industries. An equally high number of Americans were impacted due to the high casualty rates of this conflict. The current conflicts in the Middle East present a different set of elements as compared to the Second World War. Afghanistan began as a response to the attack of September 11, 2001 and

the American public was largely supportive of this measure. Iraq, however, is quite different. The Bush administration has described the incursion into Iraq as a pre-emptive strike intended to neutralize terrorism and strike at 9-11 conspirators. However, the unclear objectives, poor progress and American casualties have contributed to the erosion of public support. As of the writing of this paper, the Obama administration has recently assumed command of military operations. Early indicators in his presidency appear to reflect his campaign platform: lowering the force strength in Iraq while increasing the military presence in Afghanistan. It is difficult to determine how such a shift in personnel and strategy might impact elements under consideration for this paper. However, what does seem clear is that many part-time service members will return home. Coupled with a more robust GI Bill, it appears likely that the student-veteran landscape could change substantially, creating a noticeable uptick in enrollment of veterans in post-secondary institutions. If one factors in the current economic conditions, namely the deteriorating employment market, entering (or returning to) post-secondary education for these returning veterans could rise to levels not seen since the Vietnam War.

Second, military personnel involved in the Second World War were mainly draftees. Certainly there were volunteer forces, but it was evident that the majority of the military might was comprised of conscripted men. However, as previously argued, even the conscripted forces truly *wanted* to be involved in this war. It was a time of great patriotism, when serving in the military was viewed by many to be symbolic of this patriotism (Mettler, 2005). Contrast this with the current all-volunteer force, which comprises both the active duty and the reserve components of all branches of the military. As of April 2009, up to 40 percent of military personnel serving in these conflicts were from the reserve components. Yet even though these are reserve forces, they all *voluntarily* enlisted in the military – a contrast to the Second World

War. Other factors influenced their decision to be sure (i.e. patriotism, desire to serve, etc), but front and center on the list of reasons is often the financial benefit, including educational funding and monetary bonuses for enlisting, some of which exceed \$15,000 for an initial contract (Personal Communication, 2009). This motivation was entirely different from Second World War military personnel, many of whom would never even know about the GI Bill until they were released from active duty.

Finally, the third main difference is the response of American higher education as it prepares for the return of reserve personnel. Whereas post-war planning was common in colleges and universities during the 1940s, a search of contemporary literature on similar efforts in American higher education provides little evidence regarding efforts designed to address the needs of returning veterans. The saliency of the issue in the 1940s was driven, in many ways, due to the sheer magnitude of the phenomenon. Present day demobilization of student soldiers is far more subtle. During a presentation given for the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2007) referred to these returning student soldiers as an “invisible and emerging student population.” Any institution that accepts GI Bill funds is required to have a staff person assigned to assist veterans to process claims. Logic might therefore suggest that a campus Veteran’s Affairs (VA) office would be a strong source of support and services for these individuals. Unfortunately, institutions – especially those smaller in size or with limited resources – often assign these duties to an employee with full-time responsibility elsewhere on the campus. As a result, service in these offices consists of processing paperwork and other forms of clerical assistance (Farrell, 2005). This stands in stark contrast to the widely supportive campus environment of the 1940s.

The intention of highlighting these three differences is to argue that American higher education is faced with a challenge that is both new and old. The challenge is new in that voluntarily enlisted undergraduates are being called to military service, separating from college for 12 to 24 months, and then eventually returning, attempting to pick up where they left off. And yet this challenge is old because, as a collection of campuses, we have been here before. In the Second World War, men enlisted or were drafted typically before college. Upon return, and with the allowance of the GI Bill, many men and some women that normally would not attend college, enrolled for the first time. They did so in such numbers that the colleges were *required* to attend to their collective needs. Perhaps the broadest lesson is that both conflicts are historically situated. As such, lessons learned from the Second World War, while instructive and insightful, do not necessarily apply today. As a college community we must examine the current context with fresh eyes and a new perspective, while remaining mindful of past experiences.

If the Second World War provides a positive example of prepared campuses, the Vietnam War could be considered as providing the opposite: college campuses that were, in some cases, actively opposed to the return of service personnel to their lecture halls and campus greens. A review of college and the Vietnam veteran is provided next.

The Vietnam War

Twenty years after the Second World War, the United States found itself in the midst of another military conflict. The Vietnam War was the longest war in American history, lasting roughly from 1964 to 1973 (Kaylor, King, & King, 1987). While the Second World War has sometimes been characterized as “*The Good War*” (Wynn, 1996), perceptions of the Vietnam conflict were largely negative. Kaylor, King, and King and others (e.g. Brown, Lau, & Sears, 1978) have written that Vietnam was “...America’s most controversial war” (p. 257). Fontana

and Rosenheck (1994) noted that the unconventional nature of the war contributed to its public resentment. In comparison to the Second World War which was fought between armies and over territory, the Vietnam War consisted of "...civilians engaged in organized guerrilla warfare against U.S. troops" (p. 27). Guttman (1969), writing at a peak time in the Vietnam conflict, asserted that "...opposition to the war...has grown to include, in one form or another, a majority of the nation" (p. 62).

In the early 1960s, there was sufficient military manpower and relative peace (it was thought) throughout the world to allow for a review of draft policy. As a result of these factors, the Selective Service enacted a provision that "...deferred men in order that they might train and study and in this way serve the national interest" (Shields, 1981 p. 216). But the Vietnam draft was different than the draft in the Second World War in one important way: those enrolled in undergraduate or graduate studies were granted deferrals from the draft (Fisher, 1969; Shields, 1981). Shortly after this apparently premature student deferral policy was enacted, the United States once again found itself in need of manpower beyond what the previously plentiful voluntary enlistments provided.

Only 20 years prior, during the start of the Second World War, deferments for college students were also under consideration. Mettler (2005), who has written extensively on veterans and the GI Bill, asserted that "...military officials opposed such deferments, viewing them as a way for those who could afford college to evade military service and thus as fundamentally undemocratic" (p. 28). It would logically follow, then, that an undemocratic draft was deemed unacceptable in the 1940s, but accepted in the 1960s. Whereas the draft for the Second World War cut across all segments of the population (Humes, 2006), the Vietnam draft yielded mostly "...low income and poorly educated individuals" (Shields, p. 216), exactly what military

planners 20 years earlier strived to avoid. Card and Lemieux (2001) noted that deferments provided a "...strong incentive to remain in school for men who wanted to avoid the draft" (p. 97). Of the nearly 1.8 million draftees (Bound & Turner, 2002), "...a college graduate had a 42 percent chance of a Vietnam tour versus 64 percent for a high school graduate and 70 percent for a high school dropout" (Shields, p. 216). Local draft boards furthered feelings of preferential treatment. These boards were generally comprised of middle and upper class members who more often selected young men from poor, urban areas while "...upper class suburban youths were protected from conscription" (Shields, p. 218).

The Vietnam conflict quickly lost public support. Unfortunately, some of this national negativity was transferred from the war itself, to the returning Vietnam veteran upon his arrival home. Although called to serve by his government, he was seen as a physical manifestation of a misguided war. Stenger and Stephens (1972) noted that "...the impact of the veterans' reception upon their return is perhaps unlike any ever accorded Americans asked to serve their country" (p. 304). Returning Vietnam veterans exhibited a host of distinctive characteristics including a willingness to challenge authority, a belief that those in authority would not be sensitive to his/her needs, and a tendency to have less control over emotions (Stenger & Stephens, 1972). Haggerty and Modell (1991) noted that "...many returning veterans apparently felt a lack of closure of the morally confusing phase of life just completed, partly because of the censoriousness of their fellow citizens" (p. 213). Not only did their fellow citizens find fault with their actions, the government turned its back as well. Humes (2006) wrote that veterans were

...saddled not only with doing their duty in an unpopular, losing and ultimately pointless war, the Vietnam veterans returned to a tightfisted shadow of the old GI Bill, receiving scant help for their readjustment difficulties, which ranged from

post-traumatic stress to homelessness to exposure to cancer-causing chemicals (p. 289).

Stenger and Stephens provided more insight into the type of reception afforded to returning Vietnam veterans and its consequences:

Carrying out or being associated with acts of destruction appropriate for war but in violation of deeply held principles and values concerning the importance and worth of human life causes considerable and enduring psychological shock. This shock is further intensified when the veteran reenters civilian life and personally experiences instances of disapproval and hostility from his countrymen rather than the positive and reassuring acceptance accorded those who served in earlier wars (p. 305).

Like the national climate, the campus climate for the returning veteran was also unwelcoming. This about-face attitude of American colleges came only 25 years after campuses eagerly welcomed veterans returning from military duty. At the government level, the GI Bill was a more watered down version as compared with the Second World War and the Korean War (Mettler, 2005; Humes, 2006). Whereas the previous iteration of the GI Bill afforded benefits after 90 days of active military service, the version available for Vietnam veterans required at least 18 months of active military service (Mettler). At the college level, Stenger and Stephens (1972) noted that "...educators, like the nation as a whole, have been less aware of the veterans' presence, though more than five million have already returned" (p. 303).

Throughout the country, colleges individually and collectively protested against American involvement in Vietnam. Schreiber (1973) posited that faculty and student protests of the Vietnam War often occurred at the nation's elite post-secondary institutions. Perhaps the

culminating efforts of American colleges arrived in May of 1970. Horowitz (1987) wrote that 60 college campuses throughout the United States went on strike, protesting the invasion of Cambodia by American service personnel. One such protest ended in the most traumatic fashion when four individuals were shot and killed, and five others injured by members of the Ohio National Guard during a protest at Kent State University. Only ten days after this tragic event at Kent, an eerily similar, but far less well remembered event, occurred on the campus of Jackson State University in Mississippi. Like students at Kent, Jackson students engaged in protest. But unlike the Kent State University incident, a historical undercurrent of racial tension between the black college and its white townspeople existed. The subsequent clash of color and history resulted in the death of two individuals at the hands of law enforcement. From these culminating events, Horowitz (1987) argued that enthusiasm for the student anti-war movement waned and was eventually extinguished.

Comparing the Vietnam War with Today's Conflicts

As with the Second World War, there are three main areas relevant to this paper where the Vietnam War and the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are quite different: the national sentiment regarding the conflict, the military personnel involved and the campus response to returning service members.

First, the national sentiment regarding Vietnam and the current conflicts is actually more alike than not. National support for both wars waned. What is different in this regard, however, is the *nature* and tone of the national discontent. During the Vietnam era, protests, both on campuses and elsewhere throughout the country, were common. Such high level protests regarding Iraq and Afghanistan are far less common. In my college town, for example, there is a protest of sorts held each Wednesday evening in the town square. It is a peaceful and quiet

display. That it is a protest at all is difficult to discern. But after looking closely, passersby can identify the hand-written signs and candles held by three to four pleasant-looking people, a distinct contrast to the types of protests during the Vietnam era as described by Horowitz (1987). Thankfully, events like those of Kent State University and Jackson State University have not occurred on our nation's campuses. But also absent is any sense of student collectivism regarding the current Wars in the Middle East.

Secondly, the military personnel involved in these two conflicts are quite different. During the Second World War and the Vietnam War, the bulk of the fighting machine was comprised of draftees. In the Second World War, young men *wanted* to be drafted, during Vietnam the opposite was the case. But contrast this to the modern conflicts in the Middle East which is being handled by an "all volunteer force" (AVF). Some lawmakers have continued to argue that a draft is an important function to democratize our military – an argument reminiscent of the Second World War era (Rangel, 2003). However, most agree that any form of a draft in the future is unlikely. Current soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines – including active duty, reserve and National Guard – volunteered for their service. To be sure, this does not make service in a combat zone or an extended deployment any easier. But it does fundamentally change the makeup of the military force. Although the current force is comprised of volunteers, it is evident that a major factor for voluntary enlistments is the financial benefit received by military members – this includes funding for post-secondary education (Farrell, 2005; Kime, 2007). A study conducted by an independent firm on behalf of the United States Army revealed that 42 percent of potential military recruits identified the educational benefits as the most important factor in their enlistment (Department of Defense, 2004).

Third, the response on American campuses to Vietnam was at best indifference and at worst openly hostile and violent. Horowitz (1987) wrote:

But far more important in altering the minds of significant numbers of undergraduates...were the war and the draft. The Vietnam War changed the meaning of authority to many college youth. Not only was the nation fighting a war they judged evil; the national administration was waging it on the backs of young men. Protected for four years by student deferments, college men felt threatened by the death sentence that awaited them upon graduation (p. 232-233).

For those who did serve and return home, veterans were often viewed as emblematic of the war and all that went wrong. As a result, and coupled with the air of sometimes violent protest, the campus climate was less than hospitable for the almost 60 percent of veterans that used the GI Bill for post-secondary education (Mettler, 2005). Also noteworthy is that little was written about what campus leaders did to prepare for these returning soldiers. Only 25 years earlier, campuses actively planned for the return of the veteran. Conversely, with Vietnam, literature demonstrating similar campus efforts is scarce. Examining the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is unfortunate to note that a similar type of scarcity is present. However, the indifference for today's War appears to be within campus personnel *and* the student body. During the Second World War, campus leaders readily prepared for the return of the veteran. During the Vietnam War, it appears that campus leaders engaged in little such preparation, though the broad student body was very organized in protesting the engagement. In some ways, this represents a shifting of attention away from key administrators in the 1940s and onto student protestors in the 1960s and early 1970s. In examining today's campuses, it would appear that *both* groups are now paying little attention to the War and to the return of the veteran.

The point of this historical presentation is to demonstrate that American higher education is facing a situation unlike prior engagements. All wars are historically situated, resulting in context specific experiences and perspectives both from service personnel and the country more broadly. While consideration can be given to prior wars and the involvement of college students from those times, today's returning veterans face challenges and hardships that are singular to them. To date, little research or writing has been done to understand the experiences of returning student soldiers and the process by which they re-enter college after an extended military deployment. Suggesting that insight from the Second World War or the Vietnam War can adequately apply to the current situation is shortsighted and misleading. Some lessons can be learned from these eras, but it is evident that assisting today's returning veteran requires a fresh approach to a more complex situation.

Although the singular nature of this situation provides an essential warrant, the phenomenon under review must also be *important* enough to research. That is, seeking understanding about this phenomenon must be *worthwhile*. In the next section, I examine research on mental health issues facing today's returning veteran in an effort to convincingly demonstrate that this topic possesses the importance necessary for further study.

Mental Health Challenges – Understanding an Important Problem in Returning Veterans

Mental health issues represent some of the more tangible challenges faced by returning veterans, including activated reservists. Newby et al. (2005) noted that many psychological challenges were first observed during the mass deployments of World War II. These included "...uncertainty, separation, isolation, danger, fatigue and differences in status and privilege among ranks and services" (Newby et al, p. 815). Colerick, Elder, and Shanahan (1997) found even more significant challenges faced by World War II soldiers *after* returning home. They

indicated that "...combat experience predicted physical decline or death in the years immediately after World War II – from 1945 to 1960" (p. 334). Since World War II, contemporary researchers have indicated the broad presence of mental health challenges in soldiers who participated in major American military campaigns including the Korean War (Allain, Galina, Sutker, & Winstead, 1991), the Vietnam War (Kaylor, King, & King, 1987; Browner et al., 1997), and Operation Desert Storm (Amoroso et al., 2005; Reeves, Parker & Konkle-Parker, 2005).

Other studies focused on identifying specific groups of veterans and assessing their psychological health. These groups include female Vietnam veterans (Fontana, Rosenheck & Schwartz, 1997), Hispanic Vietnam veterans (Ortega & Rosenheck, 2000), Persian Gulf reservists (Hammelman, 1995) and prisoners of war from World War II (Cook, Coyne, Riggs & Thompson, 2004), the Korean War (Allain, Galina, Sutker, & Winstead 1991) and the Vietnam War (Browner et al., 1997). Still other researchers have focused on the psychological illnesses themselves. Many of these studies, particularly since the early 1980s, have focused on the presence – or absence – of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Reeves et al. 2005). The Vietnam War was the first military campaign that truly elevated mental health issues to the attention of the American public, due in large part to the creation of the diagnosis "*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*" (PTSD). In 1980, PTSD as a diagnosis was codified in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual version III* (Hegadoren & Lasiuk, 2006).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is defined extensively in the DSM-IV-TR (2000). Presenting a more condensed conceptualization of PTSD, Reeves et al. (2005) defined PTSD as "...characterized by the onset of psychiatric symptoms immediately following exposure to a traumatic event...when the

disturbance lasts more than four weeks, it is referred to as PTSD” (p. 933). An important consideration is the idea of a “traumatic event.” Defined in different ways by different people, trauma for one person may not be regarded as such for another. Also important for the diagnosis of PTSD are three symptomatic domains:

1. Re-experiencing the trauma (i.e. dreams, memories)
 2. Avoiding stimuli associated with the trauma (i.e. numbing, avoid discussing the subject)
 3. Increased autonomic arousal (i.e. difficulty with sleep, anger, exaggerated startle response)
- (Parrish, 2001; Reeves et al, 2005)

Notably, the Veterans Administration maintains their own conceptualization for PTSD as it relates to dissemination of benefits. In their parlance, a “service-connection” must be established for the veteran to claim and receive benefits. Parrish (2001) wrote that “...to establish service connection for PTSD, the evidence must establish that during active duty a veteran was subjected to a stressor(s) that would cause characteristic symptoms in almost anyone” (p. 5). An interesting component of that conceptualization of PTSD is the idea of “almost anyone.” One’s reaction to stress, whether a singular event or prolonged exposure, varies from person to person. Although patterns may emerge across individuals, it seems difficult to grasp that all service personnel and their experiences should be regarded so broadly. It seems more appropriate that considerations regarding PTSD and eligibility for benefits be more narrowly tailored so as to permit individual-specific consideration.

Although the definition and classification of PTSD is fairly specific, research related to the presence of PTSD and military personnel is less concrete. Grossman (1996) indicated that

anywhere between 400,000 and 1.5 million Vietnam War veterans may suffer from PTSD. Browner et al. (1997) estimated that the prevalence of PTSD in Vietnam veterans could be as high as 15 percent of those who served in the campaign. Much of this research on Vietnam veterans was conducted after their return home – in some cases ten or 20 years later. Conversely, research examining today’s veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan is already showing that PTSD is clearly a concern. Hoge et al. (2004) reported a strong relation “...between combat experiences, such as being shot at, handling dead bodies, knowing someone who was killed, or killing enemy combatants and the presence of PTSD.” (p. 16). Many service personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are experiencing exactly these types of stressors, often over a prolonged period (Hoge et al, 2004). However, as with other mental health studies, research on the actual prevalence of PTSD in current veterans varies. Auchterlonie, Hoge, and Milliken (2006), indicated that almost 18 percent of Army Soldiers and Marines returning from Iraq have screened positive for PTSD. In a follow-up study, the authors showed a substantial increase in the presence of PTSD, noting that between 30-35 percent of returning veterans screened positive for PTSD (Auchterlonie et al, 2007).

Compounding this issue is the difficulty some service personnel have with discussing their issues. Parker-Konkle et al. (2005) indicated that “...most will find it difficult to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their experience during the war” (p. 935). Like many mental health challenges, PTSD can go unnoticed by the broader public, all the while presenting serious concerns to the afflicted individual.

Stress and Coping

PTSD is often the manifestation of stressful experiences for some service personnel. In some, the stress can be a singular event such as a roadside bombing, losing a friend, experiencing

a “close-call.” For others, stress can be a more prolonged experience such as being away from home, the relentless operational tempo, being responsible for subordinate personnel. Research related to PTSD and other personal outcomes of war present one clear theme: the impact of the military experience – whether war operations, hazardous duty operations, or peacekeeping operations – is a *stressful* experience to many who serve. It is this stress that may lead to a host of interpersonal, psychological and psychosocial challenges upon returning home. Folkman and Lazarus (1984) defined stress as:

a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. The judgment that a particular person-environment relationship is stressful hinges on cognitive appraisal (p. 21).

Cognitive appraisal is a process by which a person assesses a given situation and determines the potential effect upon his or her well-being (DeLongis, Dunkel-Schetter, Gruen, Folkman & Lazarus, 1986). The term “cognitive” suggests an active process of evaluation, as opposed to simply a biological response. Should an encounter be deemed as stressful, an individual utilizes coping strategies, both healthy and unhealthy, in an effort to adjust to the stress. Folkman and Lazarus (1984) defined coping as “...the person’s constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person’s resources” (p. 993). As with appraisal, coping is an active, personal process, representing an attempt to adjust to a particular problem.

Recent military campaigns – including Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan – have challenged the coping mechanisms of those personnel involved in the conflicts. During the first Gulf war, veterans reported a host of stressors and

subsequent coping challenges associated with their military mobilization (Hammelman, 1995). These stressors, combined with "...environmental and endemic hazards of the region to which troops are deployed often determine the illnesses experienced later" (Reeves et al., 2005). These authors provided a listing of the common stressors cited by these veterans; the authors also conjecture that these same stressors are currently being experienced by military members in Iraq and Afghanistan. Included in these stressors are:

- Lack of preparedness (reports of anger and anxiety for feeling underprepared)
 - Combat exposure (embarking on dangerous missions, using weapons, inflicting injury on others, observing injured soldiers)
 - Perceived threat (one's appraisal of his or her safety condition and the subsequent concern and anxiety regarding this appraisal)
 - Difficult living and working environment (personal discomfort, hygiene issues, lack of privacy, displeasing food – these issues compound over time and can overwhelm an individual)
 - Concerns about life and family disruptions – (impact of the mobilization on their career, employment, family, when the deployment will be over)
 - Sexual / gender harassment – (steady increase in women in war zone settings and the potential increase of harassment issues)
 - Ethno-cultural stressors – (stress experienced by minority soldiers, particularly those who may appear to be 'Middle Eastern' or 'Arabic')
 - Perceived exposure to radiological, biological and chemical weapons (the potential for encountering this weaponry and the constant training employed to counteract this possibility)
- (Reeves et al., 2005, p. 933-934).

Britt et al. (2007) concurred with the assessment from Reeves et al. (2005). In their recent study (2007), Iraq war veterans reported similarly stressful environments and situations.

The most common stressors reported by soldiers and Marines during the [Iraq] war included roadside bombs, length of deployment, handling human remains,

killing an enemy, seeing dead or injured Americans and being unable to stop a violent situation...More than 90 percent of Soldiers and Marines returning from Iraq reported encountering these stressors. (p. 157).

Soldiers currently in Iraq and Afghanistan must also contend with possible terrorist attacks (e.g. roadside bombs) as well as the difficulty in identifying enemy combatants. As with Vietnam, (Kaylor et al., 1987), one's enemy is often intermixed within the citizenry of the country and not in uniform (Reeves et al., 2005). These aggregate conditions, combined with separation from one's family, friends, and civilian life, can greatly impact the returning service member. While PTSD, as discussed earlier, represents one such impact, more general, mental health issues afflict a sizeable portion of the returning military population.

Impact of Prolonged Stress and War Zone Exposure

Although results vary, researchers indicate that the prolonged, stressful, war zone conditions of recent military conflicts are taking their toll on American service members. As Litz and Orsillo (2009) succinctly state "...it is safe to assume that all soldiers are impacted by their experiences in war" (p. 21). Perhaps the more pointed question is, *how?* Auchterlonie, Hoge, and Milliken (2007) reported that 20.3 percent of active duty and 42.4 percent of reserve and National Guard veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated an overall mental health risk as shown on the military's screening instrument. Britt, Castro, and Greene-Shortridge (2007) found similar results, reporting that "...30 percent of troops returning home from the Iraq war have experienced some type of mental health problem" (p. 157). These more recent statistics demonstrated a marked increase from a study conducted by Reeves et al (2005) which reported that approximately 20 percent of a subset of reserve Army Soldiers returning from Iraq perceived themselves as having a moderate or serious mental health issue. Research from Bliese and Stuart

(1998) conducted after Operation Desert Storm further supports the presence of mental health challenges in reservists. These authors studied reservists who deployed to the Middle East in support of Operation Desert Storm. In comparison to reservists who did not deploy to this region, approximately 33 percent of the sampled reservists tested positive for significant distress as measured on the global severity index. Although the specific results across studies are murky, the conclusion that returning veterans – especially reserve and National Guard personnel – are experiencing mental health challenges is quite clear.

Research conducted within the last several years indicates that certain mental health challenges are increasing in prevalence. Seal et al (2008) found the most alarming rates of mental health issues. Their study found almost 70 percent of returning veterans who were subjected to post-deployment mental health screening were positive for PTSD, depression or alcohol abuse. Gaylord's examination (2006) outlined a number of common challenges experienced by returning service personnel, including major depression, substance abuse, adjustment disorders, and anger and violence issues. In one of the more comprehensive studies, several thousand service personnel were tested before and after their deployment. Results from this study by Hoge et al (2004) noted that mental health disorders in veterans covered four main areas: depression, anxiety, PTSD and alcohol misuse. In their more recent study of more than 88,000 active and reserve personnel, Hoge et al (2007) reported similar issues in veterans. However, these authors added that interpersonal aggression and conflict appeared as a common challenge. More pointedly, these authors also noted the differences between active duty and reserve or National Guard veterans. They indicated that National Guard and reserve personnel show a higher prevalence of interpersonal conflict, PTSD, depression, and overall mental health risk. These findings suggest that active duty personnel are better equipped to address the prolonged, stressful

exposure to military life in a combat zone. Conversely, their reserve and National Guard counterparts are not full-time military personnel. It seems reasonable that the amount of time spent entrenched in the military prior to deployment could impact on one's ability to cope with the subsequent stress associated with a combat zone.

Suicide

One of the more alarming mental health concerns in returning veterans is suicide. The connection between veterans and suicide was first recognized with the Vietnam conflict (Brown, 2008). Brown (2008) cites prior research which suggested the suicide rate of Vietnam veterans ranged between 50,000 and 150,000. The imprecise figures reflect the variation with which suicide is reported. Regardless, even at the lower end of this range, these numbers are alarming. It would stand to reason, then, that lessons learned from the Vietnam conflict with regard to suicide could be considered in light of the current conflicts in the Middle East.

The learning, however, appears to still escape those in a position to address this significant concern. Once again this topic has recently claimed national attention with a report published by CBS news. According to their inquiry, "...in 2005...in 45 states...there were at least 6,256 suicides among those who served in the armed forces; that's 120 each week in just one year." Veterans with the highest suicide rate were those who served in the war on terror, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rates for this demographic were between two and four times higher than the general civilian population

(cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/13/cbsnews_investigates/main3496471.shtml).

More recently, Alvarez (2009) reported that suicides by military personnel through 2008 increased for the fourth consecutive year. This past January 2009, more military personnel were lost to suicide than those who were lost to combat in Iraq or Afghanistan. Boyko and Maynard

(2008) found similar increases in their review of veterans from Washington State. During their examination of the suicide rate between 2000 and 2006, the highest rate in any one year was 47.5 suicides per 100,000 for veterans as compared to 22 suicides per 100,000 for non-veterans during the same period. Their research revealed that suicides among veterans were consistently higher during each of these seven years as compared to non-veterans over this seven year period (Boyko & Maynard, 2008).

While the mental health challenges presented earlier are sufficient grounds for action, the suicide rate, if nothing else, further cements the conclusion that this population is struggling. Evidence from a variety of sources and authors all indicates the same theme: veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are returning home with real mental health challenges, some clear, some more obscure and hidden from view. Many authors also comment that, given the current situation, adequate care must be provided to the returning veteran. As the nation that required their presence in the Middle East, it is our duty to recognize these challenges in our service personnel and to provide the necessary assistance.

Unfortunately, the Veterans Administration and the federal government are receiving mixed marks on their efforts for achieving this goal. Perhaps the most notable failure was the Walter Reed Medical Center, which was found to have inadequate care, facilities, and staffing (Hull & Priest, 2007). More recently the Department of Veterans Affairs has received national attention for its slow response to mental health issues and the alarmingly high suicide rate of veterans. These and other less than successful efforts demonstrate the inconsistency with which the federal government cares for its service personnel. Evidence presented later in this section will further highlight concerns in this area, especially as it pertains to the intake and post-deployment screening process.

Development of Military Psychological Screening

The involvement of the federal government in the psychological health of its military personnel is not new. Psychological screening of military personnel has been in place since the First World War (Bertenthal et al, 2008). At that time, efforts were focused on screening recruits out, as opposed to assessing psychological well-being upon return from military entanglements. At these early stages, much of the screening was focused on one's intelligence or defects in one's intelligence. Initial instruments were referred to as the Army Alpha and Beta, which were administered to "...approximately two million draftees" (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007). In addition to standard intelligence testing, the Second World War added increased emphasis on psychiatric screening. Cardona and Ritchie (2007) noted that "...all men with actual psychiatric disorders or character flaws were screened out, creating a psychiatric rejection rate of 10 to 15 percent" (p. 32). These rejection rates proved untenable as the increased tempo of the Second World War demanded a subsequent increase in the number of military personnel. As a result, standards were relaxed and enlistments increased. Grossman (1996) noted that some individuals with poor screening scores were diverted to specific military jobs or received specialized training designed to meet the needs of the enlistee with psychiatric concerns.

From the Korean War through the Vietnam War, a number of instruments were used for screening purposes (e.g., *Fort Ord Inventory; History, Opinion and Interest Form; Assessment of Background and Life Experiences; Assessment of Individual Motivation*). Cardona and Ritchie (2007) noted a change in emphasis to identifying personality elements which predicted successful military service. Additional emphasis was placed on one's personal biography and life experiences, educational attainment and motivation for enlisting. Elsass et al. (2001) also noted

the increased emphasis on educational attainment and standardized test scores during this time period.

Present day intake screening includes the use of three elements. The first is the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) which was first administered in 1976. Secondly, one's educational attainment is assessed. According to Cardona and Ritchie (2007), attainment of a high school diploma "...has been the strongest predictor of finishing a service term..." (p. 34). The attainment of a high school diploma or a GED was, until recently, a requirement for entering the Army. Kaplan (2005) noted that the Army relaxed this standard once it failed to meet its recruiting goal by almost 10 percent. Kaplan (2005) further reported that the Army is relaxing its standards with regard to enlisting those who score lowest on the ASVAB. Prior to 2005, this group comprised 1 percent of total enlistees. In an effort to boost enlistments, this figure will be increased to 4 percent of total enlistees. As mentioned earlier, this is not the first time that the military has relaxed certain standards in order to meet personnel needs. In the Second World War, psychiatric standards were relaxed such that more enlistees could qualify for service. It seems, then, that the military's standards are rather fluid, contingent upon the needs of the service and the various conflicts with which they are entangled.

The third evaluation for present day enlistees – and the more important element for this paper – is a general physical examination and psychiatric evaluation which occurs during Military Entrance Processing Station visit (MEPS). These psychiatric tools are designed to detect and reject only "*gross*" psychiatric concerns. Booth-Kewley, Larson, Merrill, and Stander (2001) note that psychological screening at MEPS is brief and recommend that interviews should be more rigorous. MEPS personnel admit that they are understaffed and undertrained in the area of psychological screening (Booth-Kewley et al, 2001). Larson (2001), citing the "...basic MEPS

instruction...” indicated that “...psychiatric evaluation is a low-priority...” (p. 2). Having participated in MEPS as an enlistee, I found the physical examination to be far more intrusive and probing as compared with the psychological screening. In fact, reflecting back on the day-long event, I *cannot* recall any mental health tests yet I *can* recall in great detail all of the physical assessments completed.

Alfonso, Martin, Ryan, and Williamson (2006) noted that psychiatric assessment of new recruits is quite limited. Given the generally youthful nature of the new recruit, it is possible that this will provide only limited insight into a particular psychiatric history. Furthermore, the basic training experience often tests young men and women in ways not yet experienced, requiring them to draw on previously untested coping strategies. When coupled with the limited psychiatric intake screening, it is likely that mental health issues are under-detected at best and not detected at worst. Furthermore, exposure to basic training may trigger unknown mental health issues (Alfonso et al, 2006). An example from the Navy provides insight into this concern. Booth-Kewley et al (2001) wrote that psychological reasons “...are the single most common source of recruit loss...” in the U.S. Navy, accounting for more than 3,000 lost recruits each year (p. 796).

Initial psychiatric intake appears cursory at best, yet the military *is* concerned about the mental health of its members. However, as evidenced next, what seems clear is that this concern is not readily translating into consistent execution of mental health assessments upon return from deployment.

Post-Deployment Screening

Recent psychiatric screening efforts have also focused on the *post-war* mental health of service personnel. In 2003, the “...Department of Defense mandated that all service members be

required to complete a *brief* [emphasis added] Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA) immediately upon return from any deployment...” (Auchterlonie, Hoge, & Milliken, 2006). The PDHA assesses critical elements of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as potential risk for substance abuse, interpersonal conflicts, suicidal ideation, and depression. Upon completion of the PDHA, all members are interviewed by a health care professional. Based on these two assessment tools, a determination is made if the military member needs a general mental health referral, an immediate intervention or no treatment. Although no mass-screening tool presents an ideal scenario, the PDHA and interview sequence appears to be a valid measure of psychological illness. Results from the PDHA are consistent with data from similar research with regard to prevalence of psychological illness in veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan (Auchterlonie et al, 2006). However, what is less clear is whether this valid measure is being effectively and consistently implemented with returning service personnel. Levin (2006) cites a Government Accountability Report which indicated that “...only 1 in 5 of troops returning from Iraq or Afghanistan found at risk for developing PTSD was referred for further mental health evaluations...” (p. 5). While it appears that the PDHA could be the right mechanism for assessing the mental health of returning personnel, its inconsistent application is problematic.

A subset of the PDHA is designed to screen for the possible presence of PTSD. The question set is brief, encompassing only four questions as follows:

In your life, have you ever had any experience that was so
frightening, horrible or upsetting that, in the past month, you:

1. Have you had nightmares about it or thought about it when you
did not want to? YES/NO

2. Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it? YES/NO
3. Were constantly on guard, watchful or easily startled? YES/NO
4. Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings? YES/NO

(Kudler & Straits-Troster, 2008 p. 40).

Current military regulations indicate that if an individual answers “yes” to any *three* of these questions, then the assessment of PTSD is positive (Kudler and Straits-Troster, 2008). However, Kudler and Straits-Troster (2008) call for action even if only *one* question is answered positively. They further suggest that these and other questions, if not sufficient enough to be positive, should at minimum cause a provider to probe more deeply into the individual’s adjustment and return experiences.

In addition to the PDHA, personnel deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan during their service contract, and who separated from the service after September 11, 2001, were required to participate in an “Afghan and Iraq Post-Deployment Screen” (Bertenthal et al, 2008). From this 10 to 15 minute interview, the clinician assesses the veteran and is “encouraged” to refer individuals for mental health services if they test positive. The term “encouraged” is notable, since it lacks the decisiveness one might expect when concerning a veteran’s mental health status. Perhaps this term should be replaced with “required.” In this study, Bertenthal et al (2008) noted that 233 of the 338 veterans screened tested positive for one or more mental health challenge. Those who received a subsequent referral to a mental health care provider were far more likely to attend as compared with those who received no such referral. It would seem that the referral process, when completed, serves as a catalyst for personnel to seek additional

treatment. A significant challenge to this study, however, is that an additional 50 percent of veterans were not screened (Rona, 2008). The authors failed to offer insight as to why this group was not offered the post-deployment screening tool and instead focus only on those who were screened. Without sufficient insight into this aspect, one is only left to wonder about those who might have missed these important services.

