

**COUNCIL OF MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEES
OF UNITED KINGDOM UNIVERSITIES**



UNIVERSITY SERVICE UNITS. WHAT ARE THEY REALLY FOR?

By Dr Patrick Mileham

COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 1.



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The Author

Dr Patrick Mileham, a graduate of Cambridge and Lancaster universities, served in the Royal Tank Regiment for 28 years, finishing his service as Staff Officer OTC in 1992. Subsequently University Reader and Staff Governor, he was a member of the Glasgow and Strathclyde MEC and served on COMEC Executive for a number of years. He researches, speaks and writes internationally on professional military reform, military ethics, leadership and officership.

Author's Note

This paper is written to attract wide readership within the University Service Units. The style is therefore deliberately informal, even journalistic. Readers, however, will detect that there is a strong academic research background to the content over many years. The paper has been peer reviewed. The danger in the informal approach is that it might seem patronising. That is far from the author's intention. The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking or policy of Her Majesty's Government, the Ministry of Defence or the Council of Military Education Committees.

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C/O Secretary COMEC, 22, The Ridgeway, Putnoe, Bedford, MK41 8ET

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**FOREWORD BY
PROFESSOR DONALD RITCHIE CBE DL FRSE
CHAIRMAN COMEC**

I am very pleased to introduce and recommend this COMEC Occasional Paper by Dr Patrick Mileham. This is the first in a series planned for annual publication which focuses on important topics relevant to the University Service Units. COMEC is promoting this innovative series because of the coordination function that it has in holding the centre ground between The Ministry of Defence and the Universities. The USUs will change to reflect the changing nature of Defence. The intention of this and subsequent Occasional Papers is therefore to stimulate trains of thought and thereby encourage a much better understanding of the role and purpose of USUs.

Donald Ritchie

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover

'Call of the Sea. Sunset.' View from the Bridge of a P2000, manned by URNU members.

Inside cover

'Thrill of flying. In control.' Officer Cadet of Cambridge University Air Squadron.

'Royal Guard of Honour provided by the UAS, at the unveiling of the RAF Bomber Command Memorial, London 2012'.

Inside back cover

'Comradeship in action and at rest'. Two views, members of Trojan Squadron, DTUS.

Back Cover

'Soldiering. Trust and confidence'. The OTC on exercise.

COMEC is grateful for these illustrations, made available by the three Service Staff Officers/Commanders and CO Trojan Squadron, DTUS.

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Higher Education

The best clubs in the universities? Leadership packages – but can you package leadership like sausages? Flying experience – whose turn next around the bay? Field exercises – bangs and cam-cream face-painting for grown-ups? Evolutions, learning to avoid running aground, hitting harbour walls and *mal de mer*?

Forgive me. What a cynical way to begin. How else, however, could I attract your attention – particularly students – to read from end to end a moderately serious paper on the University Services' Units (USUs)? The USUs comprise Royal Naval Units (URNUs), the Officer Training Corps (OTC)¹, University Air Squadrons (UASs) and, joining the muster more recently, the Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme squadrons (DTUS)². Read Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* (1942) and you will see the narrow margins in the Battle of Britain in more ways than one. How far from Longmoor and Fremington training areas, to Sangin and Helmand Province, Afghanistan? What seamanship experience can be gained around the coasts of our islands, ready for the Caribbean and Straits of Hormuz in ships of war, not forgetting Britain's nuclear deterrent?

The purpose of this first COMEC Occasional Paper is to look rather more deeply than normal under the declared blanket-coverings of functional maritime, military, air training and technical activities of the USUs. We acknowledge their civil-military relations' agenda, but is the message getting through? There is deliberate constructive ambiguity about officer recruiting. However, such questions about institutional aims for engaging officer cadets seem mere background stuff, compared with the immediacy

¹ The first Officers' Training Regiment (OTR) is being trialled while this Paper is being written. It is too early to differentiate it from the UOTCs. Most of the substance of this Paper applies equally to the OTR.

² The Welbeck Defence Sixth Form College is connected with DTUS entry.

of the activities and exciting outdoor, practical life on which the USUs thrive and find their fun.

