

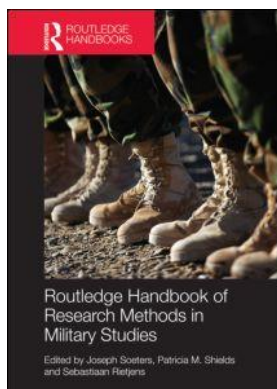
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Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Military Studies

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Introduction

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PART I

Getting started and seeing the context

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1

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Soeters, Patricia M. Shields and Sebastiaan Rietjens

What is special about studying the military?

Military organizations and the profession they spawn are unique. The military dispatch their personnel to far-flung places throughout the world. These men and women are asked to risk their lives in the service of the state, for higher purposes, and in so doing suffer, sometimes even after a mission is over. Military organizations and the people within them are tasked to do something extraordinary. Militaries are also unique because they frequently conduct their business in an atmosphere of secrecy. Sometimes a military organization does not want to reveal its actions because it is not always good at what it does, or because it now and then behaves unethically, especially towards the people in its area of operation (e.g. Soeters et al. 2010).

These characteristics demonstrate that studying the military is valuable and difficult at the same time. Researching the military is valuable and in fact indispensable because the use of violence, the military's core business, is probably one of the most unpredictable and impactful forces in social dynamics. Further, a society's armed forces use collective sources such as the taxpayers' money and hires citizens who could have earned their salaries elsewhere in the economy, under less threatening circumstances. For all these reasons the voters and taxpayers – ordinary people in society – have every right to know what military organizations are doing.

Doing research in any organization is difficult (e.g. Bryman 1988). However, studying the military is probably more complex because, more than other organizations, the military is a world on its own, an island within society-at-large on which its inhabitants work and live together. Getting access, particularly if one is not a regular inhabitant of that island, usually is no easy game to play. On the other hand, if one is a regular inhabitant, it may not be easy to do research either, because the organization wants some control over the diffusion of information about itself. Therefore, military organizations often manage the timing of the release of the research and occasionally, when a study is unflattering (but not a threat to security), inhibit or delay publication. Besides, national or regional security concerns can affect the diffusion of research findings. Studying the military is also difficult because its impact and presence can be felt along a continuum of scale. It can range from the causes of war to the stories of soldiers. Sources of data can range from sophisticated, international, longitudinal databases to intimate stories of soldiers. Methods of military studies are truly dynamic.

Taken all together, one can observe a societal and political push to know and an organizational tendency, however slight, to hide. Given this possible tension, the methodology of studying the military is defined by idiosyncrasies, relating to the specific work itself and accessibility barriers (e.g. Caforio and Nuciari 2003). These unique characteristics provide ample rationale to devote a specific volume to the methodologies of studying the military and the way it tries to achieve its main goals: prevention, containment and resolution of conflict. This *Handbook* can be seen as an addition to a recent volume on qualitative methods in military studies (Carreiras and Castro 2012).

What this book is, and what it is not

This *Handbook* focuses on the methodology of research that is in use in the social, behavioural, economic, political and administrative sciences. It is a social science introduction to the broadly defined intricacies of studying the military. Therefore it does not deal with issues that are particularly suited to the technical sciences, such as the study of *Markov Chains*, *knapsack* problems or linear programming in operations research. Of course, these problems are of large importance in the military, but they fall outside the scope of this book. Nor is this *Handbook* a statistical textbook on scale construction, measurement and (model) testing, or a volume devoted to methodological recipes for ensuring reliability, validity, the construction of representative samples, and the like.

Clearly, to become a fully trained military researcher one needs to do a bit more than working with this volume. One would need to master general aspects of research methods that extend beyond the military context. In fact, this *Handbook* assumes a basic knowledge of research methods and practices – developing a research question and conceptual model, designing a research set-up, and knowing about data collection and analysis – before it can be valuable to its readers (e.g. Bryman 2012; Shields and Rangarajan 2013). As such, this book is intended to be used at the graduate or the advanced undergraduate levels, like other books dealing with research within one specific sector, such as education or organizational research (Cohen et al. 2011; Buchanan and Bryman 2009).

While this book is not about technical sciences or statistical methods, it is not devoted to epistemological questions or the history of science either. Hence, issues concerning the possibilities, varieties and limitations of developing knowledge will only be discussed occasionally when the topic demands it. Frankly, we think that many distinctions and even controversies or debates about how to do research and acquire knowledge, have become cliché-ish, stereotypical, polarized or even obsolete (e.g. Boëne 2008). With other authors we think it is about time to leave the ‘paradigm wars’ behind.

Stressing the interpretative strength of qualitative studies over ‘positivist’ methods disregards the fact that in ‘positivist’ studies, such as surveys or experimental studies, interpretation – the search for ‘meaning’ – is as important as it is in, for instance, social constructivist studies (e.g. Whetsell and Shields 2014). Also contrasts between objectivist and subjectivist, or between naturalistic and artificial, research seems less and less relevant today. An important distinction in social science research may, however, be the use of words only (=qualitative) versus the use of words, numbers and their interrelations (=quantitative). This is the main distinction that we have used while structuring the book.