Clearly the military engages in a structured mental health assessment of its members. Furthermore, it seems that this assessment, when completed properly by trained clinicians *and when entirely inclusive of all who should participate*, can result in positive tests and subsequent referrals. Additionally, evidence suggests that referred individuals do in fact attend an initial counseling session within 90 days of the referral (Bertenthal et al, 2008). However, research suggests that referrals are inconsistent.

Also unclear is the post-deployment, longitudinal aspect of mental health assessment and intervention. Do veterans, once screened, continue to seek mental health services beyond an initial appointment? As presented earlier, veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are testing positive (between 20 percent and 40 percent for most studies) on these screening tools for PTSD, substance issues, anger/interpersonal issues, depression, anxiety and related challenges. However, compulsory mental health treatment remains elusive. In many ways, it is up to the individual service member to determine if he or she will seek continued mental health care. This assumption of “help-seeking” behavior in a largely male, strength oriented culture is questionable. As research presented next demonstrates, the cultural legacy of the armed forces remains one of the most significant barriers to continued mental health care in today’s military.

Help Seeking and the Returning Veteran

Military personnel, especially those serving in a war zone, often experience a wide array of stressful scenarios. Under cognitive appraisal theory (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), each soldier actively appraises his or her environmental conditions. The more one appraises conditions as stressful, the more coping mechanisms must be employed. One of the most important coping mechanisms for a military member is the utilization of mental health services. While these services are plentiful in today's military, evidence suggests they are not well utilized. In a 2007 study of mental health stigma in the military, Britt, Castro and Greene-Shortridge concluded that demobilized service members are uncomfortable seeking mental health assistance, are concerned with the perceived stigma, and are less willing to discuss their problems. In their comprehensive review of the mental health and medical literature, Reeves et al (2005) noted that demobilized military members are generally uncomfortable in sharing their war time experiences. However, Auchterlonie, Hoge, and Milliken (2006) noted a slight increase in the utilization of mental health services by reservists and active duty veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In their longitudinal study of close to 90,000 participants, 20 percent of active duty participants and 42 percent of reserve participants tested positive for a possible mental health issue. Of these, approximately half sought mental health treatment. Although this represents a slight improvement over prior military campaigns, concerns remain.

Some service personnel may *intellectually* acknowledge the need for care but the larger military culture is not always supportive of such efforts. Auchterlonie, Hoge, and Milliken (2006) asserted that stigma plays an important role in mental health treatment seeking behavior. If a fellow soldier is perceived as having a mental health challenge, some military members can begin to distance themselves from this individual, creating a "public" stigma. This quiet,

distancing behavior further cements the notion that mental health problems are “bad.”

Additionally, in a culture that values strength above all else, having a mental health problem may be viewed as a sign of weakness. On the battlefield, no soldier wants someone at his or her side who could be perceived as weak. Reducing these stigmas and barriers to mental health care within the military is a difficult but necessary task (Auchterlonie et al.). Kudler and Straits-Troster (2008) indicated that some military personnel seek mental health care in the private sector so as to avoid any associated stigma. The perception is that private care is less connected with one’s military record and therefore will not influence or impede one’s military advancement. However, as Kudler and Straits-Troster (2008) noted, these providers are often less equipped to address post-deployment challenges.

In addition to the perceived stigma attached to receiving mental health service, Hoge et al. (2004) found several other barriers to mental health care in returning veterans. These authors reported that 59 percent of veterans who met the screening criteria for a mental health disorder did not seek treatment because “...members of my unit might have less confidence in me...” (p. 21). Sixty three percent of this same group (N=731) did not seek help because they feared their “leadership” would treat them differently. Sixty five percent responded by saying they did not seek treatment because “...they would be seen as weak...” (p. 21). Perhaps more critically, in this study approximately 20 percent of the respondents defined *themselves* as having a “...moderate or severe mental health problem...” (p. 20). These findings indicate a clear disconnect between those who need mental health services and their willingness to access those services.

It seems evident, given the mental health research, that the question of assisting returning veterans is an *important* one, and that further investigation into this group – especially reservists

and National Guard personnel – is worthwhile. Having established that American campuses are in a *historically different* situation and that understanding this situation is *important and worthwhile*, a *gap* in the currently available research must be identified. The following section provides evidence indicating that such a gap in our current understanding of this topic exists.

Available Research – Identifying the Knowledge Gap

Conference Presentation and Recent Publications

In the spring of 2007, two of the major student affairs organizations – National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association – held a joint conference. Three works were presented on topics related to student-veterans. As of this writing, one such presentation, although different than the proposed research, seemed particularly insightful.

A presentation by Ackerman, DiRamio and Mitchell (2007) highlighted their recent study involving veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. The authors interviewed six female veterans and 19 male veterans representing four of the five branches of service. Unlike the current study, these authors did not specifically seek participants who stopped-out of their college education due to their military recall, an important distinction. Perhaps the most applicable aspect of this study is the descriptive nature of the military transitioning experience. The authors provided insight into why individuals enlist (9-11, financial benefit, educational benefit), what active duty was like for these individuals (military relationships, seeing other cultures, IEDs), and offer insight into returning home and re-enrolling into college (feeling different, feeling isolated). Students indicated difficulty in connecting with peers, trouble with focusing and expressed a desire to simply blend in. Indeed, many of the responses contained in the presentation rang true as I reflected on the pilot data collected for this study. The authors

concluded their presentation by asking a number of hypothetical questions for various campus offices and departments, all centered around one main idea: How are you assisting these students?

What began as a presentation eventually became a peer-reviewed, published article in NASPA journal in 2008. In this work, the authors expanded on their initial ideas contained within the presentation. Ackerman et al (2008) suggested that their study supports the notion that this population is one with special needs and deserving of special attention. “For many participants in this study, the transition to college was among the most difficult adjustments to be made when returning from wartime service” (Ackerman et al, 2008 p. 97). Given the saliency of this transformative experience, the authors provided a number of suggestions to campus officials as they seek to assist their returning student veterans: starting a student-veterans organization, starting a student-veteran registry so that key personnel and faculty are aware of their veterans, tracking the progress and academic success of student-veterans, understanding mental health challenges experienced by some student-veterans, educating faculty, staff and administration on these challenges and appropriate referral procedures, and assigning the returning veteran a mentor or “transition coach” to assist with the process (Ackerman et al, 2008). This study, the first of its kind, provides excellent, initial insight into the student-veteran population. Furthermore, the authors provided thoughtful examples of how campus personnel can make positive progress with this group. Unfortunately, it represents the majority of our published collective understanding around student-veterans.

It should also be noted, that while informative, the current proposal is positioned differently than the Ackerman et al (2008) study and will move beyond description and theorize about the process of pre-mobilization, separation and re-entry experienced by military members.

Additionally, participants for this study will be individuals enrolled in college who must withdraw as a result of their military orders. Once their service is completed, these students then re-enroll and resume their college studies. This start-stop-restart process encompasses a different group of student-veterans as compared to Ackerman et al's. (2008) sample.

Use of the World Wide Web

When I first began this study in 2007, the Ackerman et al study represented the only tangible research on student-veterans. Even then, Ackerman et al's. work was not in published form – it existed only as a presentation at a national conference. Since then, not only has this work been published in a peer-reviewed journal, other efforts have surfaced. While these efforts may not be scholarly publications in a traditional sense, they do reflect a growing interest in the student-veteran population. One such example is the web resource studentveterans.org.

Describing themselves as "...a coalition of student veterans groups from college campuses across the United States..." studentveterans.org leaders attempt to organize at the campus level and advocate for student veterans on the state and national level. Among their recent (December, 2008) efforts are a series of publications designed to assist students with the transition back to college, and to assist colleges in helping their student veterans return to campus. While most of the topic areas covered in the document are administrative or educational in nature, one page of their 17 page publication for student veterans is given to issues of transition. Suggestions include joining a student organization to facilitate connecting with other, non-military students, utilizing advising and counseling centers, and exercising and eating right. I highlight this publication to show that even organizations focused on this particular topic seem to only have a cursory understanding. Certainly these suggestions are positive, but they are superficial in that they fail to acknowledge the serious mental health issues among the group they advise.

Social networking efforts are another example of efforts focused on the return of veterans. One such social networking site, communityofveterans.org, allows veterans to connect with one another and connect with resources related to post-deployment challenges. Although not centered specifically on student veterans, this online community offers personal accounts from veterans, discusses mental health and other “invisible” injuries, provides information on PTSD, substance abuse and traumatic brain injury and offers insight regarding the transition home, reconnecting with one’s family, friends and civilian life. This type of website provides what many veterans need, an opportunity to connect with one another and a chance to read privately about some of the challenges that are faced by returning veterans. Similar websites and online communities for veterans and their families are more common now than when I first began this project. I think in some ways, our “public” understanding of the veteran experience lags behind those with a “personal or private” understanding of this same experience. This was likely the cases for all conflicts. However, what is different now is that the ability to communicate this to a broad audience – a global audience – is readily available via the World Wide Web. In the upcoming years, it is my conjecture that these efforts to connect will continue to expand. Until our academic efforts catch up, campus leaders could learn a great deal by simply browsing through these communities.

Since our scholarly and theoretical understanding of this population is limited, it is necessary to examine a parallel body of research – one that captures the enrollment interruptions experienced by mobilized undergraduates. The next section will examine a body of literature concerning the “stopping out” phenomenon that some undergraduates experiences. I will seek to connect this body of literature to the parallel process of the military mobilization of undergraduates.

Stopping Out

The traditional model of college matriculation is characterized by a college student entering as a freshman, maintaining enrollment throughout a four to five year period, and ending in graduation. However, as Hoyt and Winn (2004) assert, any college student population is comprised of numerous subpopulations with enrollment patterns that vary from this tradition. These subpopulations can include students who transfer to another school or who drop out of college altogether. “Stopping-out” represents another subgroup of students who do not follow traditional enrollment patterns. The concept of “stopping-out” includes “...students who do not complete their plan of study within the normal time schedule, having skipped a term or more and then having returned to college” (Hoyt & Winn, p. 397). While individuals may have differing reasons for stopping out (e.g. military duty, family, finances), this concept refers simply to a group of undergraduates who, for whatever reason, separate from their education and eventually return to college. The literature related to the stopping-out phenomenon parallels the enrollment interruptions experienced by demobilized undergraduates. As such, reviewing this research will provide some insight into the processes and experiences related to interrupting and then resuming one’s education.

Spanard (1990), writing during the development of the stop-out concept, suggested that students who stop-out and then consider reenrollment are weighing the cost-benefit ratio of their future choices. Stopped-out individuals realize that a college degree has benefits, such as improved career choices and potential increases in lifetime earnings; however, an individual student must determine whether to pay the *up-front* costs (e.g., personal time, money, etc.) necessary to complete the degree. Those who stop-out of college for any amount of time are more likely to be “...self-supporting, working, married with children and financially

constrained” (Hoyt & Winn, 2004, p. 409). Spanard concurred with this assessment. In her review of adults who reentered college, she cited substantial family and financial obligations – often beyond those of traditionally aged college students – that contributed to the adult students’ initial withdrawal and their possible return. Spanard also indicated that overworked adult learners have less time and, as a result, may be more likely to separate temporarily from college. Returning to college requires an assessment of the cost/benefit ratio. If the cost of losing personal time is overshadowed by the benefit of earning the degree then reenrollment is more likely (Spanard). O’Toole, Stratton, and Wetzel (2005) concurred with this general assessment, indicating that students who are married or have children must consider the opportunity cost of continued enrollment in college coupled with lesser employment, or no employment in some cases. These individuals are more likely to stop-out in an effort to replenish their finances and care for their family. These authors further noted that stopping-out can be a function of poor academic performance during the first year, major life changes, financial hardships, and individual reevaluation of one’s degree progress (O’Toole, Stratton, & Wetzel, 2005).

Mason, Sadler, Slabaugh and Woosley (2005) found that a stopped-out student’s commitment to educational goals coupled with his or her personal connections to an institution was a significant predictor of eventual reenrollment. Mason et al suggested that “...students who express positive educational and institutional commitments may require very little help to return to the university” (p. 196). Post-secondary institutional administrators sometimes consider these stop-outs as likely drop-outs. However, personalized attention from academic advisors, faculty and the like coupled with a willingness to work with temporarily separated students greatly influences their likelihood of returning. Thomas (2001), in her study of adult women reenrolling in colleges, found that numerous factors impeded the reentry experiences of a diverse population

of adult women. These factors included role conflicts (e.g., mother and student) and time constraints. For African American women, these factors were even more consequential. As with the separation process, reenrollment is affected by a host of variables including family considerations, financial impact and the like.

Understanding the concept of stopping-out and the multitude of variables that influence the stopping and restarting of one's education is important for this study. However, the component of the stopping-out process that is most relevant for the current study is the *reenrollment experience*. How does one transition back into the college setting? What challenges do students face as they attempt to resume their college studies? As with leaving college, there are numerous variables that influence this transition experience.

Kasworm's (1990) meta-analysis provided insight into the reentry experiences of returning adult learners. Her review of the research reveals that returning students often have difficulty entering a youthful culture. Additionally, institutions which are indifferent to this subgroup of students are ill-equipped to address the needs of returning adult learners. Furthermore, personal attention from campus support personnel (e.g., academic advisors, counseling, etc.) to this group is an important factor in their subsequent success. Glass and Harshberger (1974) presaged these findings. These authors, writing in 1974 and near the end of the Vietnam War, took the progressive stance that:

As these mature adults move into educational settings which have been traditionally oriented to older adolescents and younger adults, more educators, who are going to find themselves working with middle-aged adults, will be singularly ill-equipped to handle these new students, both in terms of attitude and theory base (p. 212).

Further supporting this notion are Pascarella and Smart (1987). These authors wrote of the adult student that "...given the added maturation, the factors influencing their intent to return to college may be quite different from those associated with the initial college enrollment of secondary school seniors" (p. 307). Shipton and Steltenpohl (1986) suggested that reenrolling adult students can feel marginalized or inadequate as they transition into the college setting. Shipton and Steltenpohl argued that:

Adults must make the transition from citizen-in-the-world to student when they enter college. At the same time, they may be negotiating transitions related to self, job or family. These transitions may be conscious or unconscious. All are accompanied by uncertainties and risks as well as opportunities...Their academic skills may be rusty or inadequate (p. 638).

A theme common to the literature on returning and reenrolling students is the use of the term "adult." This term is often used generically to refer to a student who is 25 years or older (Shipton and Steltenpohl, 1986; Kasworm, 1990), but can certainly include returning veterans, even if they do not quite make the age requirement. As Elder (1987) and others (e.g., Newby, McCarroll, Ursano, & Zizhong, 2005) have noted, the military mobilization experience often accelerates one's personal growth and maturity. While demobilized soldiers may not necessarily be 25 years old upon reentry to college, certainly their age is advanced relative to their academic class standing. Demobilized soldiers often return up to two years after their deployment but have the same academic standing as students two years younger. Do their experiences advance them into more of an "adult" category? As Glass and Harshberger (1974) might ask, are faculty, staff, and campus administrators equipped to work with these students? Institutions must take a proactive stance in addressing these unique students who are already on our campuses and will

continue to populate our classrooms for years in the future. Given the recent change in our national administration, it seems likely that these returning veterans – all of whom are clearly adults, partly by age and partly by experience – will be coming to our campuses in numbers larger than previously experienced. Although their presence will never approach that of the Second World War or the Vietnam War, their arrival on our campuses must be noted. Campus leaders must actively prepare, collaborating with one another and with veterans who have already returned, in an effort to make the transition as seamless as possible.

Summary

In the previous section, I argued that the proposed study of student-veterans addresses a void in our current understanding, presents a new situation on American campuses and is an important topic for further study. I drafted this argument by demonstrating the historical connections between the military and college. Beginning first with the Second World War and progressing through Vietnam and more recently with Afghanistan and Iraq, there is a long interconnectedness between the military and institutions of higher learning. In some cases – such as the Second World War – that history was quite positive. The GI Bill originated from this era, providing educational opportunities to millions. American campuses actively welcomed returning veterans. Accommodations were made in classes, housing, credit loads and other areas. But these positive efforts dissipated during the Vietnam era. The GI Bill, legislation that formerly transformed a nation, was substantially diluted. The soldiers themselves, although called to service through a draft like their Second World War counterparts, returned to protests directed toward the government, the war and toward *them*. Only twenty or so years earlier, the returning veteran was seen as a hero. In Vietnam, some returning veterans were regarded with

malice, emblematic of a horrible war. Campus efforts to accommodate these veterans were at best absent and at worst, cold and uncaring.

But the situation today is different. The all volunteer force means that not one soldier, sailor, airmen or marine was drafted into service for Iraq or Afghanistan. The numbers of those serving today as compared with prior campaigns is much smaller, but the proportion of National Guard and reserve troops is the highest since the Korean War. Many of these individuals will seek to return to their former lives upon their return, and some will return to campus to resume their education. Often two years have passed, resulting in an absent peer network upon return. Literature presented earlier suggests that campuses are doing little to consider the return of these veterans. Perhaps it is because their return is far quieter and their numbers are smaller as compared with previous conflicts. One might notice the military-style hair cut or the Army t-shirt. Otherwise, their presence on a campus is subtle and discreet. It is evident, in my view, that American campuses are indeed facing a different situation, requiring a fresh perspective, study and understanding.

Literature presented earlier also demonstrated the serious mental health challenges that returning veterans faced. PTSD, anger, depression, alcohol abuse and other serious ailments may impact the returning veteran – some of whom are also returning to a college campus. A recent study indicated that only 41 percent of veterans who were identified as in need of mental health services had received such services within 90 days of the screening (Auchterlonie et al., 2007). But consider the converse of this number: Roughly 60 percent of those identified as in need of mental health services *did not* receive these services within 90 days of the screening. There is no doubt that the military culture is one founded on “strength.” Often, this notion of counseling stands in direct conflict with such a culture. Campus leaders must first be aware of the

prevalence and seriousness of mental health issues affecting veterans. Secondly, since many veterans do not seek mental health services, campus leaders must engage in outreach to their veterans, offering assistance in all manners of transition and adjustment. Campuses must understand and be prepared to assist with students as they present with challenges induced by extensive time in a war zone. Clearly, the substantial mental health challenges faced by veterans support the notion that this study is an important and worthwhile undertaking.

Finally, by presenting the one peer reviewed paper and conference presentation available on student-veterans, I attempted to demonstrate that a gap in the literature exists. Although not empirical or scholarly in nature, other writings concerning student veterans – and veterans more broadly – are more available now as compared to when I began this study. Online communities have emerged, allowing veterans to connect with one another. Often these communities provide information related to post-deployment challenges, allowing the veteran to privately review the materials while reflecting on his or her own situation. In many ways, these online communities are outpacing our academic understanding of this population. I suspect that this will continue for the foreseeable future.

As a result of this scant, directly related research, a parallel phenomenon was presented. Stopping-out reflects the enrollment interruptions experienced by mobilized military members. Research reviewed for this paper suggests that stopping-out, regardless of the reason, can present genuine hardships upon return. However, the reason for the enrollment interruption – and the subsequent military experiences while separated – are qualitatively different from those who stop-out for other reasons. And so while this body of work can provide areas of consideration for the current topic, it cannot wholly apply.

In conclusion, I believe that the evidence provided in the literature review convincingly demonstrates that the research question – *what is the process by which undergraduate students, recalled for military duty, prepare for mobilization, separate from their institution and then re-enroll upon their release from active duty and how is this process affected by meaning?* - seeks to fill a gap in our knowledge, seeks to address a unique situation, and is important for further study.

Personal Connection

From a personal perspective, I have a vested interest in understanding this phenomenon. First, I am a reservist with the United States Coast Guard. Although I have never been called to overseas operations, I have been activated in support of Hurricane Katrina operations. This mobilization required my withdrawal from graduate school for one term. Though my mobilization was short, I noticed the accumulation of academic rust during the first few weeks of the semester in which I returned to classes. With some patience and readjusting, I was able to shake this off and proceed as normal. Reflecting back on this experience, my easy return to civilian life was due to a fairly short time away in a reasonably low-stress environment. Further, my mobilization was within the United States. I cannot imagine what effect a more substantial military deployment might bring to those serving in combat and other hazardous duty operations.

Secondly, as a student affairs practitioner, I am responsible for more than 3,000 students on a residential campus. I have known numerous individuals – students *and* colleagues – who have deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other military operations (e.g., Hurricane Katrina relief). It is common for me to speak with these individuals informally about their experiences. Their accounts are both insightful and difficult to hear, often eliciting emotional responses. These military experiences are often life changing for the men and women involved. Upon their return,

they must resume their lives, relationships, work, and education. As I have learned through many informal conversations, these transition experiences – returning to family, school, work and a ‘normal’ life – present some genuine hardships.

American military entanglements will continue into the foreseeable future. Recently, Defense Secretary Gates indicated that U.S. troops would have a “long-term presence” in Iraq, though he failed to provide more specific details (Cloud, 2007). As recently as April 12, 2009, General Odierno informed a national news outlet that he expects all U.S. military personnel to be out of Iraq by 2011 (<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2009/04/12/top-us-general-in-iraq-i-believe-well-be-gone-by-late-2011/>). Although this provides a time horizon, two years remain until we reach that milestone. Over those two years, it is difficult to conjecture what intervening events could occur, both in Iraq and elsewhere. Couple this with the new administration’s emphasis on increasing the number of troops in Afghanistan and the conclusion is clear: We will likely be engaged in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. Given the continued involvement, undergraduate, all-volunteer reservists and National Guardsmen will continue to be called upon to serve their country. Institutions of higher education should be prepared to work with these individuals as they depart their institutions and upon their return to higher learning. Along with an understanding of this phenomenon, it is my intent to provide a theoretical model of the military mobilization process to administrators and other relevant stakeholders. Through these efforts, I hope that campus leaders can actively assist veterans through all phases of the military mobilization process.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods

Grounded Theory

Although qualitative methodology was the overarching approach to this study, grounded theory was the more specific tradition utilized. Corbin and Strauss (1998) defined grounded theory as "...being drawn from the data, likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12). Grounded theory is a highly inductive process. As the data are collected and coded, the theory is built from the emerging categories and concepts. Merriam (2002) notes that "...the end product of a grounded theory study is the building of substantive theory" (p. 142). Jeon (2004) states that the aim of grounded theory is not to "...test or verify existing theories or hypotheses, but to develop substantive theory, which can help people better understand and interpret the processes..." under consideration (p. 250). Grounded theory was particularly appropriate for this study since no researchers have attempted to articulate a theoretical understanding of the undergraduate military mobilization process. As such, a major goal of this work was to provide theory – or a theoretical model – of the mobilization process experienced by undergraduate student soldiers. In this way, the contribution of a theoretical understanding should lead to the "meaningful guide to action" mentioned earlier.

Since the end goal was understanding through theory building, there were no pre-conceived research hypotheses as this study began (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003). However, it should be noted that this study was not without direction. Again, the overarching research question provides focus for this study:

What is the process by which undergraduate students, recalled for military duty, prepare for mobilization, separate from the institution and then re-enroll upon their release from active duty and how is this process affected by meaning?

The grounded theory process is itself guided by a larger theoretical framework. Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that grounded theory methods were created from the related theories of symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead) and pragmatism (John Dewey). These two theoretical paradigms were themselves built on each other, with symbolic interactionism evolving out of pragmatism (Jeon, 2004). According to Jeon (2004)

Pragmatists maintain that human beings go through a continual process of adaptation in the constantly changing social world, and that the existence of a mind through which contemplation of a situation occurs makes this process possible (p. 250).

The key point is that an active process exists between the individual and his or her social world and not simply a reaction by an organism in isolation. Symbolic interactionism holds elements similar to pragmatism. Macionis (1993) defined symbolic interactionism as conceptualized by Mead "...as a theoretical framework based on the assumption that society is continuously recreated as human beings construct reality through interaction" (p. 21). This interactivity between individuals within a socially constructed world is accomplished via symbols. Though saturated with culturally and historically determined social meaning, these symbols must be accorded *personal* meaning by individuals (Shepard, 1990; Collins & Makowsky, 1993; Crooks, 2001). Blumer (1966) further noted that

...human interaction is a positive shaping process in its own right. The participants in it have to build up their respective lines of conduct by constant

interpretation of each others' ongoing acts, they have to arrest, reorganize, or adjust their own wishes, feelings, and attitudes...because of this, human group life takes on the character of an ongoing process (p. 538).

Much of the theoretical foundation implicit within grounded theory involves the construction of meaning by individuals as they interact with, respond to, and reflect on their world. In that the "*social construction of meaning*" is fundamental to grounded theory, these same underpinnings inform the current undertaking. As I conducted interviews, I operated under the assumption that participants not only recalled their experiences, but that they defined, interpreted and assigned meaning to their experiences. My role, then, as the researcher was to describe, analyze, and eventually interpret the meanings presented (Wolcott, 1994) into one cohesive theory.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to determine the feasibility for a larger research effort. More specifically, I asked whether undergraduate military personnel would even show up to talk, and if they did show up, would I be capable of handling potentially emotionally-charged events? What if there was trauma? What if, during an interview, the student became emotional? Or enraged? On the other hand, what if the "impact" of these experiences was far less significant than I had envisioned? These and many other questions were front and center in my mind during the first, tentative steps in this process.

The pilot work also allowed me the opportunity to practice interviewing veterans. As noted below, I developed a preliminary interview protocol, set of questions, and interviewing procedure. These preliminary interviews afforded me an opportunity for both practice of the

interview procedure, revisions to the protocol, and for reflection on any emotional moments or similar challenges that arose.

Finally, the pilot study was also designed to provide initial insight into the military mobilization of undergraduates. The pilot study, therefore, assisted in defining, clarifying and providing direction to the larger study. As an example, the pilot study assisted in finding early concepts in the data. From this, areas of inquiry were considered for the larger study, allowing for more focus and direction with the interview process (Maxwell, 2005).

Once completed, the pilot work allowed for refinement of the interview protocols and procedures. Additionally, I was able to practice and refine the analytic schemes used with the data. Although portions of the pilot results are offered in the following pages, much of the data yielded from this effort was eventually incorporated into the larger study and is presented in the chapter four.

Approval for the study was granted in February 2007 by the Office of Research Protections. The pilot study consisted of four semi-structured interviews with individuals who answered “yes” to the following criteria.

1. Are you (or were you) a member of the military or a reserve component during your undergraduate years?
2. Were you mobilized for military duty during your time as an undergraduate?
3. Did this mobilization require you to withdraw from, or defer, your studies for one semester or longer?
(Note that actual length is not important at this time – as long as it was at least one semester).
4. Upon de-mobilization, did you return to college?
(either at the same institution or a different institution)?

Additionally, one semi-structured interview was conducted with a high ranking Army National Guard officer. Although not included in the pilot study, the insight and perspective afforded during our two hour session proved to be valuable.

As noted, the pilot study was exploratory in nature. A set of topics was drafted to reflect this broad mode of inquiry, as indicated below.

- Branch of service
- Years of service
- Rank
- Demographics
- Reasons for enlisting
- Basic training experiences
- Drill experiences
- College and military culture comparisons
- Undergraduate topics:
 - Why college
 - Major
 - Clubs / organizations
 - Professional goals
 - Social experience, peer network
 - Enjoyment of the college experience
 - Academic / classroom experiences
- Mobilization topics:
 - When did you first hear about this
 - First thoughts
 - Plans on returning to college. Doubts about returning
 - Transitioning out
 - Transitioning in
 - Coming home, memories
 - Experiences in-country

It should be noted that these are “topical” areas and do not reflect specific questions but provided a checklist against which the following broad areas were explored:

- Tell me about college
- Tell me about the military
- Tell me about transitioning – leaving college, entering a war zone, leaving a war zone, coming home, returning to college etc.

It was also important, especially in these initial interviews, to simply allow participants to talk. Reflecting on the experience, I am comfortable stating that these three broad questions allowed for that.

At the close of each interview, researcher memos were composed, documenting the experience and any noteworthy observations of the participant. Memos also included suggestions for future questions and overall improvement of the interview process. They further assisted me in identifying concepts and facilitated my preliminary thinking regarding the military mobilization of undergraduates. These writings also allowed me to reflect on my own reactions and perceptions regarding what were, at some points, emotionally charged sessions. But these memos provided more than just a space for my personal reflections. Corbin and Strauss (2008) assert that memos allow the researcher to openly reflect and consider all aspects of the interview, and represent the initial phase of data analysis. Preliminary ideas can later become complex concepts with many dimensions. In reflecting on this aspect of the pilot work, writing memos was especially important, as the exploratory nature of this effort was particularly high.

For the pilot study, three of the four interviews were conducted with student soldiers with whom I had a pre-existing relationship. One participant was a referral from a campus administrator, a source that would later prove important for connecting with prospective

participants. Given the preliminary nature of this study, tapping these individuals seemed like a logical first step. Table 1 provides a sketch of the pilot study participants.

Table 1

Demographic details on pilot study participants

Pseudonym	Branch	Rank	Age	Gender	Deployment	Length
Carly	Army, National Guard	Sergeant	27	Female	Iraq	18 months
Ryan	Army, National Guard	Specialist	22	Male	Iraq (currently re-deployed to Afghanistan)	18 months
Brett	Marines > Army National Guard	Sergeant	27	Male	Afghanistan	12 months
John	Army, National Guard	Specialist	22	Male	Iraq (currently re-deployed to Iraq)	18 months

Informed consent was obtained from each of the four participants. While these four individuals volunteered (five, if one counts the officer) willingly answered my question, I was still uncertain as to the depth of reflections that I would receive, a concern that proved unfounded. Transcribed interviews clearly demonstrated the free responses provided by the participants. The shortest interview was approximately 30 minutes (Brett), two of the interviews were conducted over two days and resulted in over two hours of conversation (John and Ryan). The fourth and final interview – Carly – proved to be most insightful and also the longest. Conducted over two days, Carly’s interview yielded close to four hours of conversation.

Pilot Study Findings

Although the pilot study generated a large amount of data, in this section I focus on presenting evidence which justifies the larger study, thereby demonstrating the essential warrant for this undertaking. As previously mentioned, data from the pilot study is incorporated into the next chapter.

As noted, I offered an initial framework for the military mobilization process which consisted of three phases: Pre-mobilization (throttling-up), separation (complete break), and re-entry (throttling-down). The pilot data supported the existence of these three phases, although they were conceptually revised. A brief description of each phase, along with an important concept within each phase, is presented next.

Phase 1 – Pre-Mobilization / Throttling Up

As part of the pre-mobilization phase, I envisioned newer military members ramping themselves up in preparation for enlisting in the military, for conducting monthly drills and for their deployment. One of the more important components that emerged within this *throttling-up* period prior to mobilization was the tension between the roles of undergraduate student and military member. This duality required participants to constantly shift between roles and between identities. In many ways, the concept of *shifting* would echo the eventual start-stop rhythm of the entire mobilization experience.

Upon enlisting in the military, and often spanning six to 12 months, each participated in basic military training followed by advanced job training. Once these initial months of training were completed, these newly formed military members arrived on campus, which required a subsequent shift in thinking, conduct, and perspective. Whereas the military culture was rigid and autocratic, the college culture was fluid and laissez-faire. This shift in culture required a shift in roles, from military member to college student.

But the shifting did not only happen once. For two or more days per month, each individual presented him- or herself for drill and training at a pre-assigned location, often an hour or more from the campus. For these participants, preparations for these weekends required a shift from one role and culture to another where jeans and t-shirts were replaced with fatigues and

boots. Participants gathered their gear, leaving Friday night and returning to campus late Sunday. In this way, they shifted each month from academic culture to military culture and then back again. It was this shifting from one culture to the next, and one identity to the next, that required the individual to *attempt* to balance between two often competing sets of demands. An excerpt from John a 22 year-old veteran from Iraq, provided insight into his shifting identities and shifting cultures:

It can be hard at times. Because if I'm going to training say for the weekend and I have a paper or have to study for a test or any assignment I have to hold that off to go to training and when I get back I have to book it – to pull all nighters – and then if I have to study and I have the CA [community assistant] job and I have stuff for that and then I have extra stuff for the military and catch up on and keep that fresh in my mind. It's kind of hard at times trying to balance all that work together.¹

John's comment reflected the strain placed on him even during normal operations. His training weekend is part of his normal Army duty schedule and generally planned months in advance. John removed himself from his academic world, shifted gears, and re-entered the military culture. As the passage demonstrates, the academic world did not wait. However, John chose to hold off his academic obligations until the completion of his military duty. In essence, John placed his assignments and tests lower on the priority list until he shifted his role from military member back to student. John went on to describe strategies he employed to keep these

¹ All passages taken directly from interviews are presented in *italics* so as to differentiate them from excerpts from other authors and/or sources.

competing demands and priorities in balance. He stated how he has to “*book it*”, pulling “*all-nighters*” to complete his academic requirements.

Reflecting back on this exchange, it is important to know that John was not complaining. Rather, his tone was more matter-of-fact, as if this is simply what needs to be done. Like many students, he has a lot on his plate. But his military duties distinguished him from most of his student counterparts. According to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, performing John’s military duty, his attendance at drill, and other enlistment obligations are required. After one’s name is signed and the oath is taken, orders and expectations are strict. John, for example, cannot simply call out sick from a drill. *He must be there*. Conversely, duties or activities keeping many non-military undergraduates busy are largely *optional*: clubs, student organizations, intramurals, going to the gym, going to a party. If one part of a student’s schedule is busy, he or she can simply not attend a club function or skip the intramural game that day so that academic priorities are met. For John and other student soldiers, skipping drill and other military obligations is simply not an option.

The differences between the academic and military worlds involves more than mandatory attendance during a drill weekend. Military culture is fundamentally different as compared with the academic world and balancing between the two can present challenges. As such, two dimensions emerged related to the concept of shifting. “The Box” is the dimension that represents the military culture: rigid, structured and deterministic, most things in the military are planned (whether correctly or not) and intentional. Even language in the military reflects *the box*: being squared away, squaring one’s corners, putting a sharp crease in one’s uniform. In current military lexicon, *the box* also represents the desert – more specifically *the sandbox* known as Iraq

and Afghanistan. Given the descriptive and intentional usage of this term, describing the military culture as *the box* captured sentiments expressed by the participants.

Brett, a former active duty marine who re-enlisted with the Army National Guard, provided insight into *the box*, where expectations are firm and choosing to comply is not an option.

Because in the Marine Corps you have standards you hold to and if you don't, you suffer the consequences.

As a Marine, or in any other service, you do as instructed. If you decide not to follow those instructions, swift and certain consequences will follow. To be sure, the instructions are not often “hard” nor do they often require something overtly “military.” For those individuals who may not have insight into military culture, it is important to cast aside preconceived notions of military life. Military personnel do not sit around and sharpen their bayonets all day. So then why, one might ask, are orders about cleaning the latrine or shining boots necessary? Early on, recruits from all five branches of the military learn the importance of following orders. Basic military training – often referred to as boot camp – is designed to create uncomfortable, stressful conditions within which enlistees are required to follow orders. While following orders under stress is important, following orders during general routine is paramount because in the military *everything* translates to battle or some other critical military function. If military members do not follow orders in regards to keeping their room clean, their boots shined or their hair cut correctly, they may not follow orders on the battlefield, when it really counts.

Brett provided another passage which embodied the opposite dimension of *the box*, the college dimension one participant referred to as “the pasture:”

It was a big change. You're going from the Marine Corps where you wake up at 5 in the morning every day, go for a jog. Everything's structured for you. You have a timeline, a schedule and you have to hit it every day. If you don't you have consequences for that. And then I came to the school here and.....I could go to class if I want to, I can do my homework if I want to. Nothing really drastic was going to happen to me here. As long as you pass your classes you're ok. I got really complacent and lazy and just kinda took a semester off when I first got here. It was kind of a shock to me because I'm used to doing so much and now I'm lazy. It kind of alarmed me a little bit because I felt like I wasn't accomplishing anything because before I felt like I was accomplishing something every day.