In the simple, now far off days of the Cold War ending c. 1990, the USUs were a semi-serious diversion from the rigour of academic disciplines. The URNUs' purpose was simply sea training with no strings attached. The Army was content that 75 per cent of OTC members would never continue in military service. The UASs provided serious flying training for selected would-be RAF pilots, most awaiting places at the RAFC, Cranwell, and qualifying for reduction there in flying training hours. Many technical military officers were educated, expensively, at the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS), Shrivenham³.

Believe me, for the main part university graduates have been historically treated with suspicion by Britain's Armed Forces. That prejudice remained until the c. 1990 University revolution in Britain, when the full force of latent HE brainpower reached all three Services. Sandhurst quickly achieved over a 90 per cent graduate intake, an unprecedented dynamic in Britain's otherwise proud military history. Likewise upwards of 50 per cent of Sandhurst entrants came from the OTC. From the mid-1990s masters and doctorates for career Service men and women came like a rush to the head. Hitherto decidedly under-educated, is the 'profession of arms' in Britain now a learned profession? Does that phenomenon start with the USUs? I would venture my reputation and say emphatically 'yes' to both questions. That's the first part of the answer to the exam question at the head of this paper. Read on.

Wider Education

Apart from those who always wanted to be 'a soldier.. go to sea.. or take wing' (to misquote Samuel Johnson), over many generations a steady number of undergraduates in British universities have found that they need something other than academic stimulants. Beyond the romance of the

³ A military university in Britain for career officers - on the West Point, Annapolis, Colorado Springs USA, and Kingston, Canada models - had been suggested in the 1966 Howard-English Report. It was rejected. Liberal education for most Service officers remains the British way, maintaining a healthy mutual respect between professional academic and professional military disciplines.

sea, the comradeship of soldiering and the thrill of flight, to complement the mind-bending development of their intellect, they intuitively felt the need to gain practical wisdom, one of the four Classic virtues. Intellect, wisdom, are they connected? This is not the place to dwell on such a fruity subject, but if higher and deeper brainpower means anything, so does wider. Where did, and still do, undergraduates develop their *mens sana in corpore sano*? Bodily kinaesthetic intelligence⁴ is still encouraged in universities in competitive sport, even for competitive would-be stoics drawn to the Cam, Isis, Thames and Trent by the joys of galley-slavery.

For an appreciable number, the thrill of competition provided by the practical military life acts like a magnet. Fostered by the nineteenth century Rifle Volunteer movement and the formation of the university contingents of the OTC (1908), joined by the UASs (from 1925) and the URNUs (since 1965), there are now two dynamics at work – the official Ministry of Defence dynamic of need and the personal dynamic of want. Do these dynamics converge? The answer is yes for most of their history. Do we know how? That is the aim of my paper. From now on, I am assuming, even hoping, that most readers will be student members of the URNUs, OTC, OTR, UASs and DTUS Squadrons.

Most of you realise that there is more to life than formal education. However the quality of cognitive capability (intelligence), conative motivation (determination) and affective depth of character (emotional influence) is important to all professions, but particularly to the military profession. All of us, according to Nobel laureate Daniel Kanneman⁵, think fast most of the time as we go about our everyday occupations and activities. Occasionally, maybe often, we have to slow down and even switch off autopilot to plunge deeply inside our own brains and, teamed up with other people's brains, to think about alternatives, choices, decisions and judgements. What we experience as really happening needs to be tested against wider and deeper truths. Try that under fire.

⁴ One of Howard Gardner's seven intelligences, in *Frames of Mind. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Fontana, 1993.

⁵ Daniel Kanneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Alan Lane, London, 2011.

Thinking fast has always been an imperative for those in the Armed Forces, often about life or death decisions, kill or be killed. Such moments of risk have drawn adventurous people to volunteer for the RN, Army and RAF over many generations. You will make more or less informed judgements about the extent of risk you might face in your career, and subconsciously how much fast and slow thinking is involved. The quality of thinking, at any speed, is enhanced by education. Do you deserve such luxury of opportunity as higher education and the USUs provide? Well you will be responsible for putting others at risk, so it's more a necessity for them than a luxury for you.