A college campus, with its manicured lawns, old trees and even older buildings, where everyone comes and goes as they please, is the antithesis of *the box*. To me, *the pasture* captured the campus environment: open, unfettered, unconstrained. People are free to go where they want and, to large degree, do what they like.

It is a logical conclusion that the two cultures clashed. However, Brett's statement provided deeper insight into his struggle to reconcile his familiarity and comfort with *the box* within his new environment, *the pasture*. Brett's comments did not provide a flattering description of college life, with the notion that there are no consequences and that all one has to do is pass one's classes. It is not that one idea is right and the other wrong. Rather, it is the clash of the two dimensions, one rigid, the other wide open, that caused Brett's struggle.

Ryan, a 22 year-old Iraq veteran who lost 11 friends during his deployment told a similar story after he returned to school from his basic training and advanced job training:

When I first came I was so squared away to go. Once I got here, the first 3 weeks of school, I was hitting the books; I was studying 3 hours a day I was pulling the grades. And then came the partying (laughs). And then one buddy wants me to be a bouncer at (local bar name). And man there's so much other stuff to do except study. You can ask anybody else, all my friends [from the military]: we'd rather have a good time than go to school.

Like Brett, Ryan's reflection is indicative of the distinct difference between *the box* and *the pasture*. As with Brett, Ryan is initially despondent over the change. He enjoyed being "squared away." But college changed that, or perhaps he changed. Either way, Ryan went from being squared-away and ready to go to someone who would rather have a good time, placing his academic priorities behind other pursuits.

All three participants presented in this section – John, Brett and Ryan – provided insight into this clash of cultures and their challenge to mitigate between the two. For John, shifting between the military box and the college pasture and subsequent identities was a struggle. For Brett and Ryan, the military provided structure and purpose. Once they arrived at school, this structure and purpose was no longer imposed by an external force. Rather, each needed to supply his own motivation and energy for academic achievement. This motivation quickly waned. Brett attributed this decline to a lack of consequences for non-performance while Ryan claimed the party scene as his distraction. Either way, both struggled with the shifting process between military member and undergraduate student.

Although each embodied the concept of shifting in a different form, it was clear that this struggle was real to these members. This emerging concept demonstrated one of the challenges

within the pre-mobilization phase. As the second phase begins, the shifting between these identities would cease as full immersion into military life takes over.

Phase 2 – Separation / Complete Break (Brake)

The next phase in the framework is preliminarily conceptualized as “separation / complete break.” As noted earlier, my thinking is that the separation phase represents the portion of the mobilization process where the individual is separated for a period of time – sometimes up to 24 months – from his or her normal, civilian life. For three of the four participants, separation meant a *complete break* from anything related to one’s student identity and college education. Relations with family and friends, though not entirely separated, were clearly strained, as all of the four participants found remaining connected difficult given the distance and time disparity. On a more reflective level, separation meant stopping one’s civilian life – literally hitting the “*brake*” – and leaving. It also meant full immersion into military life and culture – or, more conceptually, full immersion into *the box*.

Although the separation phase covers a great deal of time and experiences, the most salient portion of this phase was the time spent “in country.” A single factor – deployment into a war zone and the resultant experiences – seemed to fundamentally alter the participants’ perspectives. In short, their time in country *changed* them. As noted in the literature review, these types of stressful conditions can certainly have an impact on an individual. The length and intensity of this stressful situation, coupled with traumatic experiences and observations during the deployment, can take its toll on even the most resilient military member. Carly, a 27 year-old combat medic who spent almost two years in *the box*, reported almost matter-of-factly:

A week before we left, they had two KIAs (killed in action) right out back my door. When we first got there, there was another KIA, right in front of our treatment center. A mortar landed right on top of him.

In reflecting on this exchange, and in reflecting on other, similar exchanges that involved seemingly traumatic content, it is as if Carly placed the emotional subtext of this experience in some type of cognitive compartment. This act, what I am presently conceptualizing as “compartmentalization,” allowed for Carly to recount the incident, but absent was any sense of emotion or affect. Indeed, Carly witnessed a great deal during her extensive tour as a combat medic, including numerous deaths of American service members and a number of close calls herself. Throughout our conversation, she told her story in an almost dispassionate form, as if she erected a protective barrier around the emotional content. During Carly’s nearly four hour interview, she recalled numerous traumatic events, both to herself and others. Yet during our interview, I can only describe her tone as flat when recalling these events. If Carly has walled off her emotions, what happens if and when these walls erode? It seemed that separating emotions from the events was a form of quick and easy coping. However, the danger carried with this coping mechanism – and that which is particularly important for this study – is if and when these coping strategies are no longer effective. As noted in the literature review, PTSD can have a delayed onset. It is logical to think that Carly’s coping strategies could fail, but after some time has elapsed. Based on the timelines presented by these four participants, that lands them squarely on campus as this erosion of coping strategies possibly begins.

Phase 3 – Re-entry / Throttling-Down

My initial framework of the undergraduate mobilization process ended with Phase 3 – “re-entry.” I conceptualized it as a time where military personnel attempt to “throttle-down”

from their often intense and prolonged military experience. The idea of *throttling-down* denotes a reduction in one's intensity level or operational tempo.* (Note: words or phrases with an * are defined in the glossary). Although there were many concepts that emerged during this phase, one in particular stood out as especially insightful. This concept – *home is not home* – provides insight into challenges endured when shifting from *the box* into the civilian world and back to *the pasture*. A passage from Ryan's interview defined why *home is not home*.

You go home and nothing's the same. I'll tell you that right now. Nothing's the same. You come home 15 days out of that (leave), you don't even feel safe here. You come back and everyone's so complacent. You're still looking at buildings; you're still looking at the ground. You drive in the middle of the road. It's just so weird.

Ryan's comment reflected the reaction embodied in a soldier serving in a war zone or other high stress environment. In his interview, Ryan spoke of reacting on pure reflex, which carried over to his civilian world and represents something starkly different than the highly cognitive thinking skills taught in college. Looking for IEDs around buildings and bridges, and driving in the middle of the road are all actions that he was trained to do in Iraq. Loss of situational awareness could result in harm to oneself or others. Even though he is home and safe, he cannot help but react instinctively, as if he was still in *the box*. For Ryan, home was no longer home. His time in Iraq had changed him, at least temporarily.

John's reflections seemed highly similar to Ryan's:

And when I came back I was jumpy, I was a total prick. And um every little thing, you know driving, or like when I heard the 4th of July (the fireworks) when I got back home, that was nuts. Because I thought it was either a mortar or gunshots.

And when I'm driving I'm always checking for IEDs, or those roadside bombs or when I go under a bridge I slow down. I try to go for my weapon. I have a hard time sleeping.

The experiences recalled by both Ryan and John reflected their challenge in changing from a military war zone to a civilian world. John, in particular, stood out to me. It was evident he was still trying to throttle-down from his military experience. He spoke of how he was a “prick” in-country, that this was a necessary way of conducting oneself since it is never clear who to trust.

For John, the civilian world was more than simply returning home, it included returning to college, a transition that posed a challenge to him. I asked him about the specific transition experiences he had in entering the academic culture from his military culture. He explains:

It was.....(SIGHS).....it was different. I still didn't really, how do you say, like, I don't know how to put this. I didn't still quite adjust to the civilian life again so I was kind of jumpy. But I didn't try to show it. I was trying to work on all different aspects, trying to get back in school. Then the first semester overall was like a horrible semester for me. Trying to get in the groove here, time management with studies, class. In a sense, over there everything was in a set time, we're going out this time, do what you need to do, pack up, load your gear. I was used to that. And when I came back to school, it was a whole.....everyone was laid back. I was not used to that and the whole time management I was not used to that. And staying in one spot and studying I was totally not used to that. I wasn't quite used to being in a crowded area like a classroom without looking over my shoulder or like in the cafeteria. Through the course of the summer or

last semester, I keep looking over my shoulder. And even now when I hear thumps on upper or lower levels (in the dorm), I keep thinking it's a bomb or a mortar at times. Just the whole trying to sleep...

As the excerpt depicts, John struggled to find the appropriate words to express his situation. There are a number of pauses and sighs. He uses the word “trying” several times throughout this passage, as if he is aware of his sometimes unsuccessful attempt at returning home and resuming his civilian life. In reflecting back on this portion of the interview, his non-verbal communication also indicated his struggle, as he leaned far forward in his chair and clenched his hands inside of one another, his voice low, almost difficult to hear. On one level, struggling with things like time management is common to most college students. But his ability to cope with those elements, to make the necessary adjustments, is hampered by his extended time in a war zone. In many ways, although John is physically home, his time in *the box* has carried over to his time in *the pasture*. Subsequently, he is finding that using mechanisms more suited for life in *the box* do not fit for life in *the pasture*.

Upon returning home and then eventually back to college, each of the four participants recounted personal adjustment difficulties. It is clear from these interviews that they did not simply leave a war zone and return to college. There did appear to be a *throttling-down* process, whereby the individual deescalated from an environment that was almost continually life threatening to decidedly more serene atmosphere. Once home, these military personnel seemed to find themselves at a crossroads: The cognitive and reflexive training from their military experience remained front and center, but the environment changed entirely. It was a time when *home is not home*, or at least not the home they remembered. Skills and tactics used frequently

while in *the box* were suddenly incompatible, resulting in a sort of physical and cognitive dissonance for these individuals.

This concept is important for this study because it demonstrates the presence of a struggle that occurs within these student soldiers. In each case, this struggle began at home but spilled over to campus life once each of these participants returned to college. Given that these challenges occurred *while also an enrolled college student*, it seems imperative that more consideration be given to this population.

Transitioning to the Larger Study

In the previous passages, I attempted to provide evidence that there is in fact something significant happening with our undergraduate student soldiers during their military mobilization. Three phases guided my thinking about this mobilization process: pre-mobilization (throttling-up), separation (complete break/brake), and re-entry (throttling-down). These three phases represented my initial, higher level categories (Corbin & Straus, 2008). Within these categories, concepts emerged which represented ideas extracted from the interviews themselves (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I presented one concept in each of the three phases in an effort to convincingly demonstrate the essential warrant for this research.

Site & Participant Selection

Two college settings were chosen for this proposed study. *Alpha* University is a large, land-grant, state-related, research intensive, residential institution. Approximately 35,000 students attend Alpha University. Between September 2001 and March 2003, prior to the start of the Iraq War, 255 Alpha University students had been called to active duty (live.psu.edu/story/2377). Since 2001, more than 500 students from Alpha University have been called to active military service, requiring them to put their education on hold

(live.psu.edu/story/17877). The second setting – *Bravo* University – is a medium sized (approximately 8,000 students), public, master’s level, residential institution. For the pilot study, each of the four participants was affiliated with Bravo University. To date, there are no published statistics on the number of students mobilized for active military service at Bravo (Personal communication, 2007). However, Bravo University is well known to this researcher. As such, I have direct knowledge of many students who are appropriate for this study. Based on my lengthy experience with Bravo University, I would estimate this student-military population as numbering between 400 and 500.

These settings were chosen initially out of convenience in that both offer me ease of access. Bravo University has also been my employer for the past 14 years. As such, in-person interviews with Bravo students posed no difficulty. Alpha University is approximately 90 miles from Bravo University. Although geographically distant, I conducted interviews in person on the Alpha campus. I was initially concerned about access to the Alpha undergraduate population. Although I enjoyed ready access to the Bravo campus and students, I knew little of the undergraduate student body at the Alpha campus. In an effort to deepen my access to Alpha, I met with Veteran’s Affairs staff, which proved somewhat helpful in posting flyers and referring students.

Initially I relied heavily on snowball sampling at both Alpha and Bravo institutions. Biklen and Bogdan (2003) define snowball sampling as seeking recommendations for new participants from those who are already involved in the study. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked to consider other service members on the campus that might be interested in participating. An introductory letter, recruitment flyer and set of screening questions

(all IRB approved) were provided to the participant who offered to refer others. Early indicators from pilot study suggested that this would be a successful method of gathering participants.

Because this study is focused on a particular set of experiences, criterion based sampling was used. Prior to scheduling and conducting an interview, prospective participants were asked the same four questions used for the pilot to ensure they met the appropriate criteria for this study. In plainer language, participants for this study were enrolled in college and called for military duty, requiring them to withdraw from college. Once the service obligation was completed, participants re-enrolled in college. It is important to note also that it did not have to be the same college; nor did the initial institution need to be either Alpha or Bravo. By widening the parameters for those who are eligible, I hoped to increase the diversity and depth of my participants. Once this stage of the screening process was completed, the semi-structured interview(s) were conducted.

Final Participants

The efficacy of snowball sampling yielded mixed results. Certainly a few participants were interviewed as a direct result of a referral from a military “buddy” who also participated. However, referrals from campus administrators and faculty proved to be a more effective method of securing participants (N=14). In all cases, these referrals were seemingly effective due to the personal relationship the student-veteran had with the campus figure and the relationship this campus figure had with me. Implicit in these relationships was a sense of trust. Therefore, a referral from a trusted figure to participate in this study was positively regarded by the prospective participant.

Although student-veterans were certainly on campus, even these two methods combined were not sufficient to secure enough participants for this study. As a result, I turned to the social

networking site *Facebook* in an effort to identify additional student-veterans eligible for this study. My decision to consider *Facebook* was initially whimsical in nature. But after a short time browsing through *Facebook*, one readily finds scores of groups devoted to students who are also in the military. These groups are initiated by individual student-veterans who then seek the membership of other student-veterans from their campus. Both Bravo University and Alpha University had several such groups. Once located, messages were sent to select members within these student-veteran groups. These messages identified the research, its purpose, and the criteria for participation in the project. Responses were very supportive of the endeavor, however, not all individuals who responded fit the criteria for inclusion in this study. In the end, I secured ten individuals who agreed to participate and met the stopping out pattern necessary for this study. In total, 24 participants comprised the final study. A graphical representation of this group is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

All participants (including pilot phase)

Pseudonym	Age	Branch	Location	Academic Status	Deployment Length
Jerry	21	PA-ANG	Afghanistan	Sophomore	13 months
Jason	27	PA-ANG	(1) Afghanistan (2) Iraq	Senior	16 months (Afghanistan) 14 months (Iraq)
Matt	26	PA-ANG	(1) Afghanistan (2) Kuwait	Junior	13 months (Afghanistan) 13 months (Kuwait)
Randy	23	Army reserves	Iraq	Sophomore	18 months
John	24	PA-ANG	(1) Afghanistan (currently deployed)	Junior	18 months
Ryan	22	PA-ANG	(1) Iraq (currently	Freshman	18 months

			deployed)		
Carly	27	PA-ANG	Iraq	Senior	18 months
Alan	23	PA-ANG	Iraq	Senior	16 months
Steve	22	PA-ANG	(1) Iraq (currently deployed)	Junior	14 months
Donald		PA-ANG	(1) Iraq (currently deployed)	Sophomore	18 months
Daniel	23	PA-ANG	Iraq	Sophomore	18 months
Rick	26	(1) Marines (2) PA-ANG	Iraq (currently deployed)	Junior	18 months
Karen	21	PA-ANG	Kuwait/Iraq	Sophomore	12 months
Sal	20	PA-ANG	Iraq	Freshman	12 months
Barry	23	PA-ANG	Iraq	Sophomore	12 months
Brenda	24	PA-ANG	Iraq	Senior	20 months
Evan	24	PA-ANG	Iraq	Sophomore	12 months
Robert	24	PA-ANG	(1) Iraq (2) Afghanistan	Junior	12 months 12 months
Lex	27	PA-ANG	(1) Bosnia (2) Iraq	Senior	9 months (Bosnia) 18 months (Iraq)
Jared	22	Army Reserve	Afghanistan	Junior	18 months
Tina	23	Marine Reserve	Iraq	Sophomore	12 months
Brett	27	Marines; PA- ANG	Afghanistan	Junior	12 months
Pete	25	PA-ANG	Afghanistan (currently deployed)	Senior	12 months
Karl	25	PA-ANG	(1) Iraq (2) Afghanistan	Junior	18 months (Iraq) 13 months (Afghanistan)

Each participant was a current or former member of the military, serving in either a reserve unit or as a member of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. All were deployed to either Iraq or Afghanistan at least once. Five of the participants were deployed twice prior to participation in this study. It is worth noting that another six of the participants have been re-deployed since their interview was conducted. Four of the participants were women, one of whom served as a reservist with the Marine Corps. She was also the only participant who represented a branch of the military other than the Army. With deployments ranging between 12 and 20 months, members of this study usually had to leave school for two to three semesters. Most participants ranged between 21 and 27 in age. Academic standing also ranged from freshman to senior status. Of the 24 participants, 18 attended Bravo University, three attended Alpha University and three attended other institutions in the region.

Procedures

As I progressed through the pilot work and entered the larger work, I was able to clarify a set of questions used for the remainder of the effort. Five questions related to one's college experience and six questions related to one's military experience were developed. Although it was rare to work straight down the list, I did keep these questions in front of me, thereby serving as a guide during my interviews. These questions are listed below.

Standard college oriented questions

1. Why did you decide to go to college? What influences in your life steered you in this direction? Were other members of your family in college or college graduates? Did you ever consider not going to college and doing something else? Why or why not?
2. Talk about your college experiences. For example, did you feel connected to your college? Did you have a strong peer network? Did you like your college experience?

- Were you “involved” (“involved” as defined by you) in college? Extracurricular activities?
3. Talk about how you balanced the roles of being a student and being a member of the military. Was it difficult? Did you have a military “friend/buddy” network on campus that you were connected with? Was the military understanding of school commitments? Was the school understanding of military commitments?
 4. Did you ever receive any negative feedback (i.e. from fellow students, faculty etc) about being in the military? Did you ever receive any positive feedback about being in the military? Did you disclose that you were a member of the military to other students? Or did you keep it more private?
 5. Opinion question: how do you feel colleges treat veterans (you could talk about your own experiences or simply give your opinion). Do you have friends in the service that have had good experiences with colleges assisting them? Poor experiences? What do you think colleges could do to assist veterans in their transitions/separations due to mobilization? What do you think colleges could do to assist veterans upon their return?

Standard military oriented questions

1. Why enlist? What interested you? What motivated you? Did you have any family/friends or others that influenced your decision to enlist? Did the college and/or financial benefits play a part in your decision to enlist?
2. Talk about your military experiences – basic training, AIT, weekend drills. Looking back, what’s your reflection/opinion on your military experiences? If you could go

- back in time, would you do it all over again? Do you plan on re-enlisting in the future?
3. Talk about the different transitions you've experienced (leaving home, deployment, home on leave, back to deployment, then RELAD and back home) Have these transitions posed any challenges on your and/or your family/friends etc? Has the interruption in school posed any challenges? What's it like moving from one culture (civilian) to another (military) and then back again?
 4. How do you think your military/deployment experience has impacted you? Has it changed you?
 5. Do you consider your deployment experiences to be stressful? If so, how do you de-stress/relax? Is the operational tempo difficult?
 6. If a fellow college student asked you for advice about enlisting, what would you say?

In addition to these standard interview questions, I collected standard demographic information:

Student-Veteran Research Project | Introductory Questions

1. Branch of service:
2. Years of service:
3. Current rank (or rank at separation):
4. MOS/Rating:
5. Ethnic background:
6. Current age:
7. Age before being deployed:
8. How long was your deployment(s):

9. Location of your deployment:
10. Were you in school when you were deployed (If yes, please indicate approximate number of credits earned before deployment):
11. Did you re-enroll in school upon your RELAD*?

Most interviews occurred in my office on the Bravo University campus. There were two individuals that completed portions of the questions via email, a necessary procedure due to their geographic separation and scheduling constraints. One interview was completed by phone. My initial intent was to interview each member twice, and for the first half of the participants, I continued with this plan. However, this dual interview approach was difficult to successfully complete with all participants due to time and availability constraints. Although I switched to one interview for the second half of the group, it should be noted that the average time for each session was approximately 60 minutes. Coverage in the one interview format was as substantial as the two interview format as evidenced by my ability to work through all question areas as well as follow up lines of inquiry. Additionally, my efficiency as an interviewer improved as I gained more experience. Further, my interview protocols improved, due in large part from the first several interviews. Finally, I learned that these participants relied heavily on momentum when telling their story. Thus, when they started talking and recalling events, stopping at a perceived mid-point could result in loss of all momentum. Collectively, these considerations allowed me to successfully switch to one interview if and when constraints dictated. Most sessions hit the 60 minute mark, with several sessions lasting two hours and the longest falling just shy of four hours.

Data Collection

It was difficult to indicate in advance how many interviews would be needed for this study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest that interviews and data collection should continue until “theoretical saturation” is reached. Interviewing another 10, 20 or more individuals would not necessarily grant new information. Based on conversations with advisors and other faculty, I anticipated conducting, transcribing and coding approximately 25 interviews. I am aware that this number may be somewhat artificial. If saturation is reached at 23 then perhaps the data collection should cease. Conversely, if saturation is not reached at 30, data collection would continue. Careful attention to ongoing data analysis and close contact with my advisor was helpful in making these and other methodological decisions.

Most interviews averaged approximately 60 minutes. My initial concerns regarding military personnel answering questions in an abbreviated fashion were shown to be unfounded in the pilot work, a trend that held for the larger study. However, as the interviewer, I remained alert and offered follow up questions for those occasions when participants slipped back *into the box*.

All interviews were collected on a digital voice recorder and then transferred onto my personal computer and secured with a password. Once audio files were transferred to the computer, the source file on the recorder was deleted. All participants signed an informed consent upon which they had the opportunity to request that their audio file be destroyed at the conclusion of the study (some elected this option). For those who waived this right, I plan to keep audio files securely for no more than five years.

Data Analysis

The eventual goal of this study was to devise a theoretical model which appropriately and accurately captured the undergraduate military mobilization process. To accomplish this, Corbin and Strauss (2008) provided a number of analytical tools and techniques. Initially, data were coded using microanalysis, which allowed for examination of each word or phrase within the interview. Microanalysis helped to "...discern the range of potential meanings contained within the words used by respondents and develop them more fully in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Corbin & Strauss, 1998 p. 109). Interviews were initially examined at this level so that important meanings, concepts or insights were not overlooked. In an effort to develop concepts and dimensions of those concepts, open coding was employed next. Open coding consists of "...breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data..." (Corbin & Strass, 2008, p. 198).

The development of concepts is an idea threaded throughout the grounded theory tradition. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define a concept as "...words that stand for groups or classes of objects, events and actions that share some major common properties, though the properties can vary dimensionally" (p. 45). Analysis is a fluid process and therefore does not have one exact method. Rather, concept development varies contingent upon the researcher and the collected data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that "...there are many different stories that can be constructed from the data..." (p. 47). They further assert that the analyst could make several attempts before the one, unified story "feels right" (Corbin & Strauss). Dimensionalized concepts move from isolated to connected, resulting in the preliminary model for understanding the undergraduate, military mobilization process (Corbin & Strauss).

Validity

As the researcher, I must assure that what I advanced as the unified story accurately reflects those who participated. Assuring validity is one way to accurately justify this narrative. Maxwell (2005) described two validity threats to qualitative research: reactivity and subjectivity. Reactivity pertains to my influence or effect as the researcher on the participant and the subsequent data collected while subjectivity pertains to attending only to data that supports my preconceived notions (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). Although it is nearly impossible to eliminate all potential validity threats, Maxwell and others (e.g. Merriam) note that member checks, sometimes referred to as respondent validation, can serve as a useful tool in reducing validity concerns. Member checks consist of "...soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (Maxwell, 2005 p. 111). Maxwell asserts that this is the most viable way of eliminating the possibility of misinterpretation. Not all participants need to engage in member checks. Individuals may be selected and the data and conclusions presented. Merriam suggests asking if the interpretation "...rings true" to the participant (p. 26). For the purposes of this study, three member check sessions were utilized in an effort to ensure validity. Results of these member checks are presented in the following chapter.

In addition to member checks, I sought feedback from individuals not affiliated with this study but who had insight and/or access to this topic. For example, I dialogued with three military leaders, two of whom were deployed to the Middle East for extensive periods. The ability of these individuals to comment on my findings was be instructive and offered further evidence of validity. Additionally, I dialogued with two student affairs professionals, both of whom had regular contact with student soldiers. Although not affiliated with the military, as student centered advocates, these individuals reflected on the findings and discussed with me

their understanding of what I have presented. Results of these peer audits are also presented in the following chapter.

Research Relationship

I decided to disclose my military identity to all participants. During the pilot work, participants knew me as more than the interviewer. As such, they were familiar with my military affiliation. As the study expanded, I knew that I would encounter individuals with whom I had no prior relationship. Although there were many reasons as to my disclosure, my main concern was that the participants would be able to determine my affiliation through various clues and question me as to why I was not more up front at the start. Many military members have habits that they carry over into the civilian world. These clues often arise in conversation, sending a signal that you are *in the club*. The way you stand, your haircut (for men), when you remove your hat (cover) upon entrance into a building – these and many other features of military culture are readily identifiable. My concern, therefore, would be that these signals would be interpreted and generate a question as to why I did not disclose such information. I was further concerned my non-disclosure may be distracting at best or deceptive at worst, thereby possibly straining the research relationship.

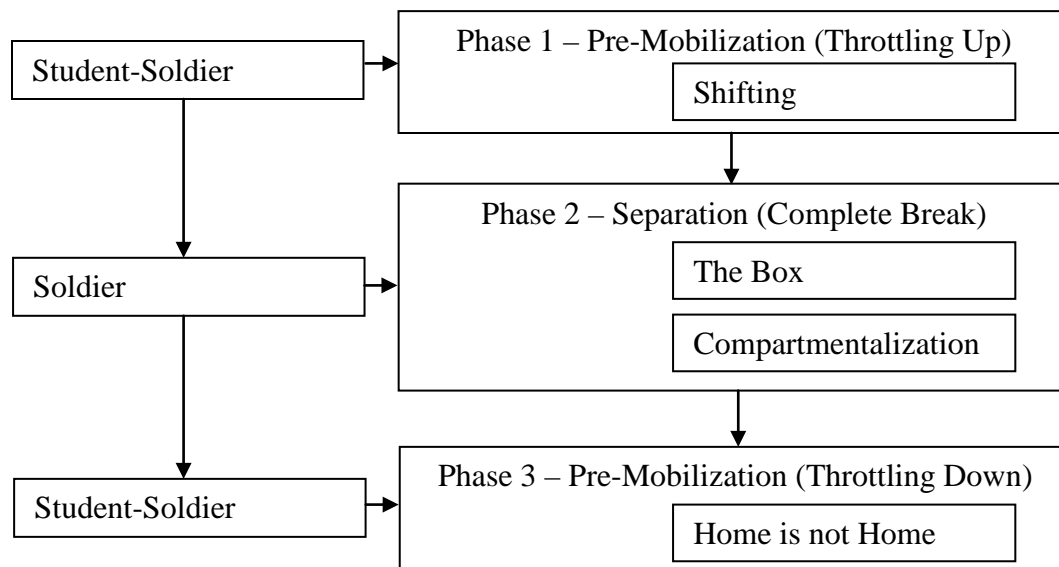
Although initial thoughts regarding my military affiliation might suggest a validity concern, I argue the opposite. Krenske, as cited in Merriam (2002) noted that developing “authenticity” is an important step in gaining rapport with participants. As a fellow member of the military, this notion of authenticity is readily available. More pointedly, I can identify and empathize with those telling their stories. Already my connections with the military have proven to be helpful as interviewees seem more at ease and more willing to talk openly of their

experiences. Both my initial and later assessment was that this sense of authenticity increased trustworthiness for this study.

Tentative Model

Figure 1 depicts a tentative model of the military mobilization process. This model is an outgrowth of the pilot work and is included here to show the initial framework.

Figure 1. Tentative model of the undergraduate military mobilization process based on the pilot study.



The tentative model is also shown here to demonstrate the continual evolution of the data and subsequent analysis. As the next chapter shows, some concepts developed during pilot work remained, while others were discarded in favor of more meaningful, data-driven concepts.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This section begins with a graphical presentation and discussion of the broad categories related to the undergraduate military mobilization and meaning-making process. Following this are subsequent sections, consisting of more detailed description, analysis and theoretical interpretation of each category, or phase, and the associated concepts. Supporting passages extracted from the participants themselves are provided to keep research interpretations linked to data. The full theoretical model is presented at the conclusion of the final phase. Presentation of the lone negative case, member checks and peer audits complete the findings.

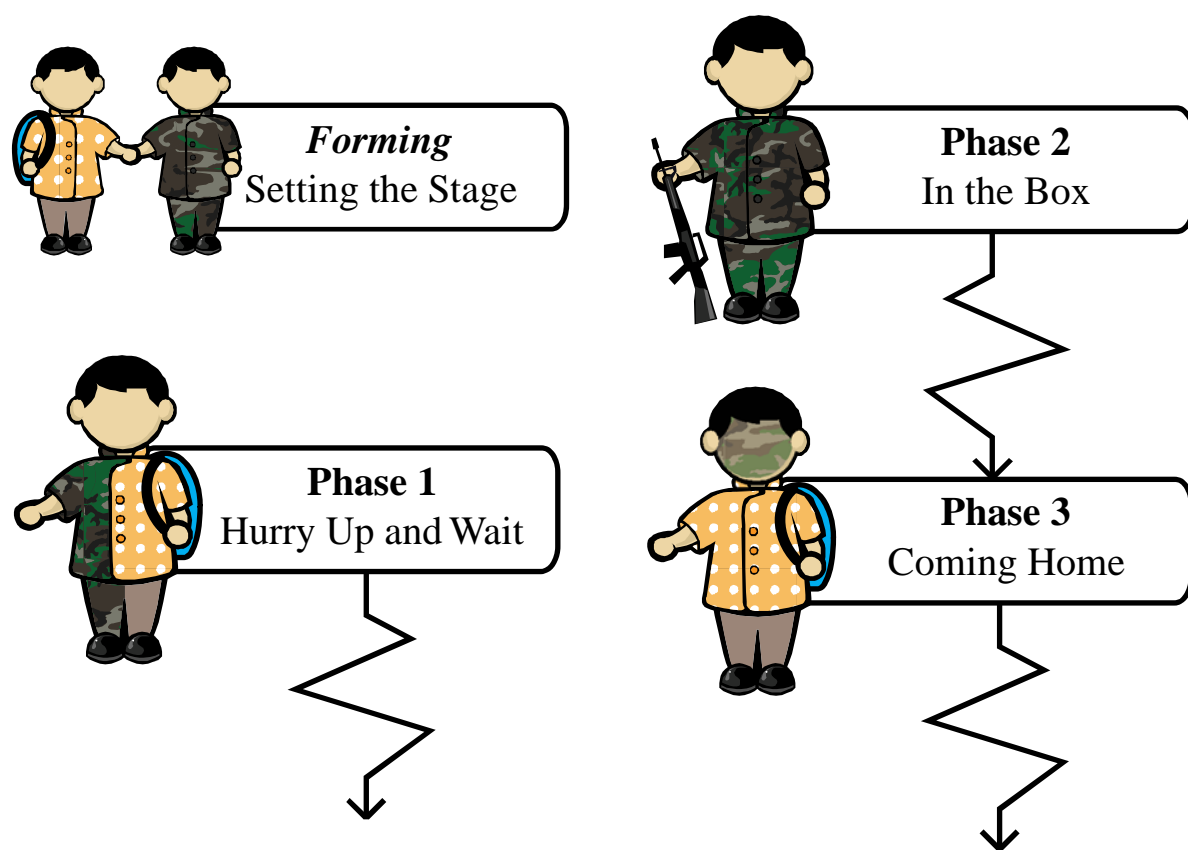
Categorical Model

Figure 2 provides the broad categorical areas that represent the undergraduate military mobilization process. These categorical areas were initially drawn from the pilot data and verified or revised by the larger study. Also included in this “categorical” model is the forming/setting the stage category. Although not necessarily a part of the mobilization process, forming/setting the stage is important to understanding the creation of military and student identities.

The model begins with two figures – one in fatigues and one in civilian attire. Although they are the same person, the duality represents the two distinct identities which are in formation. One identity – the military self – has barely begun as individuals consider enlisting in the armed services. The other identity – the student self – is also in an early germination stage as individuals were just starting to define themselves as college-bound students. As the process proceeds, these identities converge, competing for time from the individual. This is represented by the split figure, half in fatigues and half in civilian clothes (Phase 1). Phase 2 shows the figure

entirely in military clothing, complete with a weapon, depicting full immersion into military culture. This immersion is required as mobilization demands complete attention from its participants. Phase 3 shows the figure in civilian clothes, but the camouflage coloring has moved to the figure's head. This depicts the highly personal experience of coming home, including the many personal hardships experienced by participants. Over the course of this chapter, individual phases are presented in a more complete fashion, with the theoretical model presented at the end of Phase 3.

Figure 2. Categorical model of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



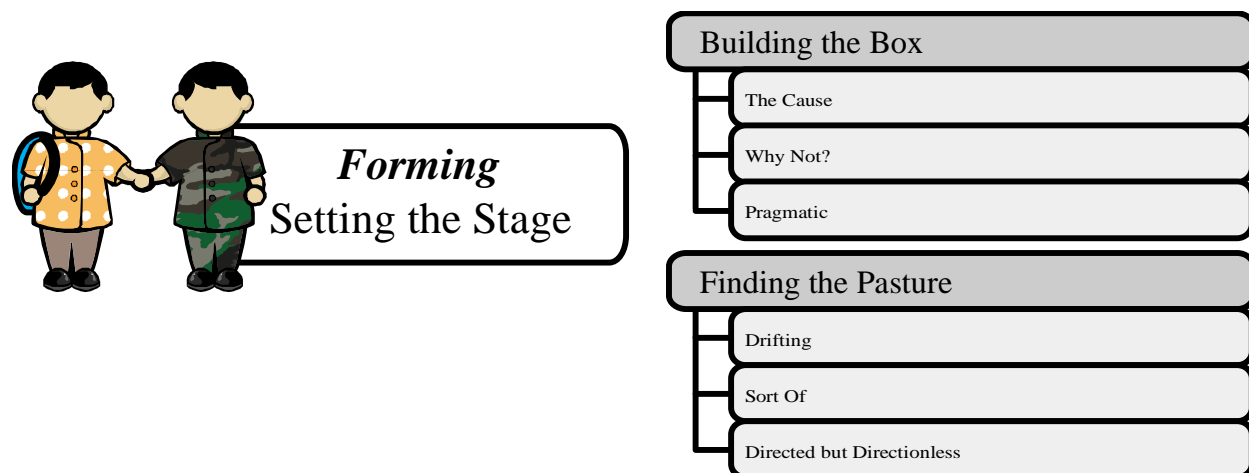
There are, however, changes in this model as compared to the tentative depiction presented at the end of chapter three. As noted above, new to the model is the “*forming/setting the stage*” category. Although not a part of the phased mobilization process, it seemed important

to provide some initial context as to the development of the student identity and the military identity. Also changed is the removal of the initial concepts “...throttling up, throttling down.” In some instances, this may be an accurate conceptual understanding of the experience – especially for non-reserve or National Guard personnel. However, the interviews from the pilot study and further evidence from the larger study suggested that this may not aptly capture the process for part-time undergraduate student soldiers, especially in Phase 1.