Non-destructive Testing

While serving in the USUs, activities are pretty well guaranteed to be risk-managed, if not entirely risk-free to life and limb, and hopefully of a 'non-destructive' nature. Half or more of the training and education given in the USUs is about safety and health, how to minimise casualties. Occasionally the risks are real, but usually they are simulated. Technical training in seamanship, tactics, flying and engineering is given by qualified instructors to meet proper Service standards and qualifications. The reliability of equipment is paramount. Assuming most readers are Officer Cadets, I suggest you thrive on such exposure, and enjoy competitively testing yourselves, using equipment and gaining expertise and qualifications.

You learn the art of Command, the techniques of Management in the military context, and you can develop your Leadership skills parallel to your position in the chain of command. What is Leadership? In the context of the activity it's a synergistic force, hugely in demand as a constituent of armed force, both intellectually and practically. Risk provides the imperative. To the work in hand the leader's brainpower and actions provide the extra dynamic. In a nutshell, teams need leaders. Leaders generate teamwork.

So command, Leadership and Management (CLM) are grist to the mill of all members of the Armed Forces and MOD civilians. CLM and gentle recruiting is at the heart of what the USUs are good at and exist for. However, the USUs do not exist only to complement and contrast with academic studies for the majority of those of you who do not join for Regular or Reserve service.

You know the syllabus well enough, what you do at weekends, camps and deployments, on land, at sea and in the air, so I shall not describe a mass of detail which reads like a telephone directory. However, let's not be killjoys: there are good parties too, lifting the spirits no end.

Skills are one thing. For those of you who are seeking a career in the RN, Army, RAF or MOD Civil Service, there is a testing beyond mere qualification in USU activities, chiefly of your character. All the Services have now articulated their lists of Ethos, Values and Standards. 'Selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, respects for others' reads the list⁶, with 'excellence, service and teamwork' thrown in for good measure. 'Humour' is not confined to the Royal Marines, and all three Services add a subsidiary list of a dozen or so terms of military ideology and virtue. Although missing from the main list, 'trust' integrates all ingredients, both as an outward and internal corporate spiritual activity – spiritual given as many meanings as you can imagine – whether the human groups are elementary or highly sophisticated. Trust is an active verb as well as a noun and, in this paper, it is the most significant word of all.

For the more pedantic readers, I have to point out that almost all other stated military virtues are abstract nouns, not verbs. How do you do abstract nouns? That is something to think about – your university education encourages self-reflection – when you are sitting in a trench in the dark, grounded because of fog or when tied quietly alongside or at anchor and not asleep.

For those of you seeking officer selection the USUs enable you to learn and test yourselves in your knowledge, understanding, motivation, stamina, resilience and character⁷, in three ways –

- Your competence,
- Your energy, and
- Your good faith.⁸

⁶ Are these personal virtues of character, of belief in ideals, or values fixed or variable? Are they prescriptive and 'normative', while actual conduct can only be judged 'descriptively'? These are open questions, which deserve more enquiry and development.

⁷ If you have an idle moment, google 'Johari windows', and test how much you know about yourself and how you think others think they know you.

If you choose a Service career your trustworthiness and competence, of course, will be developed continuously as you complete your officer training and education after USU service and before you become operational. Your energy and willingness to act swiftly and over long periods, together with the proof that you can be trusted to act in good faith – the moral imperative behind all corporate actions – are all exercised and developed while you are a member of the URNU, OTC, OTR, UAS or DTUS Squadron.

So what happens next? To join or not join, as a Regular or Reservist, for a hoped-for full career or short service – those are the questions. Pause and hold your fire. War is a terrible thing and military operations far from unalloyed joy.

People: Operations and war

Armed forces exist to exert military power and armed force when necessary. The UK's current 'Defence Vision' asserts that enterprise exists and operates as 'A force for Good in the World'⁹. Armed force to achieve peace, on the face of it, is the contradiction of all contradictions, an ambiguity of all ambiguities, a paradox of all paradoxes. Does it work?

When operational, navies, armies and air forces act as 'total organisations'¹⁰, in their configurations exclusive of outsiders in order to be effective and also comply with personal indemnity and legal immunity for combatants under the international Laws of War. On operations coercive and lethal force, 'hard power', is used. The denial of adversaries' human rights on operations is the 'double effect' of all 'double effects', if you know your moral philosophy. It is about avoiding collateral casualties, arguably the most difficult of all

⁸ Patrick Mileham, 'Building the Moral Component' in Patrick Mileham and Lee Willett (Eds.), in *Military Ethics for the Expeditionary Era*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, 2001, p. 67. The bullet points accord with cognition, conation and affection, mentioned above.

⁹ See <http://www.mod.uk/Defenceinternet/aboutDefence/Defencevision> accessed 20 August 2012.

¹⁰ Erving Goffman, 'The Characteristics of Total Institutions', in Amitai Etzioni, ed., *A Sociological Reader on Complex Organisations*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1961, pp. 312-338.

the criteria to judge in the *jus in bello* list, how to fight justly, fairly. ‘Soft power’¹¹ is also used, with hearts and minds tactics and minimum force.

One of the criteria for just war is a reasonable chance of success, so ‘fighting spirit’, or as Clausewitz defined it, ‘moral force’¹², is necessary. An overwhelming militaristic spirit, however, is to be shunned by liberal democracies, of which Britain is one. General Sir John Hackett, one-time member of Oxford OTC, Australian-born, British Cavalry General, airborne brigade commander at Arnhem and University Principal, wrote

‘The officer is endued with the power of coercion. In a society of free men, this power cannot safely be bestowed on those who do not possess sufficient detachment and liberality of mind to use it wisely.’¹³

In respect of risk Hackett also wrote that the hallmarks of military service in war and operations was an ‘unlimited liability’¹⁴ and the duty of being a ‘citizen’ as well as military office-holder. The denial of some normal citizens’ civil liberties and human rights amongst military persons is significant.

Anyway Hackett’s analogy is counter-intuitive, and he would have known it as such. A legal fiction, however, does not prevent a fact from happening. For all practical purposes, military persons can be expected to take physical risks, moral risks, legal risks and many other sorts of risks for themselves and, within the chain of command or outside it, particularly risks on behalf of others they command, lead, follow or just serve alongside. This is serious stuff.

However as USU members you do not face unlimited liability, nor possess actual powers to coerce other people in the same sense as Regular or Reservist commanders on operations. In a real sense, however, you are being mentored and learning to understand – if you didn’t know already – about the contradictions of risk and safety, of military zeal and civility as

¹¹ See Joseph S. Nye Jnr., *Soft Power*, Public Affairs, Perseus Books, Cambridge MA, 2004, and Joseph Nye Jnr. ‘Soft Power, Hard Power and Leadership’, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/10_06_06_seminar_Nye_HP_SP_Leadership accessed on 6 August 2012.

¹² Carl von Clausewitz, *On war*, Ed Michael Howard and Pater Paret.

¹³ John Hackett, ‘The education of an officer’, in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, vol 105, 1963, p. 33.

¹⁴ John Hackett, *The Profession of Arms*, Sidgewick and Jackson, 1983, p.202.

citizens, of moral and legal responsibility for the taking of life and bringing about destruction, all of which armed forces are duty bound to accept and do on operations.

Significantly you as USU members are also learning to act corporately, not as individuals as you chiefly do in your university studies. USUs provide supremely effective means of teaching and learning the art and science of Command, Leadership and Management. There are realities and dangers for you also in the elements of terrain, of the sea and in the air. Seamanship and airmanship are elements of sea-power and air-power as well as fighting effectiveness. So how realistic is the training and education in the USUs? That question can be answered only truly afterwards, when you have experienced Regular or Reservist service and, most particularly, on operations.

There is one more element to military education. It is already taught at Sandhurst, and is defined in the dictionaries (for example the full *Oxford English Dictionary*, *OED*) and some armed forces' lexicons. It is the word, 'Officership'.