Forming/Setting the Stage

Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of the forming/setting the stage category. Each participant possessed two prominent identities – one the military self – the other, the college self. These identities often carried competing demands and obligations. Analysis and interpretation of each identity is presented next.

Figure 3. Forming/setting the stage portion of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



Setting the Stage – Building the Box

The concept of *the box* emerged in the pilot study and serves as a symbol of military culture. But it is important to understand that new military members do not simply have *the box* placed on them. Rather, each individual goes through a process during which *the box* is constructed both by and for him or her. For those in this study, “building the box”¹ began in a

simple fashion: with the idea of enlisting. (¹ Concepts are first presented in “quotes” and thereafter *italicized*.)

Ryan provided an example for getting in.

I joined to get deployed. After 9-11 I always wanted to join. But after 9-11 I remember my exact words with my mother – I was like "...mom I want to kill these people that did this." And I know Iraq has nothing to do with it – but there's terrorism all throughout the world. And that's why I made my final decision.

Ryan's emphasis on “*killing these people that did this*” provided a dramatic example of his motivation to enlist. I recalled during our interview the conviction with which he asserted his thoughts on this topic: It was clear to me that he was fully committed to what he perceived as “the cause.” Carly's rationale represented the dimension opposite of Ryan's box building:

As a senior in high school we had to do this project, and I didn't know what to do mine on and I wasn't doing it on “euthanasia” or “HIV” (feigns boredom). So I did it on women in the military. My mom had a friend that worked down at Ft. Indiantown Gap. And I just did this project and she gave my name to a recruiter. I talked to a recruiter and I was like, why not. I didn't really know what I wanted to go to school for. It's only 6 months of my life and they're going to give me money. And I'm going to basic training. I'm like, that'll be really good. And I wasn't a bad kid or anything. So it wasn't like I needed discipline. I mean I was your average kid. I loved my parents, I loved my friends, I did what typical high school kids do. So I decided to join. What the heck.

In her meandering story of entering the Army National Guard, Carly's final decision point – a decision that fundamentally altered her life – came down to “why not?” If these

dimensions – *the cause/why not* – represent poles, the middle ground was reflected in Brett’s comment:

I re-enlisted because, I needed more money, basically I’m gonna tell you I needed more money.

In Brett there is an emphasis on the “pragmatic,” which reflects the mid-point between the two dimensions. As a former active duty Marine who re-enlisted in the Army National Guard, Brett was aware that he could be deployed. Although he had no personal desire to be mobilized, he accepted this potential obligation as simply a part of the contract one signs. It was a risk he was willing to accept in an effort to reach the practical conclusion of more financial backing for college and related expenses.

Box building truly began with basic training. Also known as “boot-camp,” new military members are brought into the box in a harsh and often challenging way. John’s comment reflected sentiments expressed by everyone in the group:

I wouldn’t mind going back through it again (basic training). It was a good time. I met different people. It was a good time.

John’s statement, matched by his smiles and frequent laughs as he recounted his basic training experience, indicated his fondness – not only of his memories, but of his larger affiliation with the military. Ryan’s reflections are similar:

In the moment, I’m thinking “oh shit.” But now I’m like, that’s fun. I liked it. Actually it wasn’t even now – it was halfway through basic training that we’re laughing about it. All the guys, you make friends.

Positive sentiments expressed by John and Ryan were common for all participants – something that surprises civilians. Most notable in the interviews was the camaraderie and the

kinship established between people sharing reportedly intense and challenging experiences. Indoctrination, here in the form of basic training, brought unlikely and disparate individuals together in a fashion not easily captured in a non-military environment. These “military buddies” formed during basic training, and later formed through one’s eventual unit and drilling site, provided a strength to members in the network. Given the largely negative or unnecessarily intense depictions of basic training in television and motion pictures (e.g. Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*), it seems paradoxical that one might consider this experience positively. But in fact, each of the participants reminisced on their *box building* – beginning with basic training – nostalgically. An important point here is that individuals must “buy in” to this experience. From the military’s perspective, if scores of new recruits regarded their initial experience poorly, acceptance of this new culture and its methods and objectives would be seriously challenged. Thus the positive reflections related to this challenging experience are critical in perpetuating military culture.

Mellinger (2007) identifies culture as “...socially transmitted behavior, patterns, beliefs, and institutions that shape a community or population” (p. 80). From this definition, it is clear that the military reflects a culture unto itself, situated within the larger context of the nation. As with many cultures, mechanisms and processes which serve to perpetuate the culture are in place, and basic training provides an example of one such military process. Dunivin (1994) theorizes that this perpetuation and acceptance of military culture – what I refer to here as *building the box* – is important in the conservation and transmission of military values, ethics and beliefs. “The conservative culture promotes enculturation, attitudes, and interactions that complement its cultural paradigm” (Dunivin, 1994 p. 536). Interestingly, further supporting the transmission of culture, most of the participants for this study identified a male family member as influential in

the decision to enlist. It would seem, therefore, that the transmission of this culture through the mechanisms such as basic training, and also through “legacy” military members in one’s family or social network, is critical in the *box building* process.

Setting the Stage – Finding the Pasture

Just as the concept of *the box* is central in this study, the concept of *the pasture* – depicting college culture – was implied frequently and symbolically throughout. Like enlisting in the military, entering college involved a process for these individuals and some were clearly more committed than others. As before, participants presented a range of motivations for their pursuit of higher education. Daniel, a 23 year-old veteran from Iraq commented:

I had no plan of going into college. I initially enlisted in the Army National Guard basically as a stepping stone. I had full intentions to go active duty [meaning full time, military service]. School was really on the back burner. I really didn’t feel comfortable going to college.

Daniel’s passage reflected one dimension of the concept finding the pasture – “drifting.” He further stated that his tentative enrollment was the result of the local college coming to his school and doing a presentation. Had they not come to him, it was unlikely Daniel would have taken the idea of college much further. Randy, a 23 year-old Iraqi veteran, had this to say about his interest in coming to college:

My parents forced me to go – that was a major deciding factor. It also stemmed from the fact that I had a lot of good friends that were going to college and the fact that that was your next step after high school as far as I was concerned. I wanted to go I just didn’t know what I really wanted to do.

Randy's passage reflected sentiments from several participants in this study: "directed but directionless." He wanted to be *in the pasture*, and internal and external motivators were present. But he lacked a focus and sense of direction. Regardless, in the end, being *directed but directionless* was sufficient to motivate him into college.

If Daniel represents one dimension and Randy the other, the mid-point is reflected by Pete, a 25 year-old Afghanistan veteran:

The Military offered a solution. The Army told me that I could come to them and do college at the same time, and that they would pay for it. No one else in my family went to college (immediate family). I was going to be a writer, write about my childhood and hoped people would like it. Didn't think about college until I found out it would be free. Sort of free.

Whereas Daniel drifted into *the pasture*, and Randy was *directed but directionless*, Pete "sort of" wanted to be there but lacked the financial resources, sentiments that resonated with several participants. Enter the military, with its promise of full college plus a monthly stipend and Pete's ability to achieve his objective was now realized. Or, as Pete noted, *sort of* realized.

As the concept *finding the pasture* indicates, motivations for entering college varied across participants, a finding that was not necessarily surprising. Parental influence, as illustrated by Randy and evident in other participants, is a readily identifiable factor in many pre-college decisions (Teachman, 1987). Also not surprising is the influence of financial resources on college enrollment, as displayed by Pete and others in this study. Not only have financial considerations been important historically, but given today's current economic climate, it is likely these will remain a top consideration for college bound students (Leppel, 2002). More broadly, the dimensionalized concept of *finding the pasture* does not seem much different than

obstacles faced by non-military, college bound students. A review of the research on the college entrance process illuminates the myriad of factors influencing one's choice (Perna, 2000).

However, the main difference regarding the participants for this study is their usage of the military – either by intention or by accident – to ameliorate financial barriers to college. For some, enlisting in the military was purposeful, creating access to post-secondary education. For others, their military identity was primary, going to college started as a humdrum, side-benefit of enlisting. Although college is often lauded as a place of learning and growth, none of the participants in this study cited this as a rationale for their enrollment.

Present day student development theory has evolved to address a wide number of groups on campus, including an emphasis on extracurricular, campus engagement and involvement (Astin, 1999; Dannells & Stage, 2000). Although theory is an important building block for the field of student affairs, attempts to include individual students and groups will necessarily exclude others. For example, in my review of the student affairs literature, no mention is made of the development of students who are also members of the military. Thus applying theories from Chickering, Perry and others prominent in the field may be incorrect. For example, Evans et al. (1998) state that Chickering's theory is based on the notion that identity development in college, and the environmental/external influences of this development, is at the center of the college years. Chickering's theory proposes seven vectors that students move through – from developing competence to developing integrity – as identity develops. Missing from this theory, however, is any regard for the influence of one's military involvement. Given the seemingly transformative nature of this experience, it seems reasonable that a student who is also a military member could develop in a fashion entirely separate from Chickering's theory. Given the shortfall of

Chickering and other identity theorists, how are we to understand the development of identity in these individuals?

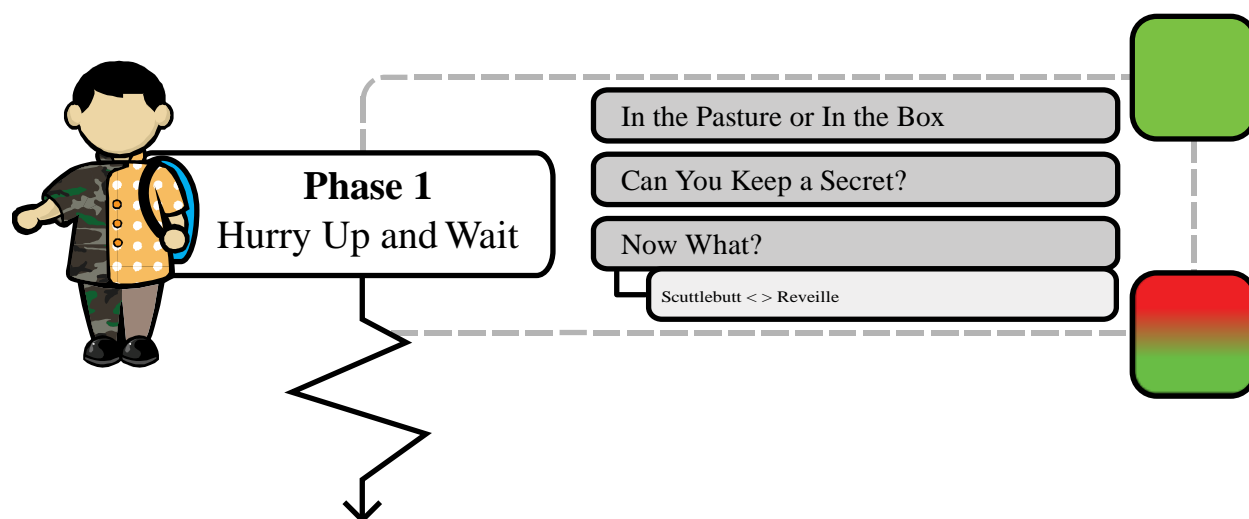
Similarly, theories of student engagement that consider military involvement are also absent. Consider Astin's (1999) theory of student engagement. Astin posited that the right type and amount of involvement in one's college can increase one's connectedness to that institution, thereby increasing overall satisfaction. On the surface, this theory rings true. But what of those students whose "involvement" takes them away from the campus? What if the student is very involved in the military and that subsequent involvement impacts his or her overall satisfaction or identity development? Like developmental theories, theories of student involvement also miss this group. Therefore, understanding or explaining the identity development by calling on conventional theory in this area is difficult.

For these participants, it was evident to me that being in college and in the military helped spark the development of one's early adulthood identity. Prior to mobilization, some placed their military identity out front, while others maintained their academic identity as primary. As these identities continued to form, participants found themselves settled – however briefly – into a military/academic routine. This routine involved the shifting between identities, between the military self during drill weekends and summer training and the academic self during the regular semesters. For some, this routine ended quickly, as the call to serve happened fast. Others would remain students for several semesters before receiving the call. But in the end, all of these participants would eventually enter Phase 1 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.

Phase 1: Hurry Up and Wait

The phrase “hurry up and wait” is well known among military members. Used here, it represents the larger category which encompasses the first phase of the undergraduate mobilization process. *Hurry up and wait* began with one’s initial processing into the military, before the oath was even taken, and remained a looming constant throughout most military careers. Consisting broadly of the advance time prior to one’s mobilization, it is fueled by rumors and speculation, mostly confined to the unit but not deaf to the larger national political situation. During this phase, individuals shifted between two worlds. One is the civilian/student world, which continued unfettered, largely ignorant of the upcoming change caused by the mobilization process. The other is the military world, which rapidly grabbed ownership of its part-time members. Figure 4 contains a graphical depiction of Phase 1 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.

Figure 4. Graphical depiction of Phase 1 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



As the figure depicts, the student-soldier, clothed partially in fatigues and partially in civilian attire, represents dual and dueling identities as he or she begins the process. Contained within this phase are three concepts – “in the pasture or in the box,” “can you keep a secret,” and

“now what?” Finally, the green box represents “go” – meaning the start of Phase 1. The red/green gradient box represents the “sort of stop, sort of go” type transition that occurred toward the end of Phase 1.

Hurry Up and Wait Concept – In the Pasture or In the Box

In the *hurry up and wait* phase, student soldiers have completed their basic, once-per-month drilling obligations. Whereas before, the student could turn on the military switch and turn off the academic switch with less difficulty, all that changes once scuttlebutt* emerged about a possible mobilization overseas to theaters of battle. As one prepares for deployment – a period that can last months – the shift between being *in the pasture* (college life) and being *in the box* (military life) is strained. Tina, a reservist with the United States Marine Corps provided insight:

It wasn't easy going from a student to an NCO (non-commissioned officer) and from an NCO back to a student. As a student, you're supposed to question everything you're told; you're supposed to always think outside the box, challenge rhetoric, and plans made by authority. As a Marine, you are supposed to accept orders without question...no matter how little they make sense. This was my most challenging part of being activated to Iraq – keeping my mouth shut.

Tina's excerpt demonstrated the dual roles of student and military member in advance of deployment. Notice how she indicated that students are supposed to “...*think outside the box*...” Tina has described what I am arguing here: that college culture and military culture are fundamentally different. *In the pasture*, things moved slowly, lacking a sense of urgency. But *in the box*, things were rigid, structured and planned – even if those plans changed constantly. As such, one's conduct, strategies and interactions deemed acceptable *in the pasture* may be entirely

unacceptable, or ineffective, *in the box*. As talk of mobilization continues, it was these cultural differences that were exacerbated, causing strain on participants.

Matt, a Sergeant in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard (PA-ANG) who mobilized twice commented:

Being a civilian soldier is a tough job. While the regular army just balances the army life as its job, the National Guard and reserve components have a lot more to deal with. In most cases the reserve soldiers are either in school or have a full time job. When it comes time to be called up and serve your country, a lot of people find it very difficult to adjust to this.

Matt's comments further reflected the balancing required to successfully address demands presented by both cultures, each of which has their own priorities. He also noted the special challenge felt by part-time soldiers: for active duty military personnel, this is their full time vocation. But for reserve and National Guard personnel, other priorities were equally if not more important. Pulling away from these priorities often presented a genuine hardship.

Hurry Up and Wait Concept – Can you Keep A Secret?

A second concept that emerged from the data was the idea of how a participant goes from being a part-time military member to a full-time, active duty soldier. I conceptualized this movement as “can you keep a secret?” Public perception – and often the perception of one's family and friends – is that mobilization of military members is involuntary, that individuals are told to go. To a certain degree, this perception is accurate. Some individuals are *involuntarily recalled* and make up a portion of the currently activated reserve and National Guard contingent. However, before the military involuntarily recalls its members, a solicitation for volunteers is presented. Most of the participants in this study actually volunteered for their orders. As I began

hearing of these volunteers, I was initially surprised. But as the commonality emerged, I began to understand why most of the participants in this group willingly raised their hand. John, a 22 year-old veteran from Iraq who volunteered for his tour, commented:

I was kind of excited to go. Even though it's a war zone it's a whole different experience. You don't know what to expect and that excitement that like I can't wait to go and do my part.

Lex, a 27 year-old former Active duty Army member turned Army National Guardsmen deployed to Iraq, provided a similar perspective:

Being an infantryman, being deployed to a combat zone, it's like getting to play in the Olympics. Everybody was really excited, almost everybody volunteered.

It was the excitement. That word, or something similar, consistently appeared in those who volunteered. Even the few in this study that did not volunteer recalled their sense of positive anticipation of the forthcoming experience. Karen, a 21 year-old veteran who served in Kuwait and Iraq commented on something deeper:

I didn't have to go on deployment, I gave up a commission [to become an officer] to go. My unit was going. They're a family. There are privates and specialists going. 'Hey you're going right, Karen? You're going to be there right?' For me to not go would be abandoning them and they are family to me and I won't do that.

Karen did volunteer for her deployment, but there was a sense of pressure behind this that was threaded throughout her unit. This pressure, manifested in terms of pride, camaraderie, and an obligation to the fellow soldier, was what often pushed Karen and others in this study to volunteer for their deployment. It was informal, to be sure, but powerful just the same.

Although volunteering led to excitement and a sense of interconnectedness, it also created challenges. As a result, most volunteers in this group revealed in their interview that they did not disclose to family their mobilization orders – or that they volunteered for those orders – until it was almost time to depart. The intent of this strategy was to avoid the emotional backlash from family and friends. The perception is that if you are “ordered” to mobilize, the resultant emotional challenges are easier to address – not in oneself, but in one’s family and friends. But this privacy came with a cost: By *keeping the secret*, some participants were left to speak only with their fellow military buddies about the upcoming deployment.

Jerry, a 21 year-old Specialist in the PA-ANG received his mobilization orders – along with his older brother – in April 2007. For this mobilization, they would go together as brothers. But Jerry remembered his mother’s emotional reaction when his brother was first mobilized, before Jerry was even enlisted in the military. It was this memory that caused the brothers to keep their orders private.

When my brother went, I was there, and I got to see the way she was – she was upset all the time. It was a rough year for her, so we waited to tell her – we told her Nov. 25th of that year and that was just like two weeks before we left. If we would have told her about it, she would have been worrying about it the whole time and it wouldn’t have done her any good. She was pretty upset when we did tell her because obviously we were both going. I’ve seen her and she doesn’t need to know this because then, then she’s gonna start watching everything that’s going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, so the longer she didn’t know, the better.

In an effort to avoid any emotional turmoil – or perhaps to delay the inevitable – the brothers waited more than six months before speaking to their mother. Two weeks after they

finally revealed their future plans, Jerry and his brother were leaving for their state-side train-up, after which they spent close to 12 months in Afghanistan.

For many, the emotional difficulty expressed by others is worsened when they are informed that the duty assignment was voluntary. Although some participants disclosed their voluntary service shortly before their departure, most did not disclose until they returned home safely. Lex, a 27 year-old Sergeant who deployed twice also volunteered for his service. He provided a good example of the type of reactions one can receive once they have disclosed *the secret*:

But my mother was absolutely upset. She didn't know what to do. I didn't tell her until after I came back that I volunteered. Which resulted in getting slapped (laughs).

A few participants in this study have still not revealed to *anyone* that they volunteered. They almost sheepishly admitted to me, under the banner of anonymity, that they stepped forward when asked.

Hurry Up and Wait Concept – Now What?

At this point in the process, members were well aware that a deployment was inevitable. It is also during this time that circumstances were fluid and often unknowable, especially for lower enlisted* members. Participants in this study found themselves asking “now what?” during this time period.

Within the concept of *now what* are two continuous and progressive dimensions. “Scuttlebutt*” is a common military term used to denote rumors. Many elements of the hurry up and wait category were fueled by the *scuttlebutt* which raged during this time. Often, members began at one dimension, where *scuttlebutt* dominated, causing individuals great difficulty with

regard to decision making. As they moved beyond this, participants came to the other dimension: “reveille*.” Also borrowed from military lexicon *reveille* means, in short, **wakeup!** (Imagine this word being shouted three times by a higher enlisted person, accompanied with bugles or other sound producing devices). *Reveille* represents the wakeup call that many members receive, compliments of his or her soldier readiness preparations, including the drawing up of a will.

In advance of a mobilization warning or order, chatter around members’ units generally suggested that something was happening, although specifics were unclear. Without official military orders showing a precise exit date, many were reluctant to take definitive action on important matters such as school and work. Most said that multiple dates would come and go before anything official occurred. In many ways, this was the “questioning” phase. What do I do with my apartment at school? What do I do if I’m close to finishing the semester but have to leave? Who should I tell? Steve, a Specialist in the PA-ANG received unofficial word of his impending deployment. Like many, Steve was caught in a quandary: should he leave school, knowing he was unlikely to finish the term? Or should he simply continue until orders were official. Like many, Steve drifted out *in the pasture* a bit until chatter became reality.

The only reason I stayed here (at school) is I had two friends that were going here and I had some classes with them and I really didn’t know what else to do. Most of my other friends went away to other schools and I really didn’t have anybody to hang out with at home. I stayed here just to have something to do. I went to some classes and I didn’t go to others. I just kinda messed around a lot. Because I knew I wasn’t gonna be staying, just kinda here to hang out.

This larger question of leaving school or staying until notified was one of the more significant questions requiring an answer at this time. The ability to effectively answer this

question was usually compromised since much of what was known was based on *scuttlebutt*. Uncertainty ruled the day, often continuing for weeks and sometimes months. In some instances this uncertainty was due directly to incorrect information communicated by individual units. Karl, a 25 year-old Sergeant in the PA-ANG who recently returned from his second deployment, had this experience regarding misinformation:

My unit's denying it, denying it, denying it. And all the lower enlisted are like, "we're going, we're going." Even some of the E7s, the SGT first classes, and a lot of the Staff SGTs, the 6s, down through the ranks are like, "we're going." And the brass and the SR NCOs [non-commissioned officers] are picking up on this. It finally got to a point where the Captain called a formation, got everybody out there, and he's like "...who hears that we're going somewhere?" Everybody raises their hand, literally everybody. And he goes "...I'm here to tell you right now, to dispel any myths, we are not going anywhere, I have not received any phone calls, there is nothing that I know of, no warning orders, nothing." Two weeks later we get a call.

Alan, a 23 year-old Sergeant who attended Alpha University at the time of our interview provided another example of such misinformation:

I had missed a pre-deployment meeting. I told them "...hey I'm up at school." And they said well we're not getting deployed, every unit in the state has to do it. We had a big speech the drill before that: don't go quitting your jobs, don't go quitting school. Then they called me up and they said "...hey we need you back here Friday." [Note: when this phone call came, they informed Alan he would be deploying]. So I didn't really know what to do. I ended up going to class. So I'm

sitting in class, looking around. I sat through the whole class, handed in my paper, then went up to my teacher and I'm like "...hey I'm not gonna be here anymore." And he was like "...what's up?" "Well I'm being deployed." And he was like "...when did you find out?" And I was like "...about an hour ago..."

Alan's world, just like Karl's, turned in the space of a phone call. One moment, Alan was enjoying his third week of his first semester, the next moment, he was contemplating the next 18 months of his life. His reaction – one that he reported as almost surreal – was similar to reactions by many participants in this study. Alan went on to say:

I kind of expected it. But it was still a shock. The next biggest thing was how am I gonna tell my mom this. This was her biggest fear, I gotta tell her I'm going away for 18 months to Iraq. There's a lot of questions: what's gonna go on now, where does it go from here? Part of it is what about school, what am I gonna do with this. But it was more just like, what goes on now. It was a weird feeling. A lot of questions that I couldn't answer, that I had to go find out.

Although this time period was significant, often the decisions regarding school were quite easy. Once the individual confirmed his or her mobilization, departing his or her educational institution was a matter of a few steps. Staying with Alan's narrative:

I stopped by the registrar's office and said "...hey I'm being deployed, I just found out today, what do I have to do?" And they're like "...just get us a copy of the orders and everything will be fine." So I called up my unit, they faxed them a copy of the orders and that was that.

Alan's narrative illustrates the simplicity of withdrawal. But it also suggested something else contained in the language: *just get me a copy of the orders and everything will be fine.*

Although likely stated by a well-intentioned staffer, comments such as these reflected the disconnect of school officials and procedures from the weight of one's impending deployment.

Daniel, a 23 year-old Iraq veteran, also expressed these ease of leaving school:

The first thing I did was I had to go and talk to my school. Luckily they said that I'm not the first person to have this situation. What I could do is put everything on a freeze and when I came back I could just pick up where I left off.

As with Alan, Daniel's comments show a communication that starting and stopping will be a simple task; this is similar to Alan's campus response. His registration office said he could just *pick up where he left off*, a statement that was far from the mark.

As noted earlier, things generally moved from clouded and uncertain to more clear. I would not suggest that things became *crystal* clear, but certainly more focus came as the process moved on. As the cloudy portion ended, *reveille* – or the wakeup – began.

In the military world, practical exercises and tasks comprise a large portion of the time spent in preparation for deployment. The time leading up to one's departure – known as "Soldier Readiness Processing" (SRP) – was described similarly by each member. Much of the SRP period was occupied by seemingly mundane activities – medical examinations, review and issuing of gear, administrative reviews and so forth. Most of these tasks were completed without much thought or regard. But one aspect of SRP seemed to solidify the *reveille* dimension: completing a will.

All participants in this study could be considered young, in fact many were still teenagers when they first deployed. The idea of doing a will was foreign to many. The process, however, clearly communicated to the member that things may not go well *in the box*. Rick, a 26 year-old

Marine turned National Guardsman who served in Iraq and is currently deployed back to Iraq commented on writing a will:

It's sobering. I didn't do a professional will. I just had a power of attorney done because I didn't have anything. I was 21 when I went over there. But for my personal gear, I had my LT sign it as a witness. I sent it home, just kinda divvying up my personal belongings amongst my brothers. That was very depressing to my mother. But before we went over, my LT made us write death letters in the event of our death. So that kinda opens your eyes at the time that this is a possibility.

Alan offered further insight:

We were all kids, we all had wills and all our money went to our mothers. Power of attorney was our moms, your mom's not gonna steal your money.

Alan's comments reflected one of many sad aspects of military mobilization. Sometimes when individuals are *in the box* people back home do less than honorable things. His assertion that "...mom's not gonna steal your money..." is in direct relation to the many stories shared within units of what some people did back home while their significant other was deployed.

You had people whose wives were divorced. One person in our unit.....I wanna say it was a boyfriend, stole all her money. This happened to another guy too – his wife took his money, took his kids and left.

The process of completing a will summoned a reality check – a wakeup, if you will – not previously experienced by most. It symbolized the possibility of never returning, but it also served as a catalyst for other concerns, some of which were equally troubling. What happens while I'm away? Will things be the same when I get back? For some, this question focused on one's family – for others, concern was focused on their significant other. Still others wanted

badly to remain in school, concerned about the two year delay in their accumulation of credits that was about to occur. Many members privately hoped that things would remain the same. That upon their return home, they would simply begin from where they ended. Or, in Alan's words:

You think that somebody pushed pause, you left for a while, and when you come back they press play. And that didn't happen for a lot of people.

These concerns reflected the sentiments of members as the first phase of the undergraduate military mobilization process closes. Actual deployment was much closer now, no longer appearing as some abstract reality far in the distance. College moved far into the background as did other civilian aspects of life. Although the feeling of *hurry up and wait* continued to occur throughout all of military life, it assumed the proverbial backseat to other, more salient elements at this time.

The next phase of the process – *in the box* – began while members were still Stateside. It began with a ceremony which marked the last time one's family and friends saw their military member for the next six months.

Understanding Phase 1

Phase 1 began with individuals shifting between competing identities and demands of the soldier and the student. This constant shifting presented challenges to these participants. In his theory on "role strain," Goode (1960) posits that individuals often occupy several role relationships "...for each of which there will be somewhat different obligations" (p. 485). These differing roles can take the form of competing obligations or "...conflicts of time, place or resources..." (p. 485). Although not writing about the military, Goode provided the following example to illuminate his theory: "...the infantry lieutenant who must order his close friend to

risk his life in battle” (p. 485). In this example, the conflicting roles of military leader and friend must be reconciled, with one assuming authority over the other. From these conflicts, role strain can emerge. Goode defined role strain as “...the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations...” (p. 483). In these participants, their dual (and dueling) but equally important roles of student and soldier required them to juggle between the two. When the academic role demanded attention, the military role could intervene and unilaterally claim attention. As Phase 1 progressed, what at one time might have seemed somewhat equally divided clearly tipped in favor of one’s military obligations, leading to an even more dominant military role for these participants.

Borrowing from Goode’s theory, some role strain prior to deployment existed for all of these participants – but that strain severely increased as an unflinching military obligation took center stage. What was once more of an egalitarian orientation of these two roles shifted to one that was more hierarchical, with the military identity assuming command. In summarizing Mead’s conceptualization of the self, MacDermid and Marks (1996) wrote the following:

They [the symbolic interactionists] recognize only one kind of organization of the self-system and role system – a hierarchical one....The problem of juggling multiple roles and identities is solved by favoring some of them rather than others (p. 418).

This interpretation of Mead and the larger symbolic interactionism perspective is appropriate to these individuals. School morphed into a place simply to hang out. Thus one’s student-self became a distant second to one’s military-self. Further loosening one’s grip on school was the knowledge that the institution must provide a full monetary reimbursement to any student who withdraws for military mobilization. Without monetary or personal reasons to leave school immediately, most drifted out *in the pasture* until official orders were available.

With the overtaking of the military role, individuals found themselves *once again* volunteering. For each of these individuals, their first time volunteering was during the initial enlistment. That initial decision to volunteer was certainly significant, but the second time volunteering proved life changing. As the narrative depicted, most participants in this study did volunteer for their deployment, a secret that some keep to themselves to this day.

Kelty, Segal, and Woodruff (2006) summarized the primary reasons that individuals voluntarily enlist in today's armed forces.

These motivations included altruistic motives expressed in terms of duty, service and patriotism...in addition to...self-improvement through increasing self-esteem and personal skills and acquiring job skills and training (p. 355).

These authors also noted the tremendous rise in monetary incentives, and subsequent individual motivations for enlisting, since the rise of the all-volunteer force in the early 1970s. Not surprisingly, most of the reasons for enlisting given for these interviews are found in the above passage, with the dominant motivation being financial benefit.

These descriptors, however, only provided insight into the initial enlistment decision. What about the voluntary decision to go on a deployment? There appears to be an unspoken and unwritten code in military units. Essentially, this code states that, for those who can truly be deployed without facing a family, occupational or similar hardship, he or she *should* volunteer. Kai Erikson (1994) theorized that

...human communities can be said to maintain boundaries in the sense that its members tend to confine themselves to a particular radius of activity and to regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral (p. 32).

These military units are, as Erikson described, human communities. Interestingly, Erikson's theory is one of deviance – namely, what happens when a member of that community steps outside the boundary that was constructed by that community? It is in this instance that these military units enforced their unwritten code: When the voluntary call to deploy came, “boundary maintenance” happened. Those who could step forward often did. Two stories, where members stepped outside the boundary illustrate this concept. A participant talked about how his unit was put on notice that a deployment was possible in the future. The plan was for volunteers to be solicited, followed by directed orders until the appropriate force strength was reached. One of his fellow soldiers, hearing of this, promptly scheduled an appointment to receive Lasik corrective eye surgery. Knowing this would bar him from deployment, he had the surgery and was subsequently deemed non-deployable. Carly also spoke of a female soldier whom she and others suspected intentionally “got pregnant” to avoid deployment. The unit informally responded to both instances swiftly and clearly. Both individuals were immediately ostracized and deemed outcasts. In each case, the boundaries – and the values – of this human community were enforced.

On a personal level, I drilled at my reserve unit several months back, during hurricane season. Hurricane Ike had just made landfall and was creating a good deal of destruction. They gathered about 25 of us in a small room and the Master Chief stood up before us. He asked us who wanted to volunteer for recovery duty, should there be a need. The tension in the room was palpable. I reflected on my own situation and how chaotic it would be if I left, even if only for a few weeks. But I got up and put my name on the list, so did most others in the room. I cannot speak for others, but I felt *compelled* to put my name down. Later that day, a handful of Coasties who volunteered earlier were called to the office and sent packing that evening. Although not

among them, I felt good about volunteering. I felt like it was the right thing to do. This is the same sense I received from these soldiers. Volunteering was the right thing, the community thing, to do.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, volunteering is deeply symbolic, both to the individual and the unit. Often these calls for volunteers were made with the entire unit together, similar to my own depiction above. This somewhat theatrical effort allowed all members of the unit to see who “steps forward.” This symbolic act of volunteering, or not volunteering, communicated to others in the unit: *Who’s willing? Who’s not? That person stepped up – I never thought he/she would. That person didn’t step up – I can’t believe it.* This symbolic gesture redrew lines within the unit, in accordance with Erikson’s theory. But it also deepened the sense of bravado and strength already part of this culture.

Phase 1 concluded with one’s forthcoming deployment only days away. It was a complicated and often lengthy time, enduring anywhere from one month to six or more. Difficult and life altering decisions were made. Dual and dueling identities were reconciled for a time, with one’s military identity eventually winning out. Phase 2 provided additional complexities and challenges, some entirely different from the first phase. They are chronicled next.

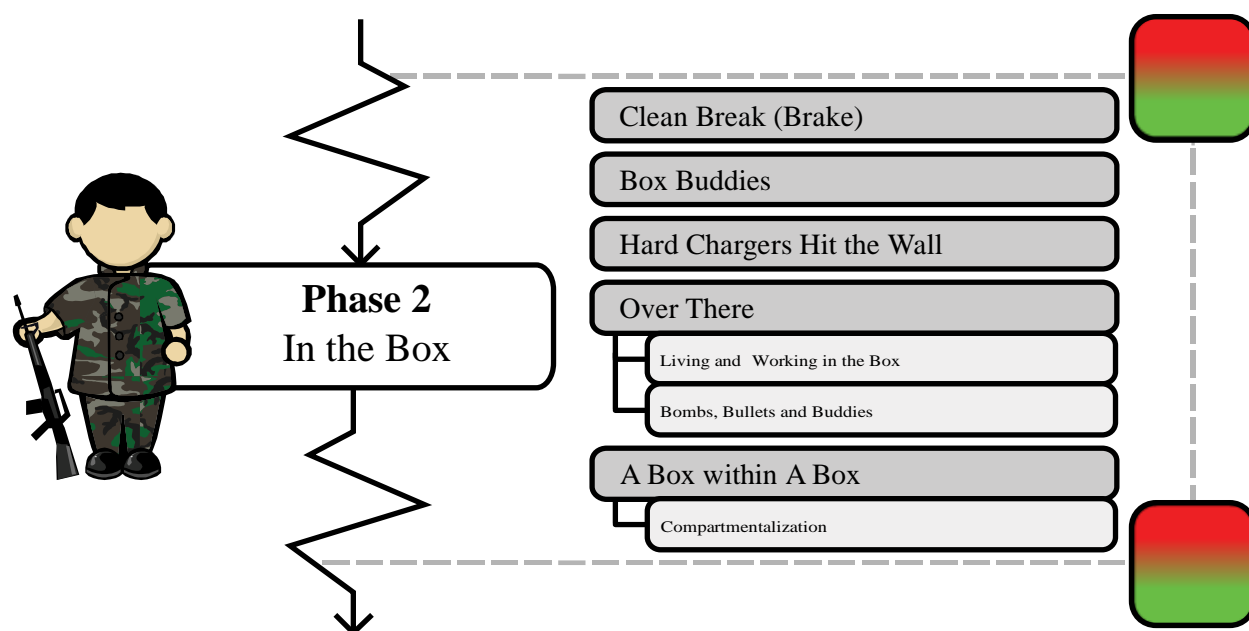
Phase 2: In the Box

“In the box” represents my larger category for Phase 2. During the first phase, the dimension of being *in the box* represented military culture and was countered by being out *in the pasture*, or the dimension that represented college life. In Phase 2, being *in the box* denotes a larger category, symbolic of the all encompassing nature of military culture. For those who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan or other Middle Eastern theaters, being *in the box* also more literally translates to “*in the sandbox.*” This phrase reflected the conditions – specifically the desert

conditions – one experienced while in country. But being *in the box* was more than one's physical location. As the development of the concepts within this category demonstrated, being *in the box* encompassed all aspects of military life.