Holding Office

A fact often forgotten is that the USUs are part of the infrastructure of the 'profession of arms', in Britain. Another fact, automatically accepted, is a distinction between commissioned and non-commissioned rank. Well understood in previous generations, nowadays it is less so, in view of the counter-dynamics of egalitarianism and meritocracy in today's liberal democracies. My belief and advice rests on the fact that everyone in the British Armed Forces is a person who 'holds office' under the Crown, a 'public office'.

Another fact is that all members of the Armed Forces are combatants¹⁵. Kill or be killed may be professional duty *in extremis*. There are those who may have to order that to happen. There may be need for professional distance

¹⁵ With the exception of members who are ordained clergy.

between those who issue such orders and those who legally have to obey, whatever their personal feelings. That is why the one person who gives orders has supremely to be trusted, while those who carry out the orders have learnt how and why to trust that person. That is why commanders have to be leaders. Under the Mission Command process, the Corporal or Leading Hand may be the one issuing that order. That is why the actual comparative level of the rank of the public official may not be of such significance in the context of urgent operational actions.

The capability to hold rank in the Armed Forces, take command, lead and manage is what officership is all about. The word is used by some other nations, expressed in the English language. Its *OED* definition is 'rank or position of an officer' and 'a staff of officers', the latter meaning officer corps, or NCO cadre. As a Chief of the General Staff, now Lord Dannatt, wrote in 2008 'Officers, whether commissioned or non-commissioned, must be the standard bearers of the values and standards.'¹⁶ Officership is not just a position or rank. It has been extended by association in the *OED* as 'capability', how he or she qualitatively performs the office. Hence my working definition for purposes of all Armed Forces and the USUs is 'the concept, character, practice and quality of the individual holding military role and office'¹⁷.

A definition is one thing. What is the substance behind officership, already in the Sandhurst syllabus since 2004, and of which Dartmouth and Cranwell have an interest? It's all to do with trust, that word again. Trust is given by the public and mutual trust exists within the profession. Why is officership different from leadership, if indeed it is? Officership and leadership are corollaries of each other, two sides of the same coin. Officership is the official, objective role and capacity of an individual. Leadership is what that person does – you perhaps – subjectively, with real live people in real time. That is the meaning of 'integrity' – the expectancy of office, integrated with the character and actions of the leader – maybe you, where capability and character exist in the one person.

¹⁶ Foreword to 'Take me to Your Officer. Officership in the Army', edited by Patrick Mileham, *The Occasional*, No 54, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2008.

¹⁷ See Patrick Mileham, 'Naval Power, Ethos and Officership', in *Naval Review*, Vol 98, No 2, May 2010, pp 139-146. Also Patrick Mileham, 'Fit and Proper Persons. Officership Revisited', Sandhurst Occasional Paper No 10, 2012, p.10-11. This can be accessed online <http://www.army.mod.uk/trainingeducation/training/17077.aspx>

However, that is not all. The official position of trust, actually a double trust, is expressed in the word 'fiduciary'. Reading the Commission you will see the words 'especial trust and confidence', which is deliberate and not a tautology. Read the law books, and you will see the position of a trustee is a person 'in a fiduciary role..[which] gives rise to a relationship of trust and confidence'. The fiduciaries, trustees, are in this position of mutual confidence and trust. These are the same words as in the Commission. But all persons who are Crown Servants, which includes all military personnel, also 'owe fiduciary duties to the Crown and, through the Crown, to the public'¹⁸. That makes office holders of any rank 'public servants', people holding 'public office'.

In my belief the relationship of mutual trust, reliance and partnership between all ranks, found in Britain's Armed Forces, and witnessed daily in the USUs, is a striking feature and stronger than in any other nation in the World.