Figure 5 provides a graphical depiction this phase. The figure on the left is fully clad in fatigues, depicting complete immersion into the box. A rifle has joined him, symbolizing the intimate connection soldiers have with their weapon throughout their deployment. A jagged line comes from Phase 1 and connects with Phase 2, another leaves Phase 2 headed for the next set of experiences. The outer right side of the figure shows the gradients again. As before, red fades into green, depicting the unclear stopping and starting points that exist between phases. Within the phase, five concepts are presented – “clean break,” “box buddies,” “hard chargers hit the wall,” “over there” and “a box within a box.” These concepts, along with supportive passages from the interviews, are provided next.

Figure 5. Graphical depiction of Phase 2 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



In the Box Concept – Clean Break (Brake)

Phase 2 encompassed the separation aspect of this process, which actually began State-side. Shortly before units departed, a ceremonial function was held, allowing family and friends a final opportunity say farewell. But it also represented a time when individuals finally made a “clean break” from their families and “put on the brake” regarding their civilian identities. This *clean break* was met with a sense of finality, often due to the months of readiness. There was a sense of “*let’s get going here...*” that members expressed during our interviews. Although an emotional time for all, it was also a welcomed time, as it represented progress toward immersion into the box. It was ironic that making a *clean break* – symbolizing freedom to these participants – subsequently landed one *in the box*.

Many participants in this study recounted how this was the first time *fathers* showed any signs of distress. Previously, mothers were emotional, nervous and scared for their son or daughter. But in this ceremony, fathers tended to drop their stoicism, their emotions no longer contained. Daniel provided an example:

I see all my family members getting emotional and then I get emotional just thinking about that. Like the first time my dad showed his emotions toward me. That was the first time I saw him cry on that day. By the end of the day I just didn’t know what to do.

In one of those military quirks, this “final” ceremony was not always followed immediately by one’s departure. In some cases, final departure occurred early the next morning, allowing some members to return home for one final evening. This was the case for Daniel. For him, going home that night allowed him to see more emotions from his father than ever before:

We got back from the ceremony and he couldn't get out of his car because he was crying and he didn't want to cry in front of me. That was before anybody ever saw him sad. That was the first time he was sad for anything. It's not so much that he was worried, he was worried he would lose his boy, but I think it was more that he was sad because we never really did get that true relationship which we do have now. I guess he kinda felt like he mighta screwed up a little bit. But that was the first time I ever saw him react. And that was probably the most disturbing thing for me or the saddest thing for me. I ended up crying as well with him.

In our interview, Daniel was very open about his relationship with his father, both past and present. It was this openness that allowed for the sentiments expressed above. Carly, conversely, provided only a brief glimpse of her relationship with her father. It was enough of a glimpse, however, to suggest the difficulty that her father experienced with her departure. I distinctly recall this portion of our interview. Carly was going strong, recounting her final evening before leaving:

We had a going away party. My friends from campus came – both sets of friends. My RA [resident advisor] friends and my nursing friends. Everybody came and that was the hardest night. Because my family was all there. And it was in between Christmas and New Years. And it was really hard, because I was saying goodbye and I didn't know when I'd be seeing them again. Obviously it would be like six months or something until I would see them again. That was a tough night. My aunts and stuff cried a lot – they cried more than my parents. But my parents had to be strong for me because they're my parents. That wasn't as hard on them as it was on the rest of my family.

But then she slowed down, and seemed to be more reflective. Her speech trailed off. I waited for what was her final comment:

When I look back on it and look at some of the things that my dad said or how he acted, it was harder on him than anybody. But I didn't know that at the time. And I wasn't a very good daughter at some points when he needed me to be supportive and I was just like "why are you upset, you're not even here....." But that's another story though (trails off.....). So we got.....where do you want me to go next?

It was almost as if she was shaking herself out of a trance. The message seemed clear, however: move on. These emotions, as evidenced by Daniel and Carly, were very real for the families, friends, and finally for the member themselves.

Once clear and off to the training site, participants in this study finally shifted gears. After months of preparation, all readiness periods were complete, and members stepped on the bus to begin their physical separation from people and places. They began their time fully immersed *in the box*.

In the Box Concept – Box Buddies

Phase 2 included a distinct shift towards one's military "buddies." Barry, a 23 year-old Specialist who deployed to Iraq provided a good example of the changing relationships:

I did miss everyone back home, family, friends and it was hard but being over there really made me get closer with people in my unit. Before that I wasn't really that social with them since they looked at me as a bad soldier (since I missed so many drills) so being there really made everyone a family. I've gotten closer with people and I know I'm going be friends with them for a lifetime.

There was something special about the bond that formed between individuals in these stressful and potentially life-threatening situations. Evidence of this bond was first noticed in excerpts about basic training, where the intensity forced people into an unexpected kinship. Furthering this kinship for many was the act of *keeping the secret* about volunteering for deployment. The extended deployment served to deepen – or more accurately, solidify – this kinship. Ryan, an Army National Guard infantryman provided his take on these relationships:

The only people I trusted were the people wearing the flag. Or the people standing next to me. We've been shot at together, we've been blown up, we've been burned, we've been in fist fights, riots, I can trust those guys.

For the participants in this study, being *in the box* indicated an immersion into full, active military service. It meant accepting, or at least tolerating, military culture and methods. As a result of the depth and duration of this military service, these personal relationships – these *box buddies* – are some of the more lasting and heartening outcomes of what is sometimes an ugly conflict.

In the Box Concept – Hard Chargers Hit the Wall

Most individuals interviewed for this project went first to Camp Shelby in Mississippi for one to three months. Others went to Fort Dix in New Jersey and another went to California. Participants described this State-side train-up as a necessary evil. Alan, whose second tour of Iraq is coming up soon, provided a description of the mood:

All the training I did in that month and a half [while at Ft. Dix] we could have done in a week. Maybe two weeks. A lot of people were annoyed because you're gonna send us, just send us. Don't let us sit here. First we're doing training, everybody's all gung ho, they're all like let's go do this...and then after a while

you're doing the same thing over and over again. At that point, people are like what are we still doing here?

Although accepted as necessary by those who participated, the often prolonged training period was difficult on the participants. It was also ironic that, now on active duty, participants described this period as anything but active. Karl's reflections on this experience provided further evidence:

Fort Bragg was absolutely horrible. They set-up this makeshift FOB [forward operating base] in the middle of the woods, just flattened it, set-up tents and a chow hall to give you an idea of what it was like to live down range and it was utterly and completely ridiculous because it was nothing like living down range and it was just the worst three months of my military experience, ever in my life, just absolutely asinine. They would run out of food, there was never any hot water, there were three shower trailers for 2,000 people. For three months, in the middle of the woods, we lived in tents. The chow hall didn't even have chairs in them, you got your plate and they had these real high tables and you just stood there and ate.

Lex provided similar insight:

Whereas probably the biggest negative of the entire deployment across the board from everyone I talked to was the six months at [Camp] Shelby or wherever they went. It was the most painful. From my standards, the training was horrible.

Contrast this passage with insight that Lex provided earlier in the interview:

Especially, at least for me, being an infantryman, being deployed to a combat zone, it's like getting to play in the Olympics.

Like many, Lex was excited prior to his departure. Lex and many others were the *hard chargers*, fueled by adrenaline and energized by the deployment. *These guys wanted action*. But these hard chargers *hit the wall*, one they perceived as erected by our own military leaders and training programs. In effect, the extended, State-side training served primarily to deflate the enthusiasm initially harbored by these individuals. Whereas in the first phase, the start-stop rhythm was due largely to rumors and chatter, in the second phase the start-stop rhythm was due largely to the ebbing and flowing of one's enthusiasm for the mission and the overall military experience. Further complicating matters was that this training time does not count toward one's total deployment time. Typically, the military provides its members with orders indicating the amount of time one must have *boots on the ground* – and in this case, the ground meant the “sandbox.” Thus spending one month or six months in a state-side training program did not reduce the amount of time one must spend in the box. But like all aspects of military build-up, this portion ends – and like other aspects it ends with a beginning – in this instance, that beginning involves going *over there*.

In the Box Concept – Over There

“Over there” generally meant two places: Iraq or Afghanistan. It should be noted, however, that there are other *over theres*: Egypt, Bosnia, Qatar, Kuwait, the horn of Africa. In fact, many participants in this study spent some time elsewhere, either for training purposes or in a sort of holding pattern until their final destination could be reached. But once the final destination was reached the operational tempo* (OPTEMPO) began in earnest. This portion of being *in the box* – once boots finally landed in the sandbox – is where each student-veteran created his or her own path. As a result, the experiences and stories of the veterans during this time period are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some members went outside the wire*,

their M-16s or SAWs (squad automatic weapon) on alert for potential enemies. Other members served guard duty in a tower overlooking the perimeter. Some sat inside an office analyzing intelligence documents, preparing reports for senior enlisted soldiers and officers. Still others administered personnel documents, addressed pay issues and performed other clerical duties. In the end, however, two main dimensions within the concept of *over there* emerged across the participants: (1) *living and working in the box* and (2) *bullets and bombs and buddies*. These two dimensions influenced how one eventually appraised his or her military experience and also impacted the emotional success with which he or she returned home. Each of these elements will be considered, along with supporting excerpts from the interviews.

In the Box Concept – Over There / Living and Working in the Box (conditions)

This dimension – “living and working in the box (conditions)” – includes one’s geographic location, living situation, working conditions and personal safety concerns among other elements experienced and interpreted by participants in this study. These aspects coalesced and had a broad impact, positive or negative, on one’s overall experience while in country.

Participants in this study who deployed to two countries provided the most insight into the differences between the two countries and how one’s location contributed to one’s *conditions*. Robert, a 24 year-old Corporal first served in Iraq and then Afghanistan:

I volunteered to go to Afghanistan, because they were deploying to Iraq and I didn't want to go back to Iraq, because Iraq had really sucked. Afghanistan turned out to be much worse.....you never would think it because of everything else. I was on a combat outpost in the middle of a mountain with 30 guys, flying all our food in, resupplying in a helicopter. There were 30 of us and 30 Afghans and that was it. And we were getting into it about once every 10 days. There was

a lot of stuff going on. It was rough.....we were living in tents, we cooked all our own food, killing goats and stuff, we'd get goats and stuff because we'd get sick of MREs. It was like if you were to ask a 12 year old kid what it's like to be in the military, that would be the answer they would give. Thirty guys living on a mountain in the middle of the desert.*

Robert's efforts to avoid Iraq – a place he did not want to return to – backfired. Robert's perception at the time, was that Iraq was far worse. But his experience in Afghanistan proved otherwise. In total, Robert spent five months of his deployment to Afghanistan living on the side of the mountain, occasionally killing goats for food, and living in tents.

Location also mattered within a country, as some locations had a higher operational tempo than others. Still other locations were more of a “hotbed” than others. Steve, an Iraq veteran who is currently serving a second tour in Iraq, had this to say about his conditions:

We were living in those bunkers and when we first got there. We didn't have any showers. They didn't have any way to feed us, we ate MREs, we slept on the floor for like three weeks. Didn't shower for three weeks. And then everything came. We had some army cooks cooking out of an 18 wheeler freezer truck and they brought us some portable cold showers, and this was in January so it was pretty friggin crappy. It was cold. I remember putting on all the clothes I had and still being cold. At first, they let us use fires. Then one of the mechanics ended up getting in a fight over firewood. And they were like, ok you want to fight about it then nobody gets fires. That was real shitty because it was really cold. Finally borrowed some space heaters. These were open OPs [outside perimeters] so the wind was whipping around and it just didn't do anything. It was so hard to stay*

awake all night. We would end up both falling asleep sometimes, it was a real bad scene. It just wasn't good at all. And we ended up doing that for 4 months.

Evan, a 24 year-old former private was there in 2003, during the initial build up and invasion of Iraq. He recalled a time that pre-dates the current conflict, when the rules of engagement were looser and the overall condition was determined along the way. One excerpt recalled by Evan in an animated fashion provided insight into his conditions:

Here's a story, we had an outhouse get hit. I mean I was there in Iraq in the first wave, I was there when we were burning shit and stirring the diesel in with it and lighting it up, full chemical gear and everything. Stirring that down, it was disgusting. And getting rid of these old wooden port-o-potties that they had there, where there was actually this tray where you removed it and carried the stuff out – it was disgusting. So yeah, I was there in that first wave, where the men were men and so were the women.

Evan's description provided something that many in the states do not see: a brief glimpse into some of the early experiences in Iraq. This glimpse, however, was oriented more toward life on a particular base. Though insightful, each member also has his or her own *personal* living and working conditions while in the box. Rick, who was also present for the invasion, provided an account of his personal conditions:

Well the first 27 days we were in our MOC gear (anti-biological gear) and that's charcoal so it keeps at least another ten degrees in. It's already over 100 degrees and you're wearing your flak jacket which is another ten degrees, you got all your gear on, probably 65 pounds worth of shit. Nice thing about it is it kept the smell in. Everybody celebrated when we took them off, but the vehicle smelled like BO,*

so terrible. I was pissed off for being over there. We had to go 47 days without a shower, and everybody stank like shit, you're miserable for so long.

Rick went on to say how all of this impacted his health:

I myself had a bad case of dysentery because there's no soap, the water we had was mainly for drinking I didn't want to waste it in case we got stranded or something. So yea I ended up with a bad case of dysentery, and I lost about 30 pounds (matter of fact). But the army didn't have water, and we didn't have food.

In a similar fashion, Jason, a 27 year-old Sergeant deployed twice recalled one of his earliest working conditions in Afghanistan:

You're literally looking at mines that have been sitting around since the Soviet era. In Bagram, you could not go a day without a mine strip going off, whether it be detonation, just because, or some goat or cattle would hit it or a kid would hit it and you know, before long, somebody would be dragging some maimed person to our front gate after they had gotten blown up by a minefield because their parents would send their kids into the minefield to go get the scrap metal. But that was my first job [helping to clear the minefield], I only did that for about a week.

Like Rick, Jason smiled and laughed as he recalled their experiences. But from an outside perspective, these conditions, whether personal conditions or work conditions, provided a picture not often observed or understood by those not involved in this conflict. But it would be unfair to say that those conditions were common to all who participated in this study. Some simply regarded their time over there as a job, one to be done just like any other. This job, however, happened to be in a combat zone, where personal safety was often compromised each day.

In the Box Concept – Over There / Bombs and Bullets and Buddies (events)

The interviews revealed a two pronged aspect to the *in the box* phase. The second prong – “bullets and bombs and buddies (events)” – also impacted individuals, both positively and negatively. *Events* included close-calls, firefights, seeing friends hurt, conflicts within one’s unit and so forth. As with *conditions*, *events* shaped one’s experience, often resulting in memorable, haunting outcomes. Ryan, a 22 year-old freshman who is currently deployed back to Iraq provided broad perspective on the type of events happening over there:

It was terrible and it was good in the same way. I could tell you the bad parts all day and the good parts and you’ll laugh. Granted I lost 11 friends over there. Yea we all wear bracelets for them. It’s war. You’re going to lose people. That’s the hardest part, you know?

Ryan’s remark that he “...lost 11 friends over there...” suggested the tragic nature of these experiences. But another aspect of Ryan’s reflections was also telling. Looking back on the interview, Ryan could have been discussing any manner of mundane topics, yet he was discussing how he lost 11 friends. As the interviewer, it seemed unthinkable that Ryan recalled this story while seemingly devoid of emotion. I was beginning to see how participants were erecting walls around some of their trauma, thus protecting themselves from any emotional impact.

Randy provided another example of the tragic nature of events over there and the subsequent barriers that were erected:

I mean the worst thing that I ever experienced - we had a group of guys we used to eat lunch with every day before we’d go out on patrol. One day we ate lunch, they went out, we didn’t go out until about a half hour later, and we saw a piece

of equipment over on the side burning and sure enough it was those guys we just ate lunch with, ah all seven of them were...now dead. I mean, how you could be perfectly okay one minute and then completely gone in the next minute, that was tough – it tells you exactly where your place is as far as, how much you really don't have control of, and ah, that was awkward.

As with Ryan, Randy described this event in a straightforward and almost detached tone. The only hint of emotion was the slight strain in Randy's voice. Reflecting on this exchange, I could not help but wonder when (or if) these emotions would come out. Rick, the Specialist who lost 30 pounds, recalled these events from his mobilization.

When we first invaded we took some artillery rounds. Me and a friend of mine were digging out a fox hole, and this round landed way too close, like 50 yards which was in the kill zone. But it didn't explode. It just landed and it started to smoke. I assumed it was a dud or a marked round or maybe chemical. That was my only close call. In my company, a friend of mine, his vehicle got shot by Blackhawks. Because friendly fire, they misread the armor ID, so their corpsman took shrapnel through is leg and back. The VC took some through the neck. I think 3 of them were injured, nobody died though.

Rick recalled this in a perfectly natural tone, no stress, no concern – just another event that happened *in the box* – on the same plane with going to the exchange or the chow hall. In a similar tone, absent of emotion, Lex recalled an event:

One of our vehicles was completely destroyed. Everybody inside.....died. It was one of the Bradlees, burnt down to about three feet tall. We actually had to go out and secure the scene. Pick up pieces. Put one of our friends in a body bag and put

him on the truck. There were a lot of people that couldn't handle it. You could tell it took them a long time. I really think it's absolutely because of being hazed in ranger battalion. I think it was the best thing in the world for it. I'm absolutely glad that my team leader hazed me. Because it gave me the ability to turn everything on and off.

Similarly, Jared, a 22 year-old Sergeant deployed to Afghanistan recalled a terrible event that happened while he was on a convoy:

You can't get complacent. We had some close calls over there and if you get complacent you're screwed. We had a little kid run through our convoy and he blew up. It's crazy [Note: the 'little kid' had an IED strapped to him]

Karl, who returned in November 2008 from his second deployment recalled, in what is now a common flattened tone:

Karl: The only real thing is, is when you get blown up, you hit the roadside bombs - we got hit with a couple of them, got lucky, nothing ever happened to me.

Mark: But your truck itself got hit?

Karl: Yeah, I was the only one on the team that didn't get a purple heart, like my driver got caught in a mortar and my gunner, one of the bombs we hit, since he was out and exposed, he caught some shrapnel in his neck, destroyed his weapon, like literally ripped it in half, but he was okay.

Many observers would regard the stories with a range of emotions: tragic, frightening, nauseating. But with these individuals there was gathering support regarding an idea presented earlier – members seemed to construct walls around some of the particularly difficult events. These walls were evidenced by the flat, detached and dispassionate manner in which intense or

tragic events were recounted. As the outside observer, I cannot help but think that this detachment – or this ability to turn things off – helped these individuals cope with their experiences *at the time*. However, although this coping mechanism might assist in the short term, I questioned its viability in the long term.

Although most participants discussed what happened to *others*, Robert talked about his *own* combat wound. Of all the participants, Robert was the only individual that was wounded (to my knowledge). Robert's passage, though long, detailed one example of the range of *conditions and events* and how they interacted and changed over time.

The beginning of the deployment was shooting your machine guns and rock and roll music and hanging out with the boys. It was a fun good time. Then people start to get hurt. I felt really shitty about it because it was an IED that was in the road and we're the lead vehicle, and I found literally hundreds of these things before driving down the road. They're all over the place in Iraq and Afghanistan and some of them are concealed very well and some of them are not concealed at all. I've found them before but that day I just didn't catch it. And now that guy that was driving damn near died over it. Lost his eye over it. He's a big mess, broke his jaw knocked all his teeth out of his head. He was in a bad way. I feel bad because a hundred other times you catch it and one time you don't, that's kinda like.....I wished I woulda caught it. It changes because it puts the fear in you. Because when you're young like that, I don't care what they say, everybody feels like you're invincible. Everybody likes to drive fast in their cars and their motorcycles and just do stupid stuff all the time. But people are frail. Even when you go through experiences like that, it's the frailty of people. Especially over

there, because you feel like you're a giant among men. I mean here I am in my bullet proof vest with my uparmored humvee and my machine gun. It doesn't really get any harder than that (laughs). You feel like you're impervious to all that crap. But then you get hurt or you see friends get killed or friends get seriously hurt. And it's like wow, it's happening. It's not a movie, it's not a game it's not anything like that.*

At the end of our conversation, Robert shared that he too was wounded during the blast:

I'm kind of not supposed to be in a combat arms MOS anymore because my hearing is all jacked on the left side from getting blown up so I don't really hear well out of the left hand side of my head.*

Initially, Robert glossed over the event involving the IED explosion and the subsequent injuries experienced by himself and his crew. This was one scenario that I did not, however, pass by without digging deeper. As an interviewer, I had developed some confidence and some comfort with these scenarios. I had also developed more ability to discern when it was acceptable to push a bit more and when I should back off. With Robert I pushed a bit and, as a result, he shared the passages above. But Robert was not yet finished. He provided a second piece of insight, this one related to when he later served in a supervisory capacity as a team leader in Afghanistan.

My first deployment, I was just a Joe. A regular soldier didn't have anybody under me. I was just a machine gunner in a humvee and an MP [military police] and that was it. In the second deployment I was a fire team leader – so I had three guys under me that I was responsible for. That changed things a lot too. Because the first deployment I saw a lot of myself in them because it was their first

deployment, and they would get excited when we'd get into contact, when we'd get into ticks. That's the way it was [for me] the first time; and the second time I was like "guys, be happy if it was completely quiet the rest of the time that we're here." Every time that something pops off, yea it's exciting, it's a rush, it's an adrenaline rush that you can't parallel. But at the same time it's an opportunity for someone that you know and care about to get killed or for yourself to get hurt. You only get woken up out of bed so many times before you start thinking when's the next one gonna be me?*

Although each experienced his or her own set of conditions and events, most regarded them as stressful during the deployment. Based on the interviews, it was clear that one's *conditions and events* experienced while *in the box* influenced the overall deployment experience.

In the Box Concept - A Box within a Box

As the interviews moved on, it was clear to me a final concept remained within this category. "A box within a box" depicts the idea that military personnel, already existing within a box, already living and working in the sandbox, endeavored to create more boxes within which they placed some of their more difficult experiences. This cognitive exercise allowed one to *compartmentalize* the emotion associated with a particular event while still allowing sufficient access to "tell the story." Preliminary evidence for this concept was presented in several previous passages. Members recalled their stories with vivid detail, but the manner in which they presented the account lacked what seemed to be "appropriate" emotions (i.e. anger, sorrow, sadness). The following passages provide more concrete evidence of the concept of *a box within a box*.

Jerry, who deployed with his brother, regarded his time over there as a job, one to be done just like any other:

It was like any other job. I mean, assuming like nothing bad happened, you didn't get attacked or anything. It was just like another job – just show up at the gate, be there when it opens, secure the gate, make sure – check vehicles coming through, close it down at the end of the day.

Although I am unsure as to how many would regard his time as “*just like any other job*,” it is clear that Jerry did not regard his daily activity over there as stressful. I pressed Jerry a bit more, as I was curious to know if his job was as mundane as he was suggesting. I asked him if he “...had any close calls...” and he replied with this:

We got in two ticks and we got attacked once. Me myself, I never really had... the only really close call I ever really thought I had turned out to be nothing. But we were out on a mission and we were rolling through a river bed that had dried up and it was supposed to be a hotbed for IEDs and one of the vehicles behind me, calls up to my vehicle, and I'm driving, and says: “...I think vehicle five (which is my vehicle) I think they're on a wire.” And I hit the brakes and am like shitting my pants, cause I thought he was saying we were on a trip wire for an IED. That was pretty much the scariest because I'm like, now I'm dead. (laughing.) I was just waiting for it to blow up and then he comes back and says: “...or maybe that's an antenna or something.” And I was like, you've.... (laughing) I'm freaking out, I'm telling the truck command, I'm like, get out and find this thing.*

Jerry's answer to my question revealed something: perhaps *he* did not regard his time over there as stressful or as anything other than ordinary. But my sense is that many non-military individuals would feel that his "...two ticks and one attack..." more than qualify as stressful experiences. This speaks to the individuality of one's experience, and it also speaks to internal mechanisms that allow one to successfully adapt to, or compartmentalize, personal experiences.

Brenda, a 24 year-old Staff Sergeant and helicopter mechanic who *volunteered to go on individual gunner missions* (it was not part of her required duties) commented in a similar fashion:

I would say the majority of our deployment, especially the first couple months was not very stressful. You know where you are going to eat, you know where you are going to sleep and you know what you are going to do every day. It was predictable and it was very easy. We had virtually no hostile contact for our first five months. Then once we started taking fire, we had a bunch of stuff happen all at once. We had two Blackhawks that went down within two weeks of each other. You have all the routine maintenance stuff and then now all of a sudden you have all this battle damage stuff that you have to deal with. So there was a point where our OPTEMPO was ridiculous. Then the tail end of that coincided with the beginning of the surge, so now there's a much greater demand for moving stuff around because now there's more people. That was when I was working and then on mission and then working again –sleeping in the tool room between the work benches for a couple hours (laughing).

Shortly after this exchange, Brenda revealed how at times her aircraft came back with bullet holes in the metal.

You come back and you've got bullet holes in the aircraft and you're looking at them and you're like, wait was this here yesterday, or did this happen today (laughing)?

Like Jerry, Brenda was matter of fact about her *condition*, going even so far to laugh at the end of her comments. As with Jerry, my sense was that there was something within Brenda that allowed her to appraise her circumstances in this fashion.

Perhaps the most striking example of this internal appraisal mechanism was Randy. In all of my interviews, Randy provided some of the most insightful comments. But they were also some of the most troubling.

I've seen some of the worst possible things I think a human could see, I've done some of the worst things I think a person could do in their life in situations I'm glad most people don't have to see. I lost people who were very good at what they did – very nice people who were just there for money for college or there cause they had a kid that was born unexpectedly and this was the only way they could get a job cause where they are from there's no economy and they just go out and they try to do their job everyday and they end up not (pausing) being able to come home.

Other than a slight strain in his voice, Randy provided this account as if he was talking about the weather. I think that Randy's comments, along with comments from Jerry, Brenda and others, are evidence of an internal mechanism which allowed one to *compartmentalize* these difficult or emotional conditions. During one of my member checks, presented later, Jason had this to say in response to my idea about compartmentalization:

It's like they're watching a movie and talking about it; but it's not a movie that we're in.

Jason agreed with my compartmentalization idea, but we both struggled with the following question: When do the emotions come out? This question would become a major element of Phase 3.

Understanding Phase 2

Phase 2 began with a final shift from one's civilian identity and associated friends and family, to one's military identity. Relationships with *box buddies* became paramount, both during the State-side training and during one's time in the sandbox. A study by Bahraini et al. (2008) found that returning veterans "...overwhelmingly emphasized a sense of connection with other military personnel" (p. 219). This connection was both during and after deployment and often the result of enduring similar experiences. A study by Millen et al (2003) yielded similar results. Conceptualized as "motivated for others," these authors found that "...the most frequent response given for combat motivation was 'fighting for my buddies'" (p. 9). They concluded that "...the soldiers were talking about social cohesion – the emotional bonds between soldiers..." (Millen et al, p. 10).

As Erikson defined earlier, this human community – which for this study is considered to be the military unit – became the lifeblood of its individual members, complete with its own culture, values, and norms. Brett (2000) asserts that

...in collectivist cultures, norms and institutions promote interdependence of individuals through emphasis on social obligations; sacrifice of personal needs for the greater good is rewarded... (p. 99).

Relationships created and maintained within military units were often what sustained these members through the most difficult encounters. Although conceptualized by Brett as “social obligations,” a similar notion is readily applied here: a sense of duty to one another. Ryan’s excerpt provided an example of this ever-present but often unspoken commitment to one’s fellow box buddies: *The only people I trusted were the people wearing the flag*. Interestingly, what Ryan also depicted connects with the symbolic interactionism of Mead, Blumer and others. Note Ryan’s emphasis on the flag – a readily understood symbol, especially to those within the military. Without speaking, this symbol communicated to other military members who in turn interpreted this communication based on meaning each assigned to the flag. For Ryan, and likely most others, seeing the flag meant that he was bound to that person, whether known or not.

Cultural and interpersonal aspects of this phase were clearly important. Reliance on *box buddies* provided an external means for working through difficult times. But coping with the stress of deployment was also personal and private. Conceptualized as *a box within a box*, military members endeavored to *compartmentalize* emotional challenges or trauma. A qualitative study by Bahraini et al (2008) provided support for this idea of *compartmentalization*. Of the 16 returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan studied, the authors found that:

the most articulated means of managing pain while in combat was dissociation. At one point these dissociative strategies may have been adaptive, but continued reliance on particularly dissociative processes to protect against, escape from, or minimize painful emotions becomes problematic when veterans return to civilian life (p. 221).

Although using slightly different words, the findings from this study seemed in agreement with my concept of *compartmentalization*. These authors also described “...decreased emotional

responsiveness post-deployment...” (p. 217). Similarities between the recently published, grounded theory study by Bahraini et al (2008) and the current research are striking. Passages presented by these authors from the veterans themselves could almost be interchanged with passages from this research.

Also presented in Phase 2 was the assertion that *conditions and events* experienced by participants in the box influenced the return to civilian life. For veterans who experienced trauma there were generally two types of potential outcomes. The first is an immediate, acute reaction often known as battle shock (Mikulincer & Solomon, 2006). The second, and more applicable to this group is identified as “chronic” or “delayed” (Mikulincer & Solomon, 2006). I am not asserting that all individuals in this group have a clinical mental health issue. However, based on these interviews, many in the group had challenges generated by their time *in the box*. But these challenges were generally not manifested until one’s return home. In this way, the delayed onset nature of PTSD and similar (though less severe) issues is grounded in the *conditions and events* experienced while on deployment. More specifically, it was one’s appraisal of those conditions and events which seemed to further impact the individual. In their cognitive appraisal theory, Folkman and Lazarus (1984) asserted that

...psychological stress is a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. The judgment that a particular person-environment relationship is stressful hinges on cognitive appraisal (p. 21).

Using this theory as a guide, participants in this study appraised their conditions and events during their time *in the box*. This appraisal process, however, is an individual function – thus what could be viewed as stressful for one might be viewed as ordinary by another. Broadly

speaking, it seemed logical to conjecture that veterans who were directly in harm's way could appraise their situation as stressful. However, participants in this study not in harm's way also appraised their situation as equally if not more stressful. Consider Carly, the combat medic, whose time in the box was spent largely treating wounded or dying service personnel. Her constant exposure to these *conditions and events* lead to difficulty later on. Daniel, the intelligence specialist, also had great difficulty. Although he sat in an air conditioned office each day and almost never went outside the wire, Daniel appraised his situation as extremely stressful. His fellow soldiers – his *box buddies* – relied on him to plan the safest routes for military convoys. Daniel described to me how he “...lost it...” over there about halfway through his deployment due to the unyielding stress and concern for the safety of his *box buddies*.

Thus far, the battle between one's military identity and one's student identity has been evident. However, during Phase 2, the student identity is essentially eradicated. Since the student-self is absent, Goode's (1960) theory of role strain is essentially irrelevant to Phase 2 in the present study. Time spent *over there* is consumed by the mission and one's *box buddies*. Rick, when asked if he remained connected with his school during deployment, had this to say: “...I made a complete break.” Rick's statement reflected the sentiment of the majority and demonstrates the complete suspension of the student-self.

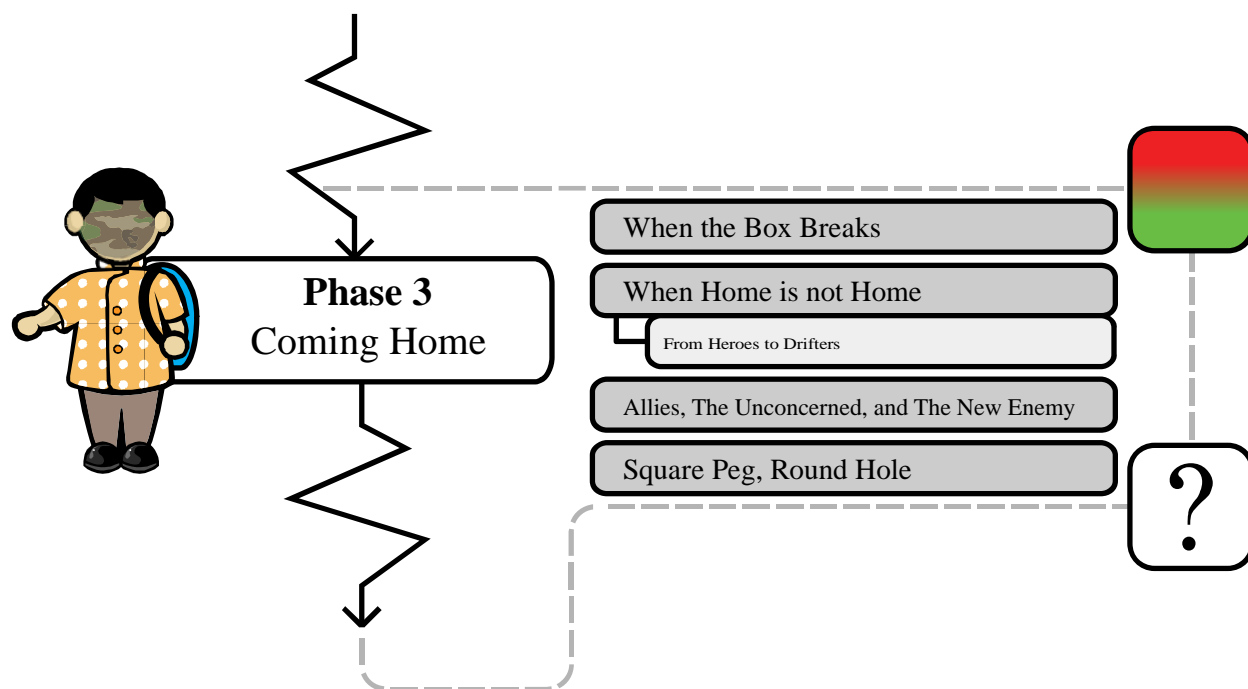
Phase 2 was a complex time, where emphasis was entirely on the “human community” that was one's military unit. More broadly, however, it was a time when one's *conditions and events* – and the subsequent appraisal of these *conditions and events* – set the stage for how one returned home. Some of them concluded that their time *in the box* was great, but always challenging. Others presented a more mixed view of their experience. But all agreed that it was

transformative, even those who would later leave the service. Much of this transformation was seen after *coming home*.

Phase 3: Coming Home

Phase 3 began as military personnel returned to the States and went through their demobilization procedures. These procedures included a mental health screening, debriefings, and attending lectures on stress, returning to civilian life, along with other such topics. For most individuals, Phase 3 was also one of the most anxious times. Although they were in the States, they were not “home.” Figure 6 provides a graphical depiction of Phase 3 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.

Figure 6. Graphical depiction of Phase 3 of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



Structurally, this portion of the model mirrors those prior. The figure on the left has returned to civilian attire. However, the camouflage coloring has moved to the figure’s head, depicting the mental elements related to this phase. As before, jagged lines are shown entering

this phase and exiting this phase, denoting an unclear pathway to and from. At the top right is the familiar red-green gradient and below that is a question mark. It is at this point that these student-soldiers are often uncertain about what comes next. Some will redeploy and some leave the military entirely. Within this phase are four concepts – “when the box breaks,” “when home is not home,” “allies, the unconcerned, and new enemies,” and “square peg, round hole” – which are chronicled next.

Military leadership is well aware that coming home can be the most stressful and powerful aspect of the entire deployment. Although the leadership seemed to take this process seriously, I am less certain that individuals in this study share their concern. Jason provided insight into this time period and the messages relayed by Army leadership:

I think I was fortunate, I mean you get a certain amount of counseling , if you will, 'look while you were away you know, things change, how you...where you put things when you left may not be there and how you did things may have been changed slightly.' They talk about... even your relationship with your spouse and everything like that, take the proverbial baby steps to...don't think you're just going to come right back and pick-up where you left off cause a lot's going to change...

As these “advising” efforts were underway, soldiers were restless and tired. Again, Jason provided his thoughts:

It was a relief...there's a huge amount of physical exhaustion, like all of a sudden, I guess, I don't know if you could liken it to a marathon or whatever, but you seemingly go on adrenaline, but as soon as it's over, you just have this huge...you're just exhausted.

Carly provided a similar reflection regarding the overall well-being of herself and the other members of her unit:

Mentally at that point we were all exhausted. We had just seen too much. Too many nights awake. Too many nights of like it's going to be a relaxing night, watching movies, going to the gym and then getting the call that we need you to come down here. Because there were a lot of casualties coming in, we were pretty much working all the time.

Both Jason and Carly detailed the strain and effort required to maintain readiness while *in the box*. It was a largely unconscious effort: acting a certain way, always being ready, being observant to the smallest of details. Yet this constant effort seemed to relinquish itself once individuals returned to the States. It was only then that they seemed to notice just how exhausted they were. It was under this exhausted mindset that soldiers were required to complete the seemingly endless tasks before them. One such task was the requisite mental health screening process, which is a factor in the first concept of this phase.

Coming Home Concept – When the Box Breaks

Although introducing the concept of “when the box breaks” here seems appropriate, I would suggest that the breaking or splintering of the box can occur at different times for different people. I also think that, in smaller numbers, the box might never break. But for many participants in this study, the *box did break*, either in small pieces or entirely. Carly provided some preliminary insight into this concept:

We got into Mississippi we were all prepared for this intense mental health screening.....not a question asked about it. They're like, if you feel a need to

have counseling when you get home contact your VA or you can go through Tri-care or go through militaryonesource.com. So there was no intense anything.

Carly's exasperation regarding this absence was very real. She talked to me about her nightmares and how certain smells caused her to flashback to times when she was caring for wounded military members and seeing people die. Carly was disappointed with the mental health screening once she and her unit returned to the States. It was precisely at this time when mental health screening was most needed. Conversely, Carly indicated that some positive mental health intervention did occur, but it was while she was still over there:

There's combat stress. They're supposed to debrief after casualties. Like our first couple we had them [debriefs]. But later on we kind of got relaxed about it because we kind of got used to it [the casualties]. After we had the mass casualties – on the entire FOB we had 105 patients – I had to go to combat stress because I kept having nightmares about some of the patients that didn't have their face, one guy punched me. I just kept waking up in the middle of the night with these nightmares with these casualties that we had. And so I had to go to combat stress for that and to deal with that.

As the passage depicts, Carly was truly affected by her work. "Combat stress," which is essentially a critical incident stress management debriefing* process, occurred less as time went on, suggesting that Carly could have some unresolved trauma. Notice also how Carly stated that "we kind of got used to it." This desensitization offered further evidence for the creation of boxes within the larger box.

Even while in Kuwait, her unit waiting to return to the States, the mental health portion of the demobilization process was more vigorous as compared to in the States:

Before we left we did all these screenings. Everyone in the brigade had to come down, they had little PDAs. Have you ever been exposed to this, this or this? Do you have any mental health issues? Do you ever feel suicidal? Like all these questions. And I answered them truthfully, they were like do you have nightmares. And I'm like, yea I have nightmares. You know?

I later asked Carly if she still had nightmares, now that some time has passed. She responded:

Not recently, occasionally I have one or two. But now I haven't had one. When I first got home I had a real problem sleeping and stuff. They put me on medicine, my primary care physician did. I didn't go to anybody else. They put me on medicine and stuff. I don't really have the nightmares anymore.

Carly presented contradictory experiences with regard to mental health efforts. *Over there*, Carly had access to some services, though the presence and effectiveness of these efforts decreased over time. When staged in Kuwait for her return home, Carly was again screened for mental health issues or trauma, an experience she noted as positive. But once home, Carly recalled the screening as essentially non-existent. Literature reviewed earlier suggested that Carly's sporadic screening is not uncommon. Once in the civilian world, Carly turned to her *civilian* doctor for assistance with sleeplessness and nightmares.

Some members, like Carly, outwardly expressed emotional or mental health challenges. Others in this study were not as forthcoming, presumably building still more boxes to provide walls around their stressful or emotional experiences. Lex, who downplayed the stress of his experiences, attributed his ability to cope to his time as a former active duty ranger.

And also my active duty experience. It was a really high stress environment there. So coming back [to the states], I was able to switch it off more than some of the other guys.

But there was more to Lex's situation than simply switching off the light. Without directly acknowledging his struggles in our interview, Lex *did* struggle with his return home. He told a story about a video he made for his unit and a book that he was given by his command, both tools that proved to be therapeutic for someone who did not really think he needed much help:

The creation of the video of the guys we lost and the video of what we did over there, that helped. It was probably the hardest thing I've done in my life [making the video]. Because I sat there and made 7 videos and trying to edit the sound and listening to taps a million times. But I got it out – all out [Lex noted how he cried during this experience]. I read a really good book – I can't remember – they hand them out. It's like maybe 120 pages. It was a really good book. They gave examples of Vietnam vets of the things they experienced. Weird things. Like people in line will bother you and how they dealt with it. Kind of like, hey here's what to expect so get ready.

Lex's comments, though different than Carly, had a unifying thread: the military did not comprehensively reach out to Lex as much as one might think. With Carly, some services were available over there, but they seemed to miss or minimize critical symptoms once she returned to the States, asking her only basic questions and not requiring a referral. With Lex, they gave him a book to read. It was curious to me as to why there did not seem to be more. Or perhaps there

was more, but the individual member did not seek out such services and resources. Either way, there appeared to be a disconnect between the individual and assistive efforts.

Lex and Carly also reflected something more. For them, *the box broke*. Not necessarily in some grand explosion, but the walls initially erected lost their effectiveness. Also interesting was that the breaking of their boxes did not really begin until their time over there came to a close. Perhaps it was the constant operational tempo that did not allow time for reflection. Or perhaps it stemmed from the concern of being perceived as weak. Either way, what was initially contained in a box while over there started to force itself out when these two came home.

In a final effort to demonstrate the concept of *when the box breaks*, I have provided excerpts from two participants. Daniel, who eventually left the military, and had a particularly difficult time transitioning back into civilian life. *Over there*, Daniel worked as an Intelligence Analyst. Some would say that Daniel's work was quite comfortable: He sat in an air conditioned office and rarely went outside the wire. But in fact Daniel appraised his work as extremely stressful. His daily mission was to prepare routes for various transportation convoys. Bad intelligence meant he could send a convoy into harm's way. The constant and unrelenting stress of such a mission had a profound impact on Daniel. Upon his return home, his adjustment was difficult and his box broke, resulting in a fairly substantial tailspin. During our interview, Daniel was talking about these difficulties in a way that I had heard before, flat, slow, overly calm. But then something changed, and Daniel had this to say:

I don't know how much you want but I had .45 at home [handgun] and I ended up pulling it out and looking at it for a while and really debating suicide.

It was one of a handful of very difficult moments, both for me and for Daniel. The memory was clearly painful. But Daniel pushed it away quickly and commented how he went to

see a doctor (a civilian doctor) and was prescribed medicine for his diagnosis of depression. His desire to focus on the positive had Daniel talking more about the present day, how he was feeling great and all that was behind him. Reflecting back on Daniel's nearly four hour interview, there is no question in my mind that his box broke. For Daniel, this breaking impacted his ability to successfully resume his civilian life. Relationships with his family were strained. He and his girlfriend broke up. Daniel talked of going on endless drives in the middle of the night. No direction, no purpose. Perhaps he was trying to find something out there, or maybe he was just trying to figure it all out. Regardless, because his box broke, Daniel's return to civilian life was anything but smooth.

Daniel was not the only participant to describe these experiences, Evan had similar moments:

And so I'm dealing with all this at the time and I'm already depressed, but now I've got these and I've got this, and I got these and I got this [Evan has placed his forearms on my desk and is showing me scars from where he has cut himself] and I'm a frickin' mess. I was on prescription drugs at the time. I had my surgery after an injury; I had torn a ligament in my leg and so I was on Percocet. I mean not just a little bit, I mean I was on Percocets the entire time and I think that contributed to my depression. I was drinking tequila, and I had already had some Percocets and I just cut, cut deep with a razor blade. And talk about failing a transition, I was failing that transition.

Evan's box also broke. In Evan's own words, he was "...failing that transition..." Struggling with the transition from intensive experience in Iraq to regular citizen, Evan's coping came in the form of prescription medicine and hard liquor. Fortunately, Evan has since

reenrolled in school and is preparing to graduate. Reflecting back on both Daniel and Evan, it seemed that they both went through some very difficult times. In the end, time and medicine prescribed by a *family* physician helped both recover. During those times, however, I question whether the military was adequately in tune with them. Certainly each member bears a responsibility for his or her own care. But sometimes even that responsibility did not result in proper connection with resources. Are the screening tools used by today's military adequate? Are they screening at intervals *beyond* one's initial return home? As noted in the review of literature, PTSD and similar issues can have a delayed onset, sometimes showing themselves months after one returns home. In both cases, Daniel and Evan developed these thoughts and emotions well after their time over there. It seems reasonable that the military would continue to engage the individual far beyond their initial return to the states. It is certainly possible that they do, but these individuals did not comment on such efforts.

The breaking of the box was one of the more troubling aspects of this study. What concerned me the most was that returning military personnel – whether active, reserve, student or otherwise – were, and still are, likely struggling privately. Neither Daniel nor Evan mentioned talking to anyone – even a friend who could simply listen. I am left to wonder about other military personnel who might be struggling with similar or even more intensive issues. If my study of 24 individuals was any indication, there are possibly thousands of service personnel with these quiet challenges.

Coming Home Concept – When Home is not Home

The transition back to civilian life – back to school, back with family and back with friends – was hard for everyone in varying degrees. Some, like Daniel and Evan, had major obstacles. For others, it was more a matter of deescalating from a relentless OPTEMPO. Short

fuses and being quick to anger were commonly reported. Members talked about reaching for weapons that were no longer there, or driving in the middle of the road, a tactic that was essential *over there* so that personnel could get the broadest view possible. Still others talked about loud booms or smells or crowded areas that evoked both muscle and emotional response. Karl provides one of the best examples of these deeply ingrained reflex reactions:

I was eating in Subway, down here on Main Street and they had this big walk-in refrigerator/cooler and when the lady walked out, the door slammed. Now since it's hollow inside, it makes this real hollow thud and this thump noise and I was the only one in Subway and I'm eating a sandwich like a week or two after I got back, I, I hit the floor. When this door slammed because there was no music playing, no one was talking, all of the sudden I just hear this BOOOM and I just lost it – knocked over my drink, my sandwich went flying out of my hand.

Mark: That was just muscle memory, basically?

Karl: Yeah, it's just, you know, it was just a natural reaction and even driving was horrible too. I blew two stop signs and a red light the very first time I drove. There's no traffic laws over there and when you're in an armored vehicle, everyone gets out of your way.

Karl's story provided an example of "when home is not home." More pointedly, Karl reported that it was he that changed and, as a result, he was not ready to look at his homeland as the same from when he left. His time spent over there was so drilled into him that he continued to apply tactics used *in the box* to conditions *out in the pasture*. The subsequent clash was what caused Karl to literally land on the floor in the Subway restaurant.

Although the emotional aspect of the coming home phase was clear as evidenced by the *breaking of the box*, something else happened during this time. Whereas only weeks ago members woke each day with a clear purpose, a sense of duty and responsibility, they were now effectively unemployed. Applauded and cheered by their local community as they returned home they sometimes found themselves without direction and without a sense of purpose. After hearing these stories consistently, it was clear that many participants went from “heroes to drifters.” Alan collected unemployment for a time before he took a job off the books, pouring concrete and doing manual labor. Carly expressed bitterness at her situation as she recounted when she filed for unemployment. But for Carly and others it was a deeper phenomenon:

I didn't want to have to face all that stuff. I didn't want to face going back to school and nobody being here. I didn't want to have to face filing for unemployment because I no longer had a job. Or because I no longer had a purpose. It took me a while. Even a couple of months ago, around spring break, I was feeling really down in the dumps because I feel completely worthless here. I was like, what's the point of this? Will I ever get the gratification of helping people as a nurse as I did while I was gone [in Iraq]?

This was not the first time this concern was presented in these interviews. Ryan had this to say about his friends from back home:

I would call my friends I hung out with them (non-military). I'd hang out with them and I'd be like “man, these guys are shitbags.” Your whole take on life changes.

Like Carly, Ryan wondered if he would ever recapture the feelings of purpose from his experience in Iraq. Even at the time of our first of two interviews, Ryan was pondering a return

trip in an effort to re-experience what he described as euphoric feelings. For Ryan, to get these feelings back, he would have to go back. And so he did.

Robert, who was deployed twice and returned to college both times, portrayed a similar outlook:

But coming back wasn't as good this time. It's tough to having to go from something where you're really driven and you have a purpose every day to come back. I was really anxious for classes to start back up, just because I'm sitting here.....you go from running every day, running three and four missions a day, and then coming back you're just kinda like.....you need some kinda direction or something, except spending money like water (laughs).....

These examples reflected the common sentiments of the group: a *hero* one day and a *drifter* – the next. For many individuals, part of the strain was the result of poor timing. Often, the return home occurred shortly after the start of a semester, thus enrolling in school right away was usually not an option. With weeks and sometimes months of idle time on their hands, many participants drifted, spent large amounts of money or found themselves underemployed or unemployed. This rapid and complete change of status was reported as uncomfortable and disheartening.

Coming Home Concept – Allies, the Unconcerned, and New Enemies

Once withdrawn, all but two of the participants made a clean break from college. But college did re-enter the picture, usually once back in the States. Although the administrative withdrawal process was described as “simple” by participants – a sentiment echoed by institutional staff – the re-enrollment process contained its share of challenges. Upon returning to their respective colleges or universities, many of these student-soldiers reported having to deal

with “allies, the unconcerned, and new enemies.” Though the clear minority, stories from Karen and Carly represent *allies*.

Of all 24 participants, Carly remained most connected to the institution during her two years of separation.

The faculty was good with helping me transition and helping me recognize, like working with me. And they're like, we understand that this is hard and not an easy process. I was also very open with them, and was like, I'm having a tough time, I don't really feel comfortable and so we were able to work with each other.

In an effort entirely singular in this study, Carly's nursing faculty, her *allies*, partnered with her before her deployment, arranging for her to take an important capstone course while separated from the institution. Additionally, the nursing faculty permitted her to take as much time as needed to complete the course, understanding that her military duties were her first priority. The provisions made for Carly throughout her deployment clearly influenced her successful academic return. Furthermore, when she returned she was not as behind in credits because she and her professors had agreed to their arrangement. Once home, Carly's faculty were patient and kind, assisting her back to school both academically and emotionally.

One other individual in this study connected with her institution. Karen, a 21 year-old Specialist deployed to Kuwait and Iraq, provided the second example of allies within the institution.

My advisor totally heroed the situation. Dr. Jones put me in over the phone, he built my schedule, because I came home in the end of November, two days before Thanksgiving, he had me in January classes. He did it over the phone on a weekend, he was like, what do you want – and right over the phone. He made it

much easier. I just showed up the first day, bought my books, and I didn't have any problems with my schedule that year.

Karen's description of a "hero" was important in illuminating the larger concept of *allies*. Carly essentially described the same phenomenon. By being concerned with her as a student, her professors became *allies*, allowing Carly to progress academically rather than remain stagnant for two years. Karen's example was less dramatic, but for many veterans, these simple efforts can turn what bureaucracies turn into a fairly complicated process into a smooth one.

But not all transitions back to school were smooth. Pete, a 25 year-old Sergeant who is currently on his second deployment, provided an example of *the unconcerned*.

It sucks that we have to play phone tag to handle something military based instead of getting extra help because we put our lives on the line for them but they only give us three minutes of their time on the phone. Just recently my fees that I thought were paid were shifted to the Attorney General's office [for collection]. How is it that I'm currently deployed with the Army and they [the school] forgot to mention that detail to the people handling my debt situation? Clearly a breakdown in communication that in the end will only leave me suffering more than I have to. Overall, the school administration could use some help in lightening the load of the military student. The things we go through in the service are heavy enough.

Pete's frustrations landed on an unconcerned staffer situated within a larger, unconcerned institution. This sense of indifference resulted in his account going to collection, rather than sparking a reasonable solution that both parties could accept.

The most damaging dimension of this concept – *new enemies* – is depicted in Karl's story.

It's been very tough. Nothing was right. They had completely deleted me as a student. I would try to call and schedule classes and I had a hold for like a parking ticket. They gave me shit about it, they wanted me to send a check and I was like '...look, I'm in Afghanistan, I don't want to send money half way around the world, so just take my credit card over the phone...' and they're like '...well we don't do that...' and I was like '...well, I know you normally don't do that, but you can do that, that's why I'm asking you.' I had to fight with them and they finally did it. And then I had to call back to Student Services and say '...okay, everything's good, no hold on the record, why can't I still schedule?' And they're like '...well, you're not a student here.' And I'm like '...what, I am TOO a student here!' [at this point, he's basically yelling as he recalls this experience] And they're like '...you left.' And I'm like '...I took a leave of absence to come to Afghanistan!' And they're like '...well can you come in and we'll talk about this?' And I'm like, 'NO, I cannot come in!' I had several people tell me that, '...well just come on in and we'll handle it.' It got to the point where I couldn't do anything. I had to wait till I got back in December and actually walk in the school and say '...I'm here, put me in the system. Undelete me – do whatever you got to do.' And they're like '...well this is standard operating procedure for that...' and I'm like '...no, it's not, because my brother and my roommate, who were there with me, didn't have to go through any of this shit.'

As if this frustration was not sufficient, Karl's problems continued.

So they finally readmitted me and the next day I go to schedule classes, and they had put me as undeclared. So I couldn't even schedule classes for my major, so I had to go back in there and I was like '... put me in criminal justice – that's my major.' 'Well we don't put people into criminal justice.' And I was like '...I don't care what you do or what you don't do, I'm telling you what you have to do.' And they're like '...well the department's full, we can't put anybody in there, the department has to do that themselves.' I went to the department and they're like, 'No one's here, all the teachers' hours stopped the week before finals' and this was like finals week, when I got back, and they're like '...well none of the professors are here to do that, you'll have to wait until spring time.' So I went back down to Student Services and I was like, 'Put me in there!' And they would not put me in there. So eventually I got in. They gave me all new passwords, new logon, new mail id, so finally they're like '...you're back in.' And then I try to schedule and it still doesn't work! And they're like 'well did you check out STINF [student scheduling program]?' I was like, "STINF doesn't work – I have nothing!" So they look me up and everything had changed, so I was using all my old stuff from before I left, they didn't tell me that they gave me new everything. So it was frustrating, very, very frustrating.

The animated fashion with which he recounted this story reflected the freshness of his frustrations. Karl's struggles with the institution lasted over a month and were still fresh when I interviewed him only weeks after its resolution. As a non-commissioned officer* Karl is familiar with giving orders. When his re-enrollment failed, Karl resorted to tactics reflective of his last two deployments: He gave orders, even yelled orders, to the institution. This method, though

effective *in the box*, only resulted in more frustration for Karl as the unconcerned institution continued to erect barriers. The institution, in a sense, became Karl's *new enemy*, requiring him to engage in battle so that he could achieve his goal.

Veterans generally expected a reasonably smooth administrative transition back to school. Student-veterans are a mature group, one whose mobilization experiences have provided them with perspective and a high level of self-sufficiency. However, they often found themselves a bit lost when navigating the GI bill process, tuition assistance, scheduling and other such administrative and academic tasks. As interviews began, I naively asked about the campus Veterans' Affairs Office, which seemed like a logical start for returning veterans. Responses from veterans clearly indicated how little this office was used. Brett, a 25 year-old veteran from Afghanistan, stated succinctly:

I went to the veterans' affairs office just to collect my Montgomery

GI bill. My check. That was it.

Brett's sentiment was reflected consistently throughout the group. What appeared as an obvious starting point for the academic return process was of little use. Veterans generally relied on informal mechanisms of navigating their way through the return process – calling offices, sending emails, finding an old friend. Fortunately, these service personnel were comfortable working independently and so the complaints often private, generally shared only with other box buddies. But in talking with these individuals, it was clear that some type of formal return process would be beneficial while also easing the transition hurdles. One of the clearest examples of how an institution could help its returning veterans was suggested by Lex, the former Army Ranger:

I think the VA needs to do a better job. They need to have at least a piece of paper that has an outline on it that says hey deploying soldiers, here's a checklist. Returning soldiers, here's a checklist. Then they need to have someone walk around with them and make sure that everything gets done and they do a follow up. Because right now you'll go there and they'd say oh you need to do the following. And you'd go do it and you'd go back and OHHHHH well you also have to do this. It was a really ridiculous thing because there were three ways that you could go about terminating your session. Withdrawing or temporary hold but they all meant completely different things when you returned. And if nobody told you, you could completely drop out of college and have to re-apply when you came back as opposed to taking a leave of absence and then coming back.

Lex's ideas were well founded – he had been through this process twice and has seen others struggle as well. As with other excerpts, Lex's ideas were so simple that it begs the question as to why this idea of a departure or return checklist was not been considered previously. Beyond Lex's specific example, Robert offered a thoughtful summary of the needs of his fellow student-veterans:

There should be some kind of outreach – or at least touch base. Because a lot of guys – like I said I'm pretty self sufficient – I take care of myself and don't need anyone to hold my hand. That being said, there's a lot of people that are first time college students who might be a little lost, in particular trying to make that transition from their year. I think that they [the school] should acknowledge it and there should be some sort of outreach; it's not like they need to hold our hand. But at least to make the attempt would be nice. Even though I don't need the help,

to have someone track and know what's going on with me as a student-veteran it would be appreciated.

It would seem that simple steps would translate into substantial returns in terms of building good will and assisting these veterans back to campus. Institutional leaders could easily consider the suggestions offered by some of the participants in this study. By moving in this direction, *the new enemy* can move closer to becoming *friends* and maybe even be elevated to *allies*.

Coming Home Concept – Square Peg, Round Hole

Aside from the administrative hurdles one must clear, readjusting to college posed personal challenges. One of the more difficult aspects of returning to college is the realization that everything has changed. As Alan stated:

You think that somebody pushed pause, you left for a while, and when you come back they press play.

But more pointedly, the interviews suggested that the individuals themselves had changed. Robert's thoughts summarized what most of the participants were feeling:

It's tough sometimes, like being 25.....it's difficult sometimes, you come and you deal with like kids that are 18 – like this is the 13th grade for them. They didn't know what else to do, so I graduated high school, maybe I should go to college now, on mom and dad's dime, just kind of screwing off and doing whatever. Sometimes you get angry because you look at what you've had to do and what you've gone through to go to school - it's like a job for me. You get paid, you get paid pretty well to go to school and you don't have to work, you live comfortably at school. But in the same token, you give up a whole lot of time and

a lot of other things, so you get a little bitter sometimes with people that are 18 and screw off, sit in the class, obnoxious or jerks or stuff like that. Act like an adult, because it's not high school.

Robert's experiences *over there* fundamentally altered his view of things. Once back in the pasture, and surrounded by younger students with less perspective, Robert's change became readily apparent to himself. Complicating things, his peer group had graduated and he found himself dozens of credits behind in their major. In comparison to his new classmates, Robert's age has advanced yet his class standing and progress towards graduation has remained stagnant. Robert and many others like him, found themselves to be *square pegs* trying to fit into *round holes*.

These differences transcended age or a loss of one's peer group. Rather, experiences overseas fundamentally altered one's perspective. Ryan provided support for this notion:

You're whole take on life changes; your mindset, you get a whole new mindset when you get pulled out of this world and into another one.....

Deployment to a high-stress, combat zone fundamentally affected Ryan and others interviewed for this study, resulting in a shift of their world view. Participants *gained perspective* as a result of their experiences. Back on campus, students often lamented about a test they had to take, or bemoaned the fact that they were unable to go out that night. Carly, who returned to her intensive nursing program after her military service, had this to say about her fellow students:

I almost want people to be grateful that I was there. That's very selfish, but I'm on this college campus where people sit on their front porch and drink beer 364

days and study 1 day for their final. And here I am I did all these things and now I'm back here and I have this different lifestyle and this different mentality.

Interestingly, Carly said she would have previously considered herself one of those students that she has now expressed resentment toward. Carly's experience pulled her out of that cohort and fundamentally altered her perspective. Upon her return to *the pasture*, Carly readily identified the differences between herself and the larger student body. Like Carly, participants often remarked about the "pie-in-the-sky" mentality of today's college students. Lex stated it best: "...they're like happy little cows in a pasture." This common sentiment was not laced with anger or frustration, but rather an implied disappointment. The idea of "cows in a pasture" greatly informed portions of this work as it appropriately captured the perception of the college environment through the eyes of these veterans.

Many in this group had difficulty relating to their younger classmates. For most, the original friend group that developed during college has since moved on and graduated. This void moved many individuals to cluster together, relying mostly on fellow *box buddies*, calling on the kinship developed towards the beginning of this process. Robert provided the best example of this trend:

It's tough sometimes to connect with people and that's why I do hang out with army buddies. Or even, like my roommate was in a different section – my 2 roommates they're brothers – they were in a different section in Afghanistan. I didn't see them for a year. And there's a bunch of people that they were with that come to college here so I've kinda been adopted. So now there's like 7 or 8 of us that are always hanging out. There's a lot of similar experiences. But a lot of my friends have graduated from school, like the people that I know from college. But

since all those people have graduated and left...It's just hang out with a lot of the army guys. Which is good, but...I don't know, I gotta hang out with some other people too I think. I feel like I'm at the VFW sometimes. Everybody's playing remember when... (laughs).

For Robert and his Army friends, clustering together felt like a natural extension of being in the box. In some ways, they continued their time *in the box* once they landed out *in the pasture*. It is also interesting that Robert was insightful enough to realize that this might not be the best idea. But nonetheless, the cohesiveness he and his friends found by remaining together outweighed exploration of other possibilities.

Phase 3 – coming home – covered a substantial range of events. Beginning first with members coming State-side, working through their mental health screenings and other administrative tasks, and then eventually returning to their home and to school, phase three is one of change. Throughout this change, individuals were challenged in different ways: Through efforts to readjust to civilian life, in coping with the change in status and in seeking a renewed connection with those from whom they have been separated. Although this time period affected some more than others, all individuals interviewed for this study went through a readjustment period.

Phase 3 represents the final piece of the undergraduate military mobilization process. I am not certain that Phase 3 ever completely ends. Many have started all over again, as six of the participants interviewed for this study are now on their second deployment. Still others are anticipating their second or in some cases their third deployment. There were many common elements to *coming home*, but each individual navigated this phase on his or her own time, equipped with whatever support and coping mechanisms were available. In the time that I had

with each member, I would argue that all came through the process successfully. Certainly there were hurdles – some quite significant. But each of these student-veterans survived, and it is somewhat ironic that that is what the military taught them how to do best.

Understanding Phase 3

Phase 3 was when *the box broke* – or at least splintered – for many of the participants. Participants were transitioned quickly from the relentless intensity and high operational tempo to the decidedly more subdued civilian world. The constant “rush” present during active duty was stripped almost immediately once back in the states. Meagher (2007) theorized that “...many veterans miss that rush upon their return to civilian life.” Ryan, presented earlier in the paper, missed the rush so much that he volunteered for another deployment. He felt that the only way to get that feeling back was to go back. Still others sought to fulfill this absence through extravagant purchases (often vehicles – especially motorcycles) or extensive trips.

The third phase was where the walling off of perceived and prolonged trauma during deployment eventually failed. Bell (1995) argued that traumatic events “...are incidents that lie outside the range of usual human experience and are so powerful that they are capable of overwhelming any person’s normal coping abilities and causing severe stress reactions.” (p. 36). For many, attempting to recreate one’s civilian identity was when the delayed onset of one’s experiences took hold, and *the box broke*. I and other authors (e.g. Bahraini et al, 2008; Meagher, 2007) observed the presence of problems within the respective veteran populations interviewed. Some of these problems were less severe, likely the result of ingrained reflexes that did not completely fade (e.g. driving in the middle of the road, reaching for a weapon, automatic reactions to loud noises etc). Others, however, were far more serious, potentially impacting an individual’s health. Two individuals in this study admitted to contemplating suicide, and one of

those made an attempt. In their study of returning combat veterans, Bahraini et al (2008) found that a sense of “failed belongingness” contributed to thoughts of suicide. Reflecting on Evan and Daniel, this phrase seems an appropriate descriptor. Even now, in thinking about Daniel, I wonder if he has re-connected. I still see him on the Bravo campus, always alone.

Suicide was the most serious form of box breaking, and a concern that has occupied military leaders for years. A recent editorial in the New York Times (2009) quoted Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, as stating the 2009 suicide rate could eclipse the already high rate from 2008. Thrusting this topic in the spotlight once again was a recent murder-suicide in Baghdad. Kennedy (2009) reported that “...a shell-shocked U.S. soldier shot and killed five comrades at a military stress clinic.” It is conjectured that the stress of multiple deployments may have contributed to the assailant’s actions. When I first saw this story, I could not help but consider the concept of when *the box breaks*. Results from this study and others, when paired with reports from the press, seem to converge on this conclusion.

But there are some heartening outcomes of this total experience – most notably, the kinship and shared values between box buddies. In an article entitled “*Back but Not Home*,” Sennott (2007) told a story about Marine Corporal Patrick Murray, who lost a leg in Iraq. During an award pinning ceremony, Sennott writes that no one would have noticed the absence of the leg. So proud and stoic was Murray that it was only when he stumbled after being pinned that his affliction was observable. His fellow Marines – *box buddies* – all rushed to help him, to prop him up. A story like this demonstrates the values and interconnectedness of these Marines. But it is reflects the larger military culture, one built largely on the symbols of pride, steadfastness, strength. Though often unspoken, these values were communicated to one another frequently: wearing the flag, supporting one another, remaining together once back home. As Erikson noted,

it is a human community, complete with values and beliefs, regularly reinforced through modes of conduct.

As a society, I wonder how deeply we care about the topic of returning veterans – whether students, active duty personnel or others. I admit that prior to this undertaking, I did not think extensively about this population. Although I would watch the news and engage in the occasional discussion, it is evident that I was quite insulated from what was really going on with veterans. Meagher (2007) observed that

...instead of trying to find out the truth about what our combat veterans are going through, for many it is easier to put blind faith in the reliable myths of war that have long been perpetuated by television and the movies (p. 46).

Perhaps unconsciously as a collective we have internalized the often dramatized depiction of the military: the strong, unfettered, and always victorious Armed Forces. Meagher (2007) further argued that the void of imagery or stories that show the “*bloody side*” of this conflict serve only to detach the country more from the true impact felt by so many service personnel. Grossman (1996) agreed, contending that

...a culture raised on Rambo, Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker, and James Bond wants to believe that combat and killing can be done with impunity – that we declare someone to be the enemy and that for cause and country the soldiers will cleanly and remorselessly wipe him from the face of the earth. It is simply too painful for society to address what it does when it sends young men off to kill other men in distant lands (p. 95)

Further challenging this sterile idea of war was the recently lifted ban on photographing coffins of service personnel. Buhmiller (2009) summarized those who opposed this policy,

writing that it “...sanitized the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and was intended to control public anger over the conflicts.”

Too often, once the welcome home ends, we do not consider our returning veterans. However, evidence from this study – particularly the coming home phase – serves as a reminder of this important task. Perhaps even more important than remembering, we need to consider actually doing something.

Although there were general psychological challenges to be endured during this time, one of the more specific conflicts came when people from *the box* landed back in *the pasture*. Time spent on deployment often resulted in a *shift of perspectives*. Once back on campus, this shift was readily apparent as more matured and somewhat hardened service personnel attempted to re-enter a generally youthful culture: how these participants *viewed themselves* had also shifted. Whereas before, likely part of *the pasture*, they now viewed themselves as distinct, more mature and beyond the “nonsensical” nature of college life. The shift was therefore most visible once they became the *square peg in the round hole*.

During the forming/setting the stage period, student and military identities were generally equal. As the process moves forward, eventually one’s military identity wins entirely, resulting in the complete subordination of the student-self. Once re-enrolled in school, most participants did not regain the prior sense of reasonable equality between these two identities. For most, the military-identity remained first and the student identity became more of a burden, something to move away from as quickly as possible. Much of their view of the world was therefore interpreted through this military lens. For most, this contrast was something to be endured privately, since most of those in the pasture would not understand. This sense of detachment led

to seeking the familiar comfort of box buddies, a behavior that was common throughout this study. In some cases, it led individuals to once again volunteer for deployment.

While the interpersonal challenges were significant in their own right, the absence of academic/institutional support mechanisms created further difficulties. This return experience, and subsequent challenges, is not unlike other adults who have stopped out of college, only to return later. Kasworm (1990) asserted that returning adult students – typically defined as those who are 25 years and older – have difficulty entering a youthful culture. This difficulty sometimes leaves these returning students feeling isolated and disconnected, both from the student body and the larger institution. Returning veterans in this study recounted similar experiences. In certain aspects, deployments seemed to accelerate one's maturity and development. Once this more developed individual landed back in the pasture, the contrast with the larger student body was immediately apparent. Thus instead of being welcomed back, student-veterans generally found themselves even more detached.

Negative Case

Corbin and Strauss (2008) defined a negative case as one "...that does not fit the pattern. It is the exception to the action/interaction/emotional response of others being studied" (p. 84). In this study, one negative case clearly emerged: Carly. Though similar in many ways to the other student-veterans, Carly was different in one important area – she remained connected to her institution for the entire duration of her military deployment. Carly was the only participant to have engaged in this continuous academic and interpersonal connection. It is therefore Carly who is truly the only *student-soldier* because she did not lose her student identity. At a time when all others made a clean break, eradicating the student self, Carly kept hers generally equal to her military self. The success of this connectedness was due in large part to an understanding faculty

who allowed her to remain enrolled during her mobilization. Equally important, though was Carly's field of study. As a nursing major, Carly's military occupational specialty as a combat medic was directly related to her academic studies. Although away from college, Carly continued to practice in the military much of what her clinical nursing training had also taught. Further cementing this experience were Carly's co-workers during her time *in the box*. She described working alongside doctors, other nurses, physical therapists and host of other medical professionals, further connecting the military with the academic.