Membership of the profession of arms can therefore be a legal and literally sacred position, when an oath of office or oath of loyalty to the head of state or national constitution is sworn. The officer-NCO distinction is immaterial in one sense. Professor Christopher Bellamy, Cranfield University, makes the point that an 'all-officer' institution is in the making. All members are trustees of their own Armed Service, and in view of the Armed Forces Covenant¹⁹, instituted in 2011, all are morally responsible for the Armed Forces' side of the Covenant. The others party to the Covenant are the population and the government of the day.

You will have heard the word ethos used frequently during your USU service. How precise a word is it? Is it a warm glow about confirming your self-conception of the character, identity and spirit of your Service and the whole of Britain's Armed Forces? The claimed ethos is only as good as the real, actual widely held reputation, these two rather esoteric phenomena being corollaries of each other. You even now, are guardians of the ethos and good reputation of the Armed Forces, part of the Military Covenant.

¹⁸ J.McGhee, *Snell's Equity*, 25th Edition, Sweet and Maxwell, London, 2004, respectively pp. 148 and 147.

¹⁹ See <http://www.mod.uk/Defenceinternet/Personnel/ArmedForcesCovenant> accessed 6 August 2012. See also Andrew Murrison, *Tommy this and Tommy that. The Military Covenant*, Biteback Books, London, 2011.

Take it or leave it?

What are the USUs really for? To answer the exam question, I draw together some conclusions.

Perhaps you did not reckon on such a complicated position in which Britain's Armed Forces exist, and why and when they have to take action in extreme as well as routine circumstances. The vast range of political, moral, legal, managerial, and social dynamics demands of those who serve in the Armed Forces great intellectual grasp of the profession, even amongst those of quite junior rank. Who can cope with military discipline as self-discipline? There resides real character and true integrity.

To conclude I switch to the third person plural. Some readers will be committed to join for full-time Regular or Reservist service. Others will be committed to Civil Service technical careers, holding 'office' of trust. The USUs will have exposed all members to the rich variety of branches and professional occupations within the RN, Army, Royal Air Force and Defence Civil Service. The USUs provide, metaphorically, a dating agency (in mixed company I pass over the *double entendre* here), a costume rehearsal (those fetching uniforms), and a seriously-real, trial-engagement for would-be professional people. Thus USU activities provide stage-rehearsals, if not the final, live firing, dress-rehearsal for true military operations. These are dynamics, the like of which is provided for no other profession I can think of in Britain.

Looking ahead the majority of those who will serve in the USUs will probably remain free agents. Within the parameters of the civil military relationship, and the Armed Forces' Covenant, those former officer cadets representing amongst the very best of their generation, will have had a substantial effort invested in them, informing them as future leaders of society national and international. They will have an intimate understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of 'force for good'. Emphatically, the wider population must understand what it is they are asking military people to do, to fulfil their part of the Covenant. This will become even more necessary as memories of the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan fade in the public imagination.

Above all USU members learn how to generate trust and trust one another, associated with the most trusted of public institutions²⁰ in Britain. The long-term civil-military relations effect is incalculable. The general management, leadership and other personal skills gained by individuals, however, are subject to serious calculation in a current research project²¹. How far the Ministry of Defence in future will dare to push strict return-on-investment criteria on the USUs, without inhibiting opportunities and killing enthusiasm, will have to be watched closely. The Council of Military Education Committees (COMEC) and constituent Military Education Committees (MECs) will have a more serious and active role than ever.

In the meantime no doubt the most adventurous and well-motivated undergraduates will continue to volunteer to join the USUs. The amount of goodwill generated with the public is long-lasting. The reciprocal advantages for USU members, the universities, the British Armed Forces and the nation will remain immense, far in excess of any normal calculation of return of investment. What price can be put on public trust? What price reputation? Is it all worth it? Emphatically yes.



²⁰ Consistently over the past 40 years, public trust in the Armed Forces has scored above 80 per cent in poll after poll.

²¹ Newcastle University 'Benefits of USU Membership Study'. MOD reviews into the USUs have never been conducted in modern times with the benefit of serious and consistent 'longitudinal' evidence as part of the Armed Forces HR 'supply chain', the units being part of the formal and informal civil-military infrastructure of the nation. The Armed Forces Covenant remains to be argued comprehensively and in depth.