Summary: Bringing it all Together

In this paper, I presented a unified narrative built from the collective voices of 24 undergraduate students who were also members of the military. It was my hope that this narrative convincingly demonstrated the importance of this population on our campuses. As Ackerman et al (2008) remarked, this is indeed an invisible culture. They rarely asked for help, nor did they seek gratitude or applause. They were largely a quiet group with a mission to complete, that of balancing the role of military member and undergraduate student. For many, these cultures were diametrically opposed, requiring one to shift between being *out in the pasture* or being *in the box*.

The *hurry-up and wait* phase of the undergraduate mobilization process saw the balance of soldier and student shifting in favor of one's military commitments. Some volunteered for their deployment, causing them to *keep a secret* from their family and friends. For some reason, the perception that one was required to go made it easier for others to accept.

As they volunteered for this extended time away, participants also considered their future in college, made financial and legal arrangements and readied themselves and their gear for mobilization. Participants found themselves asking *now what?*, often basing important decisions

solely on unit *scuttlebutt*. Even in light of this high degree of uncertainty, individuals went through the motions to the best of their ability, focused mostly on what was right in front, but largely disconnected with what was coming. That was, until *reveille*. In the military, and within this process, *reveille* was essentially the wake up alarm for these participants, often arriving upon completion, or attempted completion, of one's will. In one case, his command required him to write a death letter in the event of his demise.

In the box, or Phase 2, began as mobilization neared. Civilian clothes and manners were left behind as individuals switched entirely into the military culture. But the real start of being *in the box* was the final military ceremony before departure for the deployment. This ceremony, tearful to be sure, was finally when military members made a *clean break*, resulting in a shift from one's family and friends and toward one's *box buddies*, a group that would be relied on for the duration of the deployment. This ceremony marked a full immersion *into the box*, the *clean break* came with a sense of relief, and full connectedness shifted to one's *box buddies*.

This second phase continued in the States for a time. All members participated in a lengthy and universally disliked training program, causing the *hard chargers hit the wall*. Individuals remarked of their excitement regarding their upcoming mission, and yet this period served to deflate unit and individual enthusiasm. Part of the struggle was that members knew their time in this State-side training did not count towards their total deployment time. *Over there* only commenced once boots land in the sandbox.

Once begun, one's experiences *over there* divided themselves into two dimensions. The first were the conditions over there, or *living and working in the box*. The second were events, or *bombs and bullets and buddies*. Conditions involved a variety of elements including living environment, daily work tasking, stress level, physical situation and concerns for safety of

oneself and others. Events included close calls, firefights, seeing friends hurt and greatly shaped one's experience while in country. It was the combined influence of one's conditions and events that greatly informed the overall experience and the success of the return process.

Coping with the sometimes difficult and stressful conditions and events often required individuals to build *a box within a box*. Being able to wall off one's emotions from a traumatic experience was, in many ways, a survival tool. This factor, what I have termed *compartmentalization*, was a seemingly unconscious effort to construct walls around some of the more difficult parts of their experiences. This idea only showed itself through the numbed fashion in which members recalled some of the more traumatic experiences of their deployments and was confirmed by member checks.

Coming home, or Phase 3, began as individuals returned State-side. Often, *conditions and events* over there shaped the individual, requiring some time to deescalate from that setting. As a result, this transition was more than simply changing one's clothes and daily routine. For many, coming home was *when the box broke*. Individuals endeavored to create these boxes, stored within are the emotional contents of their last 12 to 20 months. But coming home triggered the breaking, or at least the splintering, of some of these boxes. Many stories involved individuals driving in the middle of the road, reaching for weapons that were no longer there, and reacting harshly when loud noises occurred. Still other members talked of their short fuse, quick temper, nightmares and smells that would cause them to flashback to their time in country. In two instances, individuals revealed thoughts of suicide – one member going so far as to place his forearms on my desk to show the many scars inflicted by a blade under his own hand.

Coming home also involved a complete loss of one's status, one day a *hero*, returning to accolades from the local community, the next day a *drifter*, unemployed or underemployed and

quickly forgotten by a public that often lacks a long term memory. Many individuals in this study recalled feeling frustrated that life continued while they were away. As one member succinctly stated, *you hope that someone pushed pause when you left and hit play when you return*. It was then that individuals realized that *home was no longer home*, at least not as they remembered.

Coming home was also usually the phase where members reconnected with school. It was also a time when *allies* emerged in two cases, though in other cases, *the unconcerned* or *new enemies* ruled the day. Of the two members who described *allies*, only one truly remained connected throughout her entire separation. It was Carly's experiences with this connection, and the subsequent benefits she received, that are instructive for other institutions.

For most, the process of returning to school presented a range of challenges. Individuals worked through these obstacles, paperwork lags, financial issues, scheduling problems and others to achieve the mission of returning to school. In a few instances, the administrative return to school posed significant hurdles, in one case going so far to delete the student-veteran from the institution's records. For some, school had become the *new enemy*.

Often the interpersonal return to school proved even more challenging. Individuals returned to find most of their previously established social network absent. Student-veterans found themselves trying to connect with students far younger and with less perspective. Many individuals commented that *today's students just have no idea*. As a result, returning service personnel often felt like *square pegs* trying to fit into the *round hole* of college. Being *out in the pasture* had remained the same, but the prolonged military experience resulted in a *perspective gaining* outcome for its members. As such, individuals viewed *the pasture* from a different lens, one that reflected significant time *in the box*.

For some, the inability to connect with fellow students resulted in returning to *box buddies*. But returning to these buddies is not necessarily all positive. As one member stated, “*this is good and bad; good, because you have people that have been through the same thing, but bad because you have trouble breaking out of that group.*”

The process ends with uncertainty. For those who remained in the service, the likelihood of an additional tour of duty is high. As Table 2 demonstrated, six individuals initially interviewed for this project are currently on their second deployment, requiring them to once again stop out of college. Recently I met with a student-veteran who returned from his second deployment late in the fall 2008 term. He resumed his studies this January, but the possibility of a third deployment is high. When reflecting on this uncertain future, he remarked that if he deployed for a third time that he would not return to school again. He thought he just could not take approaching 30 years of age and still trying to finish his undergraduate degree.

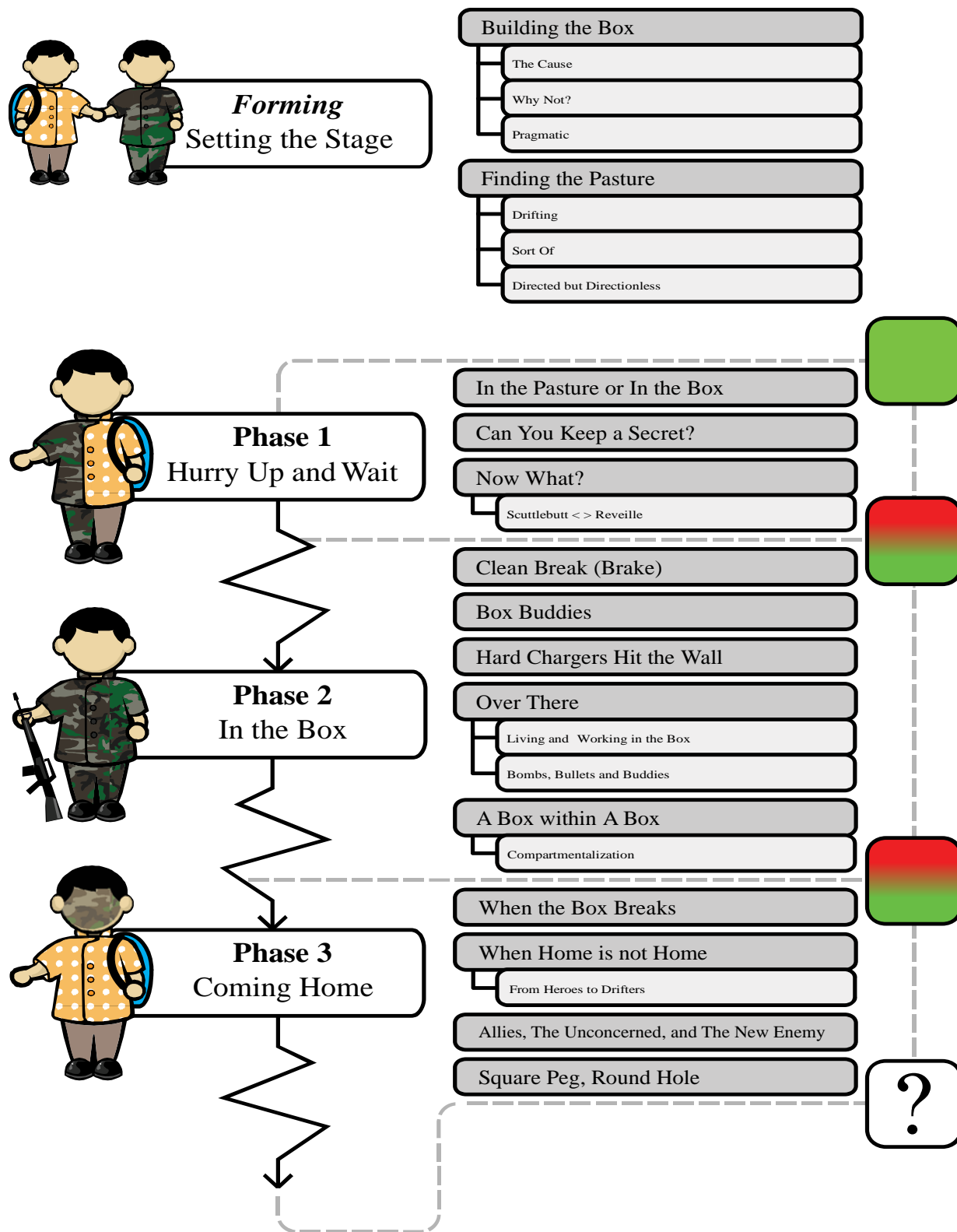
The future for each of these individuals is uncertain, but the military aspect of their past stands solid. As I concluded each interview I asked participants to reflect on their time in the military. As they articulated their diverse responses, common elements of pride and a sense of fulfillment were obvious. They were proud of their service and felt good about giving their time to their country. Yes they had been through some tough times. Yes they would agree that not all aspects were positive. I think that Tina, the former Marine reservist, provided the final sentiments well:

I would give you a million dollars for the experience, but I wouldn't pay you a nickel to do it again. That I believe sums up my military experience. Priceless, certainly. But so difficult.

Modeling the Process

Figure 7 provides the full model of the undergraduate military mobilization process. This model reflects the combination of each of the three phases of the undergraduate military mobilization process. Also included is the *forming/setting the stage* period which serves to provided context and insight into the participants' motivations for enrolling in college and enlisting in the military.

Figure 7. Complete model of the undergraduate military mobilization process.



The undergraduate military mobilization process includes all of the categories, concepts and components of the process. The figure began with the formation of two separate identities (forming/setting the stage). Moving to one, blended identity, the figure is both a student and military member. As mobilization nears, the figure becomes entirely clad in military gear, symbolizing the full entrenchment into the box. Upon conclusion of the mobilization, civilian clothes returned, but the box-like conditions and events remained with the figure, resulting in transitional challenges. Between these phases is a jagged line, reflecting the meandering course between periods. To the right are the red/green gradients, also reflecting the imprecise way in which this process moved. Told one day to start and the next day to stop, most of this process is filled with confusion, scuttlebutt, and uncertainty. Designed to capture the essence of the process, the concepts presented in the model reflected the collective experiences as told by these individuals and interpreted through my lens. Although I advanced this model as an accurate portrayal of this process, further evidence was needed to determine if this presentation “rang true” to those best qualified to know. To this end, member checks and peer audits are presented next.

Member Checks and Peer Audits

One of the difficult aspects of working with this population was their unending mobility. In an effort conduct member checks, messages were sent via *Facebook* and email. My goal was twofold: first, to see how former participants were doing and second to ask if they would be willing to review some of the findings (e.g. member checking).

I connected with three individuals to discuss the findings of this study: Jason, Evan and Randy. I presented each with the graphic of the military mobilization process along with the “*bringing it all together*” section of chapter four. After each individual had some time to read

and reflect on the material, I conducted an informal interview regarding their thoughts. Of the two, Jason and Randy were most insightful. However, Evan's comments, though succinct, were nonetheless helpful. He stated that this model "...nailed the key points." Evan went on to speak about how assimilation (his word) is different for each person, a contention I agree with.

More thorough was Jason, an individual referenced earlier as very thoughtful and who himself has experienced two deployments. He felt that the three phase depiction of the mobilization process was an accurate portrayal. We also discussed the pathways between the phases, and the idea that they are non-linear. Jason readily agreed that this captured the essence of the time. Very little was a direct shot. Rather there were numerous starts and stops, misinformation or simply a void of information throughout the process. Thus the non-linear lines were regarded as appropriately representative. We spoke about the names of each phase: Hurry up and wait, in the box and coming home. He was agreed that the names of these categories captured the essence of the associated block of time. In reviewing the "bringing it all together" section below, Jason commented that the explanation of the model was appropriate. He and I discussed further examples of each phase, which I was pleased to find I had already included in the larger paper.

Regarding the visual depiction of the theoretical model, Jason suggested that the first figure not have a rifle in its hand (the graphic originally depicted the first figure holding a rifle). Jason noted that at this stage, before mobilization, reservists and National Guardsmen do not necessarily have their weapon by their side. Nor did they necessarily associate a weapon of any kind during regular, non-active duty time. It was only after they are over there, that one's weapon became one's closest ally. Taking this advice, and reflecting on the interviews, I agreed with Jason's conclusion and removed the weapon from the first figure.

Randy also provided feedback. Although thoughtful in our interview, his commentary on my writing and the model of the process unveiled more than I had seen previously. Randy began:

Your excerpt from your paper is extremely well written. You touch on a lot of significant things, namely the trials and tribulations of returning to a nonexistent social network, the experience differential between student vets and regular students and the balancing of the two roles of student and soldier.

I pressed Randy a bit more with regard one of the concepts that I was thinking about more than others: compartmentalization. It made sense to me, but I wanted to see if someone who had been over there understood the idea. Randy had this to say:

You hit the nail right on the head in regards to it being a subconscious defense mechanism. I feel it varies from individual and circumstance to circumstance. When asked to recount, depict or explain events and conditions, particularly to non-service members, we can be apprehensive. This isn't out of shame or even necessarily because the events in question may have been traumatic – it's just that a lot of people don't understand. I went to war twice. Both times I never fought for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan; I didn't fight for oil; I wasn't out trying to bring stabilization to the Middle East. I was there to get the guy to the left and right of me home, because ultimately it would be the guy to the right and left of me that got me home. All things considered, you compartmentalize your life, your personality.

Randy's comments provided affirmation of the compartmentalization concept. However, this excerpt also validated the importance of individual experiences and the reliance on one's box

buddies for support and survival. Although asked about one specific concept, Randy actually supported several in his response.

Finally, I also engaged in four peer audits. One (Kevin) was with an upper-level enlisted reserve member with the U.S. Coast Guard who is also a part-time college instructor. By having both the military and the academic experiences, I thought Kevin would have a balanced view on this topic. A second peer audit was conducted with a recently returned Army reserve officer. Having spent nearly three year of the last five years in the box, Hank was positioned to provide strong insight into this study.

Kevin, who has experience both in the military and in the college environment, stated succinctly

...I really think you hit the target. I feel your research is very true because I have firsthand experience with the students in my class. Also we have a few guys at work that go through exactly as you described in your paper.

And Hank, the fully immersed reserve Army officer used language similar to Evan and Randy: “...all in all I think you nailed it...” Hank went on to say that there may be one dimension of the mobilization experience that I missed. His comment is offered below:

For those who deploy I feel there is another category; those who feel like they really were part of the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism] effort and did something useful and those who deployed but did not feel like what they did was worth the time away from home. An example would be that some deployed into almost office type jobs where they probably worked five days/week and had all kinds of free time when off duty; never went off the camp “Outside the wire” to really see what was going on; and were somewhat embarrassed to actually admit

what they actually did to friends and family when they returned. I have caught a number of soldiers after returning who are obviously (to someone who was “outside the wire” continuously) embellishing what they actually did – almost to the point of lying.

Hank’s comments reflected an aspect of this experience not encountered in this study – at least to the best of my knowledge. However, Hank’s thoughts did reflect an interesting, future area of study.

The remaining two peer audits were conducted with two student affairs professionals. Linda and Douglass were both full time, student affairs staff member with no military experience. My purpose in selecting these two individuals was to tap into a range of potential peers, blending military peers with professional peers. Although unfamiliar with the military, Linda noted that the model made sense and that the summary section I supplied to her was easily understood. I think that Linda’s unfamiliarity with the military presented a small barrier. For me, this is an important consideration. As I look toward the future and presenting this work to others, I need to be mindful of those who are either unfamiliar with the military or perhaps even less than supportive of the military. Explaining military culture, jargon, structure, ranks etc to any audience will be important with wider audiences.

Douglass provided more insight and explained how he has met with numerous student-veterans as a result of his occupation at Bravo’s campus (judicial officer). Over the past several years, Douglass estimated he has formally met with approximately 25 student veterans who have served in the box for one or more deployment. Unlike others in the member check/peer audit group, Douglass read my entire paper. I then discussed with him his impressions regarding my findings and his conversation with veterans, asking him if they rang true to him. He was the

fourth person to use the following phrase, or a variant thereof, “...*you hit the nail right on the head...*” Douglass further stated that my findings definitely corresponded to struggles he has witnessed in student veterans. He especially noted the return aspect of these students and how, once back to campus, they struggle with the “...*nonsensical nature...*” of their fellow (younger) students.

Although I had read about member checks and peer audits and their importance for establishing validity, I admit that I was nervous about this portion of the study. What if I had gotten it wrong? What if my analysis was completely off the mark? Listening to Evan, Jason, Randy, Kevin, Douglass and Linda comment on my work was both anxiety provoking and extremely gratifying. I do feel this model captures the essence of those who participated in this study. But hearing their agreement and understanding of my portrayal was both self-assuring and humbling.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Discussion

This section begins with an overview of the recently enacted “post-9/11 GI Bill.” Understanding what this bill does and does not provide to veterans is important in understanding the larger gap in campus, veteran assistance. Additionally discussed is identity formation related to the student-veteran and how this process is influenced by one’s enlistment in the military. A discussion regarding the box breaking concept, and the different ways in which they break, is provided. Finally, a discussion of the “at-risk” nature of this student population, both personally and academically, is presented.

The New GI Bill

Since its inception in the 1940s, the GI Bill has endeavored to support veterans by providing financial access, either in full or in part, to post-secondary education. Although weakened historically, the newest iteration of the GI Bill reaffirms this tradition and reasserts the government’s commitment to financial support of a veteran’s post-secondary education. The recently passed “post-9/11 GI Bill” contained a substantial increase in educational benefits for service personnel (Eckstein, 2009). This bill uses the highest, public, four-year tuition rate for each state and sets the funding level for that state accordingly. For example, the highest, per-credit allowance for New York is \$1,010.00. A veteran at Binghamton University, part of the State University of New York, where one credit of tuition is \$207.00 (studentaccounts.binghamton.edu/WebRateDocument.pdf), would be more than covered by the new GI Bill. In addition to tuition costs, the bill covers institutional fees and provides the member \$1000.00 each academic year for books. Finally, the new bill also provides a housing

allowance. The same veteran attending Binghamton University would receive \$1041.00 each month for housing costs, whether living on or off campus (defensetravel.dod.mil/perdiem/bah.html).

As generous as these provisions are, costs at many four-year private institutions would still exceed what the new GI Bill covers. In an effort to address this shortfall, more than 1,000 private institutions have voluntarily agreed to work with the federal government to make their institutions more accessible for veterans. With this effort, termed the “yellow-ribbon program,” the government matches any aid given to veterans by an institution where the GI Bill does not adequately cover costs (Wright, 2009). Given the substantial increase in benefits, along with the broader institutional access afforded by these benefits, the VA Office is projecting a 20 to 25 percent increase in veterans’ post-secondary enrollment (Eckstein, 2009), bringing the total number of enrolled veterans to over 450,000 (Eckstein, 2009; Wright, 2009).

However, glaring in its omission is *any* provision, allocation or emphasis on the veteran’s personal or academic success once enrolled. Public colleges, where many veterans will enroll, are already lacking in personal support services *specifically* for veterans. With the passage of the new GI Bill, and the subsequent increase of veteran enrollment on these campuses, personal, emotional and academic assistance for veterans will be even more strained (Eckstein, 2009). Literature presented earlier, along with findings from the current study, clearly indicate the presence of adjustment and mental health challenges. Although the federal government requires that institutions appoint at least one staff member to administer the GI Bill, no such mandate exists for addressing a veteran’s personal, social and academic well-being (Farrell, 2005). Many staff appointed to this role have full-time responsibility elsewhere, thereby reducing the amount of time spent on veteran assistance. This collateral responsibility trend is due, in part, to federal

funding of these staffers, which has remained the same since 1976. Institutions are paid \$7 per veteran, per year, in an effort to defray personnel costs related to veteran's assistance (Farrell, 2005). On a campus like Bravo University, where an estimated 500 veterans are enrolled, that amounts to \$3500 annually. Given this figure, it is understandable why an institution might not have the resources to do much more than process paperwork.

Supporting the financial well-being of veterans while essentially ignoring their individual well-being lends credence to the notion that the GI Bill is purely a marketing tool (Farrell, 2005). Only a few years ago, the GI Bill left many veterans digging into their own pockets to cover the balance due (Farrell, 2005). Veterans who endeavored to attend private or more selective institutions were even further burdened by the financial gap between the GI Bill and the actual cost of enrollment. Some argue that the financial carrot dangled to prospective enlistees amounted to smoke in mirrors, that when veterans sought to "cash-in," promises made by recruiters fell well short.

The new bill *could* change that. On paper, the financial support is clearly more substantial, and addresses more than just tuition costs, as compared with the previous iteration. Time will be the ultimate indicator as August 1, 2009 begins the first period of the new law. Still missing, however, is emphasis on the veteran as a person who should have the chance to become a successful, well-adjusted college student. It is therefore up to each campus to make this an important institutional goal and allocate the requisite personnel and financial resources. The yellow-ribbon program suggests that institutions want veterans on their campus. But providing financial assistance is, to some degree, easy. A greater challenge is for those same campuses to accept the responsibility of caring for the *entire* veteran, transcending mere financial support.

Identity Formation

Analysis was provided in Chapter 4 related to Goode's (1960) theory on role strain. This theory posits that competing and conflicting roles creates role strain. From this, the dominant role assumes authority at the expense of the subordinate role. In reflecting on the findings, however, it is clear that student-veterans grapple with more than just choosing between one *role* or the other. Their association with the military, and their extensive deployments, contribute greatly to the development of their *identity*.

As previously noted, student development theory does not specifically address the identity formation of undergraduate, military personnel. Many of the psychosocial theories of identity development are stage models (e.g. Erikson), suggesting an almost linear progression through a traditional, chronological conceptualization of development (Evans et al., 1998). Given the start-stop patterns and advanced maturation of student-veterans, it is easy to see why such models do not readily apply to this population. In an effort to understand the identity development process with these participants at its most basic level, I therefore turned to Helm's conceptualization of *racial* identity. Although seemingly disparate in its target group, consider her definition: "...a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (Leach & Moreland, 2001; Evans et al., 1998). The emphasis here is on *collective* identity resulting from a *unifying* element. With Helms, that element is race. For this study, and for military personnel beyond, that unifying element is enlistment in the military and the subsequent deployment. Those who served, whether in the same unit or not, became deeply and powerfully bonded, resulting in a *collective identity* similar to Helm's conceptualization. Participants in this and other studies spoke often of their reliance on one another, for strength, for support and for safety. Once home, people with these

shared experiences found each other, resuming the already established kinship. Like Helm's model, these veterans were in many respects minorities on their campuses, complete with experiences and perspectives that the larger, majority group might not understand. As with other minority groups, this resulted in veterans seeking out each other once returned to campus, taking comfort by associating largely with those who already understood (Tatum, 2003).

Recall a passage from Titus (1944), writing during the Second World War, and how this experience shaped the lives of those who served:

The veterans went away from us as boys; they return to us as men. As such, they will present to us at least three significant demands. They will want us to treat them like men; talk with them, not at them, in a straightforward manner; make decisions on the basis of rule, fact, and situation. They will be in a hurry. They will have lost years of time and will feel that they must not lose any more unnecessarily. They will be asking for additional credit for this and exemptions from that. They will expect assignments appropriate for full-grown men, not a program for half-grown youths. (p. 73).

Titus' passage could be written about today's returning men and women. Participants in this study spoke of the disconnect between themselves and the broader student population. But this disconnect was not based on color or religion or economics. It was based on perspective, perceived maturity and impatience with the "nonsensical," more "juvenile" student populace.

Once identity development is understood *collectively*, identity formation during college within the *individual* student-veteran can be considered, because for these individuals group identity appears to trump individual identity. Goldman and Waterman (1976) wrote that "...the college years are generally viewed as a time of major change in ego identity" (p. 362).

Subsequent research and theories have further supported this notion (Evans et al., 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). How, then, might individual identity development be influenced by (1) being a member of the military and (2) being deployed for an extended period? Specific answers to these questions are unknown. But drawing on results from this study, and findings from other work, provides some theoretical conjectures.

For these participants, individual identity was often defined and externalized through the lens of their military service, the impact of which was viewed as both broad and deep. After returning home, participants defined themselves through their military experiences, including those who would eventually leave the service altogether. Symbolic evidence for this can be seen in the wearing of “Army” t-shirts, referring to others as “sir” or “ma’am,” wearing desert boots to class, the “high and tight” haircut. Further evidence is observed through participants’ Facebook pages, where pictures of deployment, being in uniform and declarations of military affiliation are front and center. Not inconsequentially, school activities, classes taken and related school information is often presented after military data, if at all. In this way, one’s military identity is primary, continually shaped by ongoing challenges and success experienced through military service. The influence of college, viewed largely as a task to be completed, is distinctly subordinate to military influences. Given that engagement with the institution is strongly related to student development (Kuh & Zhao, 2004) enrollment interruptions and time-intensive military requirements will challenge more traditional student development pathways. As a result, and unlike their full-time, uninterrupted college student counterparts, it seems that *student* identity of these stopped-out individuals is therefore never fully forged.

If one’s military experiences are more important, how then do these experiences actually influence the development of one’s identity? Erikson’s broad conceptualization of identity

development involves managing and resolving a crisis by "...balancing internal self and external environment..." (Evans et al., 1998 p. 55). The interplay between one's internal self and external environment collaboratively influence how successfully one addresses a particular crisis. Evidence from this study suggests a disconnect between the internal, private self and the external, campus and social environment. In a number of cases, participants clearly lacked the internal ability to manage difficulties, whether returning home, readjusting to college or reintegrating with family and friends. Compounding the issue is the largely unconcerned, or in some cases, uncaring nature of the campus environment. This lack of appropriate support from the external world, coupled with deficient internal mechanisms drove veterans back to the comfort of his or her *box buddies*. Here again, in this somewhat artificially constructed and maintained world of box buddies, veterans surrounded themselves with familiar faces. Initially I think there is an element of adaptation, of an effort to cope with all that happens when these student-veterans return to campus. Robert, presented earlier, had sufficient insight to actually recognize this issue, commenting that being together is good because you are with people who understand. But he also commented that it is a problem because it is hard to break out of that, hard to meet new people and expand your horizons. Although he recognized the duality of the matter, he remained squarely within his group, unwilling (or unable?) to go beyond his box. This orientation towards one's box buddies might eventually become counterproductive, perhaps even resulting in a narrowing of one's identity formation.

Breaking Free from the Box

Perhaps the most significant concept to emerge from this study, and supported in other research, is the presence of dissociative coping strategies. For this study, this was conceptualized as *a box within a box*, demonstrating that military personnel exposed to traumatic events seek to

wall off associated emotions. Reflecting on this finding, there is little doubt that this unconscious effort was adaptive at the time. No one in this group wanted to be perceived as weak, nor did he or she want to publicly break-down under the stress. Walling off the emotions helped these individuals cope, and it worked. But perhaps it worked too well. In chapter four I asked about when these boxes might break. Who is there when this happens? What sorts of outcomes could be expected from this break? Based on this study, I contend that there are three ways in which boxes might break.

First, is the *erosion scenario*, where one's box slowly and over time gives way. In some ways, this presents the safest escape of previously compartmentalized emotions. Over time, these emotions leak out. This time allows one to better and more fully re-integrate back into civilian life. As such, support mechanisms such as family and friends are more likely to be restored at this point, giving the individual at least some options for help. But more likely, this slow ebb of emotions allows the individual to cope in a private, personal manner, probably turning to fellow *box buddies* for understanding and conversation. Because the emotion comes in small doses, coping strategies are not overwhelmed. As a result, individuals are better positioned to positively address and accept whatever might flow from the eroding box. In considering the individuals from this study, most would likely fall into this category. Certainly there were challenges, some significant, but over time their ability to resume a relatively normal civilian life was achieved.

Second, and in my view the most positive, is the *seeking scenario*, where individuals recognize their emotional distress *and* seek professional resources accordingly. The key to this scenario is the combination of *recognition* and *action*. A number of individuals in this study recognized their distress, but no one sought mental health counseling, and only a couple sought medical intervention, albeit from a *family* doctor. Recognition of distress can also be from

external allies, whether box buddies, a non-commissioned officer, a college friend or a family member. Since strength seems to trump all else, external recognition of emotional distress might be necessary. Pairing this external recognition with a safe and caring intervention could help guide the individual to professional resources.

Third, and most troublesome, is the *explosion scenario*, where an individual's box shatters due to some kind of activating event. This activating event could range from the small, yet symbolic, to something larger and more traumatic. For example, numerous accounts were provided about reaching for imaginary weapons, reacting to loud noises, becoming enraged while standing in a crowd, having flashbacks and dreams. It is possible that one such random incident could trigger a larger explosion of one's box. Conversely, this explosion could also result from a traumatic experience post-deployment, such as losing a box buddy or being discharged against one's will (i.e. medical discharge). Regardless of the activating event, the explosion allows all of the compartmentalized emotions to flood, immediately and entirely challenging the individual's coping strategies. In my view, the explosion scenario holds the most concern. Without a quick and appropriate response from supportive individuals, I question whether the individual will be adequately equipped to cope with the immediate and encompassing emotional distress.

I would be remiss to not consider a fourth scenario, one where the box never breaks. Although not present in this group, it is plausible that some veterans are unwilling to allow any breaking of the box. Emotions permanently locked away are emotions that must never be addressed. For some it is conceivable that those emotions are too overwhelming, thereby making their permanent sequestering the ultimate, unhealthy, adaptive strategy.

At-Risk Nature of Student-Veterans

The idea of an “at-risk” college student is inherently overbroad and vague. Although likely accurate when referring to this population, it is necessary to operationalize this phrase. In doing so, I hope to provide some structure, specificity and supporting arguments as to why this population could be considered “at-risk,” thereby meriting services afforded to similar groups.

Many of those who participated in this study were first-generation college students, a demographic broadly considered to be “at-risk.” Pascarella et al. (2004) summarized the research on the first-generation college students as follows:

...the weight of evidence from this research indicates that, compared to their peers, first-generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about post-secondary education (e.g. costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational degree expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school... Additionally, first-generation students are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of the first year, less likely to remain enrolled in a four-year institution... and are less likely to... attain a bachelor’s degree after five years.

Even *prior* to enlistment, those interviewed for this study would be considered “at-risk” by virtue of the fact that many were the first in their family to attend college. Couple this risk factor with enlistment in the military and one or more extended deployments and the at-risk categorization of this group is further justified.

The lower socio-economic status (SES) of most in this group would also suggest their at-risk status, again before enlistment and deployment experiences are even considered. Financially, many in this group saw the military as a means of affording college. Indeed, as noted earlier, educational funding is the top reason given for most new recruits, whether active duty or reserve

enlistees. Although other factors also influenced the decision to enlist, financial support for education outranked all others for this group. Historically, college was generally accessible only to those of financial means (Horowitz, 1987). College access to those with more modest backgrounds has arguably only developed in the past 60 years of colleges, and especially since the first GI Bill became law (Horowitz, 1987). Although progress in this area has been made, research continues to indicate that individuals from a lower SES are substantially behind their more affluent counterparts in both access to college and degree completion (Fiklen & Stone, 2002). As with first-generation status, when coupled with enlistment in the military and extended deployments, the at-risk status of student-veterans increases substantially.

For this group, the idea of being at-risk encompasses two facets. First, many in this group could be considered *academically* at-risk, even before considering their enlistment in the military and extended deployment. As first-generation college students from predominantly lower SES backgrounds, the proverbial deck is already stacked against their success. Secondly, individuals in this group could be considered *personally* at-risk as a result of their war-zone experiences. As this and other studies have demonstrated, the war-zone experience contributes to a host of challenges upon the return home. Without adequate support, care and assistance, these challenges can go unresolved, deeply impacting the afflicted individual.

The collaborative impact of being academically and personally at-risk suggests that this group is at least as qualified as similarly situated groups currently receiving supportive services. The federal government provides support for other at-risk groups (e.g. TRIO Student Support Services, Upward Bound, Gear Up, Talent Search), but only mandates cursory administrative assistance for veterans. Perhaps as more veterans return and enroll in college, attention will swing from financial considerations to ones centered on academic and personal well-being. Until

then, individual campuses are left with the decision of whether or not to make this group a priority.

Conclusions

The student-veteran population is a “special group.” They are bound by a collective identity, one that deeply defines each individual. As with other “special groups” on a campus, student-veterans cluster together, taking solace in surrounding themselves with those who understand without having to explain or justify or argue. They are also special in terms of their lower numbers, their economic and demographic makeup, their common experiences and their identity formation. Although special in many positive ways, these distinctions can also make them at-risk both academically and personally. Numerous government programs exist to address other such “special groups,” including low income, first generation and those unlikely to attend college. Interestingly, these could all be applied to many student-veterans, both in this study and beyond. Yet all the federal government requires of a campus is that a staff person be available for paperwork assistance. Nothing more. So when the veteran arrives on campus, there are no special programs, no special efforts designed to address his or her distinct needs. Instead of the school embracing these students, it is often *unconcerned*, allowing them to become another number. Given the projected increases, this unconcern is untenable in the long-term. Already for this upcoming academic year (2009-2010) there is a projected 20-25% increase in veteran enrollment. If college administrators and faculty truly want this group to succeed, then efforts must be made that equal those of other special or at-risk groups on campus. These efforts must also go beyond mere financial support. This group deserves the attention, effort and programs afforded other similarly situated, non-veteran groups.

Recommendations

The student-veteran population needs and deserves more study. As noted in the literature review, very little work has been completed to understand this population. It is my hope that the current study fills that void, at least in some small and preliminary fashion. Along those lines, I believe that certain recommendations can be drawn as a result of interviewing these 24 individuals. Below, I offer six recommendations based on the findings of this study. Where practical, I will connect my recommendations with the undergraduate military mobilization process modeled in Figure 7.

First, at the campus level, institutions must take a larger, more intentional and more attentive stance on issues surrounding veterans on their campuses. Understand first that there are many undergraduates who are also members of the military, including ROTC cadets, Guard and reserve personnel recently graduated from basic training or advanced training schools as well as personnel who have served one or more contract periods (4 years per period) and have left the military. Some of these individuals will have been deployed, but not necessarily all will have spent any time in the Middle East. Regardless of the exact status of the current or former service member, building relationships early will facilitate a deeper connection with the institution, which can be especially valuable for those who eventually may deploy. These relationship efforts should begin during Phase 1, when the student-military member arrives on campus, and should include broad awareness by the University community. Institutional leadership should endeavor to clearly and publicly support its veterans, holding an appreciation day, guest lectures, student-veteran panels and so on. Universities would be wise to consider the reciprocal nature of these relationships. Given the deep bond between box buddies, veterans satisfied with their educational

experiences will certainly spread the word. In this way, they will act as a de facto recruiter, bringing more veterans to the campus.

Connections should remain, and ideally deepen, during Phase 2. It is during this phase when individuals are most distant from the institution, both personally and academically. Recall that almost all of the participants made a complete break from the institution, making no effort to remain connected during deployment. Recently I contacted a few individuals that I have not spoken with since their deployment. Their responses were immediate and all expressed gratitude at my effort to contact them. I think these individuals long for this type of contact, even if only for a brief moment. This effort on the part of any university would go a long way to the veteran in proclaiming that *we care about you, we want to make sure you're doing well. We want you to know that when you're ready to come back, all you need to do is let us know and we'll take it from there.* Simple efforts like this can deepen already existing connections to the institution.

Second, institutions should consider creating a “student-veteran mentoring” program. Relationships formed during Phase 1 could easily erode if not maintained during deployment and beyond. There are many faculty, staff and administrators who are themselves current or former military members, still others have ties through family or friends or are simply genuinely interested in assisting student-veterans. Institutions could seek volunteers from this group to serve as “mentors” for an individual whose deployment is near. This campus mentor could stay connected with their military member throughout his or her separation. As the time to return approaches, the campus mentor could work to ensure the transition back to campus is smooth. Further suggesting the effectiveness of this approach comes from lessons on *box buddies*. Student-veterans clearly have an affinity for fellow veterans. Thus identifying campus veterans (e.g. faculty, staff) and/or others who are *genuinely* interested and connecting them with soon-to-

be deployed personnel could capitalize on this affinity. Mentors could also be chosen based on the student-veteran's major, many of whom connect this academic program of student with the military vocation. Selecting a mentor who could bridge all of these elements could be especially helpful and valuable to the veteran. Regardless of the exact person, mentors could ease the transition back home and back to the college community as assigned mentors would remain connected well after the individual returns. By remaining connected through the transition home and back to the campus, the "mentor" program also addresses the logistical and transactional challenges reported in Phase 3. The mentor could ensure that the returning individual receives personal attention and guidance as they schedule classes, navigate the GI Bill process, find housing and so on.

Third, institutions, in consultation with experienced student-veterans, should create a pre-deployment checklist and a post-deployment checklist to provide guidance for departing and returning personnel. Checklists should include obvious information, such as the "correct" withdrawal process, how to terminate a housing lease, how to schedule courses upon return and so on. But also included should be less obvious, or perhaps more difficult areas, such as who to talk to on campus about personal, family, or financial concerns. This simple effort would ease anxiety in Phase 1 and especially in Phase 3, when returning to college is often difficult and burdensome. When paired with a campus mentor with whom the veteran can work, checklists like these seem both easy and invaluable.

The fourth recommendation covers all aspects of the military mobilization process. In many ways, this recommendation speaks to "climate," a concept often associated with race, gender, sexual orientation or other protected classes. Statistics presented earlier indicate that a 20 to 25 percent increase in post-secondary enrollment (Eckstein, 2009), bringing the total number

of enrolled veterans to over 450,000 (Eckstein, 2009; Wright, 2009). Given these figures, campus communities must be more informed and aware of this population. To this end, institutional leadership should charge its personnel to offer educational sessions to all University constituents (e.g. all personnel, student body, alumni etc). These broad and multifaceted efforts should promote understanding of student-veterans while also exposing some of the challenges faced by members of this group. The key here is a broad, campus-wide increase in awareness and understanding of student-veterans. Manning and Stage (1992) advanced the idea of a “multicultural campus,” where institutions and its individuals are responsive to *all* people. As noted earlier, one of the major barriers towards understanding student-veterans is their invisibility. By offering educational sessions to the broader community, institutions draw positive attention to this group. From this increased awareness, campus personnel can provide more intentional efforts at including this group, thereby striving toward Manning and Stage’s conceptualization of a multicultural campus. Similarly, these efforts can assist in development of cultural competence. Sue (1998) defines cultural competence as “...the belief that people should not only appreciate and recognize other cultural groups, but also be able to effectively work with them” (p. 440). As I have argued previously, student-veterans are a culture unto themselves. As such, understanding this culture through campus educational programs facilitates understanding. Furthermore, academic, financial and personal counseling must be readily available to student-veterans and University constituents must know of its availability. University personnel in a position to offer such counseling must have deeper training and awareness of veterans’ issues so as to adequately address their needs.

Fifth, and again addressing all phases of the model, institutional Veteran’s Affairs Offices should be reviewed for efficacy and functionality. Presently, campus VA offices are the one

“obvious” place for veterans. It is also the one place where student-veterans check-in at day one. Anyone due benefits, whether previously deployed or not, will likely visit the VA office. In a larger institution such as Alpha University, the VA office was robust, staffed by several professionals, along with clerical and student employee support. Their efforts to work with student-veterans were numerous and commendable. However, similar efforts were not the case at the smaller Bravo University or the few other institutions attended by this group. My concern is that VA offices at smaller and medium sized institutions focus solely on the administrative aspect of the veteran. *Even this focus has a focus*: processing financial paperwork related to the GI Bill, tuition assistance and other monetary benefits owed to the military member. With the focus squarely on financial matters, it would seem likely that other equally important aspects of the student-veteran situation might be neglected. Attempts should be made to evaluate VA offices to ensure they are addressing the entire veteran and making appropriate referrals where necessary.

The sixth and final recommendation is based on the heavy reliance on fellow *box buddies*. Bonds between personnel, whether having served together or not, are profound and not easily understood by those without this experience. Capitalizing on this could be an initiative that has already begun at Bravo University. I recently asked a student-veteran who participated in this project what his thoughts were on student-veterans organizations on a college campus. Would there be a benefit? Could an organization like this serve as a resource to student-veterans? My question was sparked by Alpha University’s veteran’s organization, which has been in existence since 1968. It was a casual conversation, one that I did not expect to go much beyond that session. We talked for a while, with the general conclusion being that such an organization on Bravo’s campus could indeed provide a positive and supportive outlet for student-veterans. A

couple weeks after this conversation, he sent me a message indicating that he wanted to start forming such an organization. He had thought about it and, after his experiences of twice being mobilized, thought this would be a good tool for all veterans. He and I have gathered the necessary paperwork to begin this organization at Bravo University. Although small, it is movement towards supporting veterans on that campus. Other institutions should consider the potential need and effectiveness of similar efforts for their campus. After concluding this study, there is no question in my mind that a formal, collection of box buddies, unified by purpose and experience, could help all who participate.

Limitations and Future Research

In some ways, the purpose of this research was to build a foundation. Since little existed before this began, and little has happened even 18 months later, a foundation seemed a necessary starting point. Although I am pleased with the outcomes of this study, I recognize the limits of this effort and the need to do more. One such limitation is that the grounded theory design allowed only for particularization of this theory to this group of participants. I would not suggest that student-veterans interviewed at other campuses or in other settings would necessarily respond the same way. Additionally, although I was pleased to have four women participate, the group is less than ideal in terms of ethnic diversity. Only one of the 24 participants was non-white, an issue I agree should be addressed in future research. Access to participants remains a potential limitation in this study. As noted earlier, finding participants was at times very difficult, more difficult than I originally imagined. Plans for snowball sampling were not as effective as previously envisioned. However, future research should consider the recruitment challenges that occurred in this study and plan accordingly.

While all research has limitations, I find it more useful to consider future directions that can be informed by the current study. Elements clearly emerged from this study that bear further consideration. Future research, in my view, is limited only by the researcher's imagination.

One of the more suggestive pieces from this study is the idea of compartmentalization. I think that the idea of compartmentalization, or more generally, the idea of coping skills, would be readily applicable to most, if not all, veterans serving in a potentially high stress scenario. It is when veterans return home that these previously assistive coping mechanisms began to erode. It is this aspect of compartmentalization, its erosion, which gives me the most concern. Future research could examine this more deeply, suggesting intervention techniques which might benefit the struggling military member.

Future research could also examine some of the diversity that comprises military personnel. For this study, I was fortunate to have four women participate, however, only one African American veteran participated. It would be insightful to know what, if any, further challenges might be experienced by individuals who are non-white and non-male. For example, do student-veterans who are women have additional challenges *because* they are female? Similarly, do African American student-veterans have additional challenges *because* they are not in the majority group? These and other various intersections could influence one's experience, presenting further issues and challenges not experienced by the majority group military members.

Analysis of best practices would also be insightful. There are a handful of institutions that are vigorously supporting their student-veterans. For example, the University of Minnesota houses a "*Veteran's Transition Center*" designed to assist veterans in all aspect of the student-veteran balance. Their robust program includes, among other things, a "student-veteran

appreciation day” where the campus honors and celebrates their student-service personnel. This campus has endeavored to create a warm and welcoming environment for all veterans. Consider, then the potential “snowball” effect at that campus: Student-veterans enrolled on this highly supportive campus are likely to recruit other student-veterans to the same campus. Institutions that do not presently have this climate could learn from institutional leaders like the University of Minnesota, potentially implementing already proven programs.

A final area of consideration would be an ethnographic examination of a military unit. Observation of the unit as they prepared for deployment, remaining connected with the unit during their separation, and further observations and interviews upon their return home could yield a rich body of data. While the individual stories of the participants in this study are themselves rich in description, imagine the depth one might gather by observing an entire unit work through the process. As noted, the only potential hurdle is one of access. Military units are appropriately concerned with outside “intrusion.” Therefore, an undertaking such as this would require a good deal of initial trust and rapport with unit commanders. The end result, however, would likely justify the time and energy needed to successfully complete this type of a project.

Ideas for future research are virtually limitless. Certainly there are practical, logistical, and financial issues to be considered, but the “brainstorming” aspect of research ideas seems potentially unending. This experience has demonstrated the importance of further study in this area. I certainly hope that other researchers seriously consider contributing to the small but growing body of knowledge on student-veteran issues.

Researcher Reflections
















































I remember considering different ideas for my dissertation topic. In the end, I chose to study student-veterans because I wanted my research to mean something, both to me and to those

I planned to study. I cannot really speak for the individuals who shared with me some of their most personal stories. Did they enjoy the experience? Did they like having someone just listen? I would like to think so, but that conclusion is ultimately for each individual to consider.

Personally, I did not expect that this experience would be so transformative, so enlightening and so meaningful. There were moments during this experience where I needed to blink away some tears, and I think I saw the same effort in some of those I interviewed. At other times, stories were recalled to me that were hard to fathom: scenes from a land that most of us only see filtered through the media. These individuals put a face to all that we see and hear about related to Iraq and Afghanistan. In the end, the reason those individuals are *in the box* does not really matter. It is not important to dissect the larger political situation. Nor is it important to argue the merits of the decision to go to war. In the end, these young men and women went to the *box* because they took an oath to serve and their country asked them to do just that. What matters are the experiences of these individuals – and the thousands of other individuals just like them. I am so proud to have had an opportunity to tell at least a small part of their story. I hope that I and others will endeavor to continue this narrative in the future. For regardless of one's politics, it appears that we will be there for some time. Students will continue to be a contingent of those serving, and they will continue to come back to our campuses once their service is complete. As a country and as a collection of campuses, we must remember these individuals once the welcome home parade is over. Long after their service in Iraq or Afghanistan ends – and in some cases after their official service in the military ends – we must continue to collect and understand their stories. For without this understanding, we as a collection of educators and citizens will fail to serve those who have served us so well.

Appendix A. Enlisted rates and ranks for all five branches of the United States Military.

(Source: mwr.navy.mil/trainingresources/rank_insignia_poster.pdf)

ENLISTED				
ARMY	AIR FORCE	NAVY	MARINE CORPS	COAST GUARD
 SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE ARMY (SMA)	 CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT OF THE AIR FORCE (CMSAF)	 MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE NAVY (MCPON)	 SERGEANT MAJOR OF THE MARINE CORPS (SGTMAJMC)	 MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER OF THE COAST GUARD (MCPQCG)
 COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR (CSM) SERGEANT MAJOR (SGM)	 CHIEF MASTER SGT (CMSGT) CHIEF MSTR SGT W/ DIAMOND	 FLEET COMMAND MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (MCPO)	 SERGEANT MAJOR (SGTMAJ) MASTER GUNNERY SGT (MGYSGT)	 MASTER CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (MCPO)
 1ST SERGEANT (1ST SGT) MASTER SERGEANT (MSG)	 SR MASTER SERGEANT (SMSGT) SR MASTER SERGEANT W/ DIAMOND	 SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (SCPO)	 1ST SERGEANT (1STSGT) MASTER SERGEANT (MSGT)	 SENIOR CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (SCPO)
 SERGEANT FIRST CLASS (SFC)	 MASTER SERGEANT (MSGT) MASTER SERGEANT W/ DIAMOND	 CHIEF PETTY OFFICER (CPO)	 GUNNERY SERGEANT (GYSGT)	 CHIEF PETTY OFFICER
 STAFF SERGEANT (SSGT)	 TECH SERGEANT (TSGT)	 PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS (PO1)	 STAFF SERGEANT (SSGT)	 PETTY OFFICER 1ST CLASS (PO1)
 SERGEANT (SGT)	 STAFF SERGEANT (SSGT)	 PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS (PO2)	 SERGEANT (SGT)	 PETTY OFFICER 2ND CLASS (PO2)
 CORPORAL (CPL) SPECIALIST (SP4)	 SENIOR AIRMAN (SRA)	 PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS (PO3)	 CORPORAL (CPL)	 PETTY OFFICER 3RD CLASS (PO3)
 PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (PFC)	 AIRMAN 1ST CLASS (A1C)	 SEAMAN (SN)	 LANCE CORPORAL (LCPL)	 SEAMAN (SN)
 PRIVATE (PV2)	 AIRMAN (AMN)	 SEAMAN APPRENTICE (SA)	 PRIVATE 1ST CLASS (PFC)	 SEAMAN APPRENTICE (SA)
NO INSIGNIA	NO INSIGNIA	 SEAMAN RECRUIT (SR)	NO INSIGNIA	 SEAMAN RECRUIT (SR)

Appendix B. Glossary of military terms presented in the paper.

- **Critical Incident Stress Management Debriefing** – essentially an individual or unit process whereby stressful/traumatic events are discussed and further services are offered.
- **Demobilizing (or Demobing)** – the return process that all military personnel go through once a deployment is over. Demobing often involves stress debriefing, health/fitness assessments, mental health assessments, and copious administrative tasks. Also known for slowing down one’s actual return home.
- **Enlisted / Officer** – there are two career paths in the military. One is the “enlisted” side, comprised of E-1 through E-9. Most interviewed for this project were E-4 (Specialist) and E-5 (Sergeant). The other career path is “officer,” comprised of O-1 to O-9. Officers are typically college graduates, possibly ROTC graduates.
- **MOC Gear** – anti-biological/chemical gear issued to military personnel.
- **MOS** – Military Occupational Specialty; essentially one’s military “job.” For example, in the Army, MOS 11Bravo is infantry. A soldier with this MOS would be appropriately trained and qualified as an infantryman.
- **MRE** – meals ready to eat; basically a self-contained, military version of a TV dinner. Some even include heating elements.
- **Non-commissioned Officer** – generally an E-5 (SGT) and above in all branches of the service. See Appendix A.
- **Operational Tempo (or OPTEMPO)** – generally, the pace of one’s job, set of tasks etc. For example, if there is a high OPTEMP then pace is intense and downtime is scarce.
- **OPs** – outside perimeters; essentially the boundary between “us” and “them” requiring guard and gate watches by military personnel.

- **Outside the Wire** – going beyond the “safe zone,” outside the wire basically means going out into the civilian population and territory in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. Staying inside the wire, conversely, means staying within one’s base. Some military jobs require regular trips outside the wire while others require little to no work outside the wire.
- **RELAD** – acronym for released from active duty
- **Reveille** – the wakeup call heard by sleeping military personnel.
- **Scuttlebutt** –meaning rumor; always means a water fountain.
- **Ticks** – slang for a firefight/gun battle
- **Uparmored Humvee** – a re-outfitted military vehicle, initially porous to IEDs and bullets.

References

- Allain, A. N., Galina, Z. H., Sutker, P. B., & Winstead, D. K. (1991). Cognitive deficits and psychopathology among former prisoners of war and combat veterans of the Korean conflict. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 148*, 67-72.
- Allain, A. N., & Sutker, P. B. (1996). Assessment of PTSD and other mental disorders in World War II and Korean Conflict POW survivors and combat veterans. *Psychological Assessment, 8*, 18-25.
- Alvarez, L. (2009). Army data show rise in number of suicides. Retrieved April 1, 2009 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/us/06suicide.html>
- Amoroso, P. J., Bell, N. S., Engel, C. C., DeMattos, A. C., Senier, L., Wegman, D. H., Williams, J. O., & Yore, M. M. (2000). Demographic, physical, and mental health factors associated with deployment of U.S. Army soldiers to the Persian Gulf. *Military Medicine, 165*, 762-772.
- Auchterlonie, J. L., Hoge, C. W., & Milliken, C. S. (2007). Longitudinal assessment of mental health problems among active and reserve component soldiers returning from the Iraq war. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 98*, 2141-2148.
- Auchterlonie, J. L., Hoge, C. W., & Milliken, C. S. (2006). Mental health problems, use of mental health services, and attrition from military service after returning from deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 295*, 1023-1032.
- Bahraini, N., Brenner, L. A., Betthausen, L. M., Cornette, M. M., Gutierrez, P. M., & Staves, P. M. (2008). A qualitative study of potential suicide risk factors in returning combat veterans. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 30*, 211-225.

- Bell, J. L. (1995). Traumatic event debriefing: Service delivery designs and the role of social work. *Social Work, 40*, 36-43.
- Benin, M., Brandt-Williams, A., & Okun, M. A. (1996). Staying in college: Moderators of the relation between intention and institutional departure. *The Journal of Higher Education, 67*, 577-596.
- Bertenthal, D., Chu, A., Gima, K., Maguen, S., Marmar, C. R., & Seal, K. H. (2008). Getting beyond don't ask, don't tell: An evaluation of US veterans administration post-deployment mental health screening of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*, 714-720.
- Bevis, H. L. (1944). College and the demobilized student. *Journal of Educational Sociology, 18*, 81-86
- Biklen, S. K. & Bogdan, R. C. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. Allyn and Bacon: Boston.
- Blair, J. (1999). GI bill paved the way for a nation of higher learners. *Education Week, 18*, 32-33.
- Bliese, P. D., & Stuart, J. A. (1998). The long-term effects of operation desert storm on the psychological distress of U.S. army reserve and national guard veterans. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 28*, 1-22.
- Blumer, H. (1966). Sociological implications of the thought of George Herbert Mead. *The American Journal of Sociology, 71*, 535-544.
- Booth, A. & Gimbel, C. (1996). Who fought in vietnam? *Social Forces, 74*, 1137-1157.
- Booth-Kewley, S. & Larson, G. E. (2005). Predictors of psychiatric hospitalization in the navy. *Military Medicine, 170*, 87-93.

- Booth-Kewley, S., Larson, G. E., Merrill, L. L., & Stander, V. A. (2001). Physical symptoms as indicators of depression and anxiety. *Military Medicine, 166*, 796-799.
- Bound, J. & Tuner, S. (2002). Going to war and going to college: Did world war II and the gi bill increase educational attainment for returning veterans? *Journal of Labor Economics, 20*, 784-815.
- Boyko, E. J., & Maynard, C. (2008). Suicide rates in the Washington state veteran population. *Psychiatric Services, 59*, 1245.
- Bramsen, I., & Van der Ploeg, H. M. (1999). Fifty years later: The long-term psychological adjustment of ageing world war II survivors. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 100*, 350-358.
- Brett, J. M. (2000). Culture and negotiation. *International Journal of Psychology, 35*, 97-104.
- Britt, T. W., Castro, C. A., & Greene-Shortridge, T. M. (2007). The stigma of mental health problems in the military. *Military Medicine, 72*, 157-161.
- Brown, T. A., Lau, R. R., & Sears, D. O. (1978). Self-interest and civilians' attitudes toward the Vietnam war. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 42*, 464-483.
- Browner, W. S., Golding, J. M., Marmar, C. R., Metzler, T. J., Schlenger, W. E., Stewart, A., Weiss, D. S., Wells, K. B., & Zatzick, D. F. (1997). Posttraumatic stress disorder and functioning and quality of life outcomes in nationally representative sample of male Vietnam veterans. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 154*, 1690-1695.
- Bumiller, E. (2009). Defense chief lifts ban on pictures of coffins. Retrieved June 7, 2009 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/washington/27coffins.html>
- Card, D. & Lemieux, T. (2001). Going to college to avoid the draft: The unintended legacy of the vietnam war. *AEA Papers and Proceedings, 91*, 97-102.

- Cardona, R. A. & Ritchie, E. C. (2007) U.S. military enlisted accession mental health screening: History and current practice. *Military Medicine*, 172, 31-35.
- Clipp, E. C., Elder, G. H., & Shanahan, M. J. (1997). Linking combat and physical health: The legacy of World War II in men's lives. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 154, 330-336.
- Cloud, D. S. (2007). U.S. Needs Long-Term Presence in Iraq, Gates Says. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/washington/27military.html>.
- Collins, R. & Makowsky, M. (1993). *The discovery of society*. McGraw Hill: New York.
- Cook, J. M., Coyne, J. C., Riggs, D. S., & Thompson, R. (2004). Posttraumatic stress disorder and current relationship functioning among World War II ex-prisoners of war. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 36-45.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage: Thousand Oaks.
- Cuninggim, M. (1944). The war and the student personnel programme in institutions of higher learning. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 22, 130-156.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1944). The college training detachment previews post-war education. *The School Review*; 52, 157-165.
- Crooks, D. L. (2001). The importance of symbolic interaction in grounded theory research on women's health. *Health Care for Women International*, 22, 11-27.
- Dannells, M. & Stage, F. K. (2000). *Linking theory to practice*. Routledge: New York.
- Darwin, J. L., & Reich, K. I. (2006). Reaching out to families of those who serve: The SOFAR project. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 37, 481-484.

- DeLongis, A., Dunkel-Schetter, C., Folkman, S., Gruen, R. J., & Lazarus, R. S. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: Cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*, 992-1003.
- Defense Subcommittee (2005). Hearing on the FY05 National Guard & Reserve Budget: Testimony of VADM John G. Cotton, USNR, Chief, Naval Reserve. Retrieved September 20, 2006 from:
<http://appropriations.senate.gov/hearings/record.cfm?id=220207>
- Department of Defense (2009). Reserve components: Noble eagle, enduring freedom, iraqi freedom. Retrieved February 15, 2009 from:
<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2009/d20090210ngr.pdf>
- Dunivin, K. O. (1994). Military culture: Change and continuity. *Armed Forces & Society, 20*, 531-547.
- Eckstein, M. (2009). Colleges cite inequities in new benefits for veterans. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 55*, A1.
- Elsass, W. P., Hill, H., Fiedler, E., & Skop, B. (2001). Susceptibility to maladaptive responses to stress in basic military training based on variants of temperament and character. *Military Medicine, 166*, 884-888.
- Elder, G. H. (1987). War mobilization and the life course: A cohort of World War II veterans. *Sociological Forum, 2*, 449-472.
- Engdahl, B., Frazier, P., & Port, C. L. (2001). A longitudinal and retrospective study of PTSD among older prisoners of war. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 158*, 1474-1479.
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S. & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

- Farrell, E. F. (2005). Military Recruiters Promise 'Money for College' but Recent Veterans Find that Tuition Benefits Fall Short. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i36/36a03101.htm>
- Ficklen, E. & Stone, J. (2002). Empty promises: The myth of college access in America. A report of the advisory committee on student financial aid. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from: eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1a/3a/db.pdf
- Fisher, A. C. (1969). The cost of the draft and the cost of ending the draft. *The American Economic Review*, 59, 239-254.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer Publishing: New York, New York.
- Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, R. (1994). Traumatic war stressors and psychiatric symptoms among World War II, Korean, and Vietnam war veterans. *Psychology and Aging*, 9, 27-33.
- Fontana, A., Rosenheck, R., & Schwartz, L. S. (1997). Posttraumatic stress disorder among female Vietnam veterans: A causal model of etiology. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87, 169-175).
- Glass, J. C., & Harshberger, R. F. (1974). The full-time, middle-aged adult student in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 45, 211-218.
- Goldman, J. A. & Waterman, A. S. (1976). A longitudinal study of ego identity development at a liberal arts college. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 5, 361-369.
- Goode, W. J. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 483-496.
- Goodier, F. T. (1946). A teachers college adjusts to the war and postwar periods. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 23, 227-231.

- Griffith, J. (2005). Will citizens be soldiers? Examining retention of reserve component Soldiers. *Armed Forces & Society, 31*, 353-383.
- Grosset, J. M. (1993). A profile of community college stop-outs. *Community College Review, 20*, 51-58.
- Grossman, D. (1996). *On Killing: The psychological cost of learning to kill in war and Society*. New York: Little, Brown and Company
- Guttman, A. (1969). Protest against the war in Vietnam. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 382*, 56-63.
- Haggerty, T., & Modell, J. (1991). The social impact of war. *Annual Review of Sociology, 17*, 205-224.
- Hagopian, P. (2000). Voices from Vietnam: Veterans' oral histories in the classroom. *The Journal of American History, 87*, 593-601.
- Hammelman, T. L. (1995). The persian gulf conflict: The impact of stressors as perceived by army reservists. *Health and Social Work, 20*, 140-145.
- Hilliard, G. H. (1943). Teachers colleges and post-war needs. *Peabody Journal of Education, 21*, 92-96
- Horowitz, H. L. (1987). *Campus life: Undergraduate cultures from the end of the eighteenth century to the present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hoyt, J. E., & Winn, B. A. (2004). Understanding retention and college student bodies: Differences between drop-outs, stop-outs, opt-outs and transfer-outs. *NASPA Journal, 41*, 395-417.
- Hull, A. & Priest, D. (2007). Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration at Army's Top Medical

- Facility. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/17/AR2007021701172.html>
- Humes, E. (2006). *Over here: How the gi bill transformed the american dream*. Harcourt: Orlando, Florida.
- Jeon, Y. H. (2004). The application of grounded theory and symbolic interactionism. *Nordic College of Caring Sciences, 18*, 249-256.
- Kaplan, F. (2005). The dumbing-down of the U.S. army. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from: <http://www.slate.com/id/2127487/>.
- Karon, B. P., & Widener, A. J. (1997). Repressed memories and world war II: Lest we forget! *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 28*, 338-340.
- Kasworm, C. E. (1990). Adult undergraduates in higher education: A review of past research perspectives. *Review of Educational Research, 60*, 345-372.
- Kaylor, J. A., King, D. W., & King, L. A. (1987). Psychological effects of military service in Vietnam: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 102*, 257-271.
- Kelty, R., Segal, D. R. & Woodruff, T. (2006). Propensity to serve and motivation to enlist among American combat soldiers. *Armed Forces & Society, 32*, 353-366.
- Kennedy, H. (2009). U.S. soldier attacks fellow troops at camp liberty in Baghdad. Retrieved June 7, 2009 from: <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/world/2009/05/11/us-soldier-attacks-fellow-troops-at-camp-liberty-in-baghdad.html>.
- Kirby, S. N., & Naftel, S. (2000). The impact of deployment on the retention of military Reservists. *Armed Forces & Society, 26*, 259-284.
- Klein, A. J. (1945). Acceleration and the demobilized student in education. *Educational Research Bulletin, 24*, 85-87.

- Kraines, S. H. (1945). The veteran and postwar education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 16, 290-298.
- Kudler, H., & Straits-Troster, K. (2008). Identifying and treating post-deployment mental health problems among new combat veterans. *North Carolina Medical Journal*, 69, 39-42.
- Kuh, G. D. & Zhao, C. M. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education*, 45, 115-138.
- Leach, M. M. & Moreland, C. (2001). The relationship between black racial identity and moral development. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 27, 255-271.
- Leppel, K. (2002). Similarities and differences in the college persistence of men and women. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25, 433-450.
- Levin, A. (2006). Military blamed for inadequate referrals for ptsd assessment. *Psychiatric News*, 41, 5-6.
- Litz, B. T. (2007). The unique circumstances and mental health impact of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Retrieved April 15, 2009 from:
http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/fs_iraqafghanistan_wars.html
- MacDermid, S. M. & Marks, S. R. (1996). Multiple roles and the self: A theory of role balance. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 417-432.
- Macionis, J. J. (1993). *Sociology, fourth edition*. Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs.
- Manning, K. & Stage, F. K. (1992). *Enhancing the multicultural campus environment: A cultural brokering approach*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Mason, G. W., Sadler, A. E., Slabaugh, K., & Woosley, S. (2005). The mystery of stop-outs: Do Commitment and intentions predict reenrollment? *NASPA Journal*, 42, 188-201.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

- McGrath, E. J. (1945). The education of the veteran. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 238, 77-88.
- Meagher, I. (2007). *Moving a nation to care: Post-traumatic stress disorder and america's returning troops*. Brooklyn: IG
- Meilinger, P. S. (2007). American military culture and strategy. *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 46, 80-86.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mettler, S. (2005). *Soldiers to citizens: The gi bill and the making of the greatest generation*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York.
- MSNBC (2007). Confidence on Iraq continues to fall. Retrieved March 17, 2007, from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17501777>
- Nam, C. B. (1964). Impact of the "GI bills" on the educational level of the male population. *Social Forces*, 43, 26-32.
- Newby, J. H., McCarroll, J. E., Ursano, R. J., & Zizhong, F. (2005). Positive and negative consequences of a military deployment. *Military Medicine*, 170, 815-819.
- Olson, K. W. (1973). The G.I. bill and higher education: Success and surprise. *American Quarterly*, 25, 596-610.
- Ortega, A. N., & Rosenheck, R. (2000). Posttraumatic stress disorder among Hispanic Vietnam veterans. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 157, 615-619.
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (n.d.). Act 101 program information. Retrieved June 30, 2009, from: <http://www.pdehighered.state.pa.us/higher/site/default.asp>
- Paasch, K., & Teachman, J. D. (1989). Returning to school after marriage: Results for whites and

- blacks. *Sociological Forum*, 4, 423-433.
- Parker-Konkle, D. J., Parker, J. D., & Reeves, R. R. (2005). War-related mental health problems of today's veterans. *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, 930-942.
- Parrish, I. S. (2001). *Military Veterans PTSD Reference Manual*. Haverford, PA: Infinity.
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Terenzini, P. T. & Wolniak, G. C. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75, 249-284.
- Pascarella, E. T., & Smart, J. C. (1987). Influences on the intention to reenter higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 58, 306-322.
- Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Penn State Live (2004). Penn State Observes Veterans Day. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://live.psu.edu/story/8957>.
- Penn State Live (2003). Dozens More Penn State Students Report to Active Military Duty. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://psu.edu/story/2093p>.
- Penn State Live (2003). As War Looms, Hundreds of Troops from Penn State Community Stand Ready. Retrieved November 15, 2007 from: <http://live.psu.edu/story/2377>.
- Reglein, N. L. (1943). When Johnny comes marching home. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 14, 358-360.
- Ritchie, M. A. (1945). Who should counsel the veteran? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 16, 346-368.

- Roach, R. (1997). From combat to campus: GI bill gave a generation of African Americans an opportunity to pursue the American dream. *Black Issues in Higher Education, 14*, p. 26.
- Schreiber, E. M. (1973). Opposition to the Vietnam war among American university students and faculty. *The British Journal of Sociology, 24*, 288-302.
- Sennott, C. M. (2007). Back, but not home. Retrieved June 7, 2009 from:
http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2007/11/11/back_but_not_at_home/
- Shaw, R. M. (1947). The G.I. challenge to the colleges. *The Journal of Higher Education, 18*, 18-21.
- Shepard, J. M. (1990). *Sociology, fourth edition*. West Publishing Company: St. Paul.
- Shields, P. M. (1981). The burden of the draft: The Vietnam years. *Journal of Political and Military Sociology, 9*, 215-228.
- Spanard, J. A. (1990). Beyond intent: Reentering college to complete the degree. *Review of Educational Research, 60*, 309-344.
- Stenger, C. A., & Stephens, E. R. (1972). The opportunity and challenge of the Vietnam era veteran to American educators. *The Journal of Higher Education, 43*, 303-307.
- Tatum, B. D. (2003). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* Basic Books: New York.
- Thomas, V. G. (2001). Educational experiences and transitions of reentry college women: special considerations for African American female students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 70*, 139-155.
- Teachman, J. D. (1987). Family background, educational resources, and educational attainment. *American Sociological Review, 52*, 548-557.

- Titus, C. H. (1944). The university and the new veteran. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 15, 71-78.
- Traub, S. H. & Little, C. B. (1994). *Theories of deviance, fourth edition*. F.E. Peacock: Itasca.
- Tuhus, M. (2007). Getting vets their benefits back. Retrieved April 15, 2009 from:
http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/3016/getting_vets_their_benefits_back/
- Wiersma, W. (2000). *Research methods in education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Williamson, E. G. (1944). Counseling students in the postwar college. *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 18, 87-95.
- Wilson, R. (1994). GI bill expands access for African Americans. *The Educational Record*, 75, 32-36
- Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Sage: Thousand Oaks.
- Wright, A. (2009). More than 500 colleges commit to participate in new veterans' program. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from: <http://chronicle.com/daily/2009/06/20051n.htm>.
- Wynn, N. A. (1966). The good war: The Second World War and postwar American society. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31, 463-482.

Mark C. Bauman

Curriculum Vita

Education

- :: Doctor of Philosophy – Higher Education
August, 2009 – *The Pennsylvania State University*
- :: Master of Science – Instructional Technology
August, 2000 – *Bloomsburg University*
- :: Master of Arts – Psychology
June, 1999 – *Marywood University*
- :: Bachelor of Arts – Sociology
May, 1995 – *Bloomsburg University*

Professional Experience

- :: Assistant Professor, Counseling and Student Affairs
Appointment to begin August, 2009
- :: Associate Director, Residence Life
January, 2009 to Present – *Bloomsburg University*
- :: Assistant Director, Residence Life & Student Standards
October, 2000 to January, 2009 – *Bloomsburg University*
- :: Resident Director, Office of Residence Life
August, 1995 to May 1999 – *Bloomsburg University*

Courses Taught

- :: 66-560 – Introduction to Student Affairs (Student Development Theory)
Summer, 2008 – *Bloomsburg University Counseling & Student Affairs Program*
- :: 66-564 – History of Students and Colleges
Spring, 2009 – *Bloomsburg University Counseling & Student Affairs Program*
- :: 66-565 – Contemporary Issues in Student Affairs
Fall, 2008 & Summer, 2009 – *Bloomsburg University Counseling & Student Affairs Program*
- :: 66-590 | Research Design and Methods
Spring, 2009 – *Bloomsburg University Counseling & Student Affairs Program*

Selected Academic Service

- :: Member, General Education Curriculum Committee, Spring 2008 to present
- :: Member, Civic Engagement Living & Learning Community & Advisory Board, Summer 2006 to present
- :: Reviewer, *Higher Education in Review* (a journal from PSU's Center for the Study of Higher Education)
- :: LGBT Commission, Fall 2006 to present
- :: Student Life Standing Committee, 2002 to present