But most likely, even the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methods, may be exaggerated these days (Bryman 2012; Moses and Knutsen 2012). The idea that quantitative research is about large Ns, cross-case analysis and inferential statistics and that qualitative methodology is about within-case analysis only (Goertz and Mahoney 2012) seems increasingly

less relevant. For example, new computer-aided procedures aimed at identifying, selecting and counting words in the analysis of interviews and other texts bring a quantitative and comparative dimension to what has previously been seen as a purely qualitative methodology. Also the study of historical texts such as in archives may change in such direction due to the rapidly increasing digitalization of sources. The same applies to new developments in the study of visual data. Convergence of the various streams of research is likely to occur thanks to new technological facilities and the broader and open-minded training of junior researchers today.

In this book we aim to be pragmatic and interested in empirical research questions. This volume contributes to research methods by examining the key nexus between the military context and the path to quality social science research on the military. We take the military in the broad sense of the word, including the study of military operations, their effectiveness in conflict prevention, containment and resolution, people's behaviour in those operations as well as the military's general context such as the development of conflicts. This type of empirical work is not something new: there is some history as we will now show.

Predecessors

Most contemporary social scientists who study the military point to the Second World War as the starting point of their self-aware field. During WWII this occurred when American sociologists and social psychologists received the assignment to conduct empirical research among the 8 million American enlisted men and women at war. In numerous paper-and-pencil, cross-sectional sample-surveys the researchers, led by the social scientist Samuel Stouffer, examined attitudes of, in total, about half a million soldiers. These attitude measurements pertained to a multitude of issues such as adequacy of training, food, clothing and equipment, the quality of leadership, individual and group morale, and beliefs about the enemy.

On the basis of the survey results four volumes consisting of 1,500 pages were published (a.o., Stouffer et al. 1949a; Stouffer et al. 1949b). These proved to be highly influential in the development of teaching sociology and social psychology in future decades. More importantly, on the basis of these studies a number of personnel policies were developed in the military, which were related among others to racial integration, the introduction of the Expert and Combat infantrymen's badges, the elaboration of pay scales, leave and promotion policies, food and clothing standards, and so forth. According to military historian Joseph Ryan (2013), Stouffer through his empirical research did perhaps more for the everyday soldier than any general officer could have hoped to accomplish.

The permanent theoretical contributions of these studies lie in the development of new insights with respect to the importance of (morale in) the primary group, the significance of perceptions of obligation, justice and fairness, officers' performance and the impact of reference group behaviour, more specifically feelings of relative deprivation (Merton and Lazarsfeld 1950). The value of these insights goes beyond the study of military and war, as they pertain to behaviour of, and among, people everywhere in the world. The researchers also pursued and elaborated data analysis procedures by delving more deeply into the giant databases. There were even specimens of experimental research about attitude change based on message characteristics.

Another example of research from the Second World War that has been inspirational for this *Handbook* is Ruth Benedict's work. She authored a number of reports on the national cultures of a number of countries that American troops would liberate and occupy for some time, including the Netherlands for instance (van Ginkel 1997). The Pentagon wanted to know more about the host-nationals in the countries where they were about to occupy. The most important in this connection is her 1946 study about Japan, a year in which roughly half of a million American soldiers were in Japan as part of the occupation. Once published, this book – *The*

Chrysanthemum and the Sword – became an instant classic. Benedict received her important perspective through fieldwork conducted among Japanese people who were interned in the USA during the war. In 1944 and 1945 Japan clearly had not been accessible to Americans, let alone American anthropologists working for the US military. Benedict's study is a prime example of creative and highly relevant qualitative empirical research in military studies; just as the *American Soldier* her work has laid the foundation for the development of empirical social research in the decades after the war had ended.

Set-up of the *Handbook*

Following up in this all-inclusive tradition of empirical research on the military, this volume aims to be broad in scope and practical in use. Its scope ranges from getting access to the field and discussing 'who's in charge' to – at the end of the day – reflecting on ethical dimensions, the development of new theories and publishing along a continuum, which includes high-standing academic outlets or the opposite, focused policy reports. This in fact is the project cycle in research.

Additionally, this volume aims to be broad by giving full attention to all sorts of methodological approaches, ranging from archival and historical studies to conducting case studies and in-depth interviewing as forms of qualitative research methods, and to quantitative approaches such as surveys, (quasi-)experiments, computational modelling and the use of business analytics.

This broad approach, displayed in the different chapters, may be conducive to advocating methodological pluralism, eventually merging into the use of mixed methods in the study of the military. The most experienced researcher, we think, is she or he who is capable of choosing from, and in fact using, the whole toolkit of methodologies, dependent of the type of problems, research questions, design and context of a study-in-being. Sometimes, often in fact, this may lead to using a number of research methods in one study simultaneously. Such mixed methods – or blended methodologies, if you wish – are likely to lead to a better understanding of the phenomena under study (Bryman 2012; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). It will lead to stronger validity and credibility of the findings and it will include more diverse perspectives, more context and more opportunities to explain and illustrate what has been found. Mixed methods require a broad approach to research design, and that is what we want to provide in this *Handbook*.

Taken all together, the 27 chapters have been divided in four parts:

- The first part is about getting started and seeing the context, and it consists of six chapters including this introductory chapter, respectively about gaining access to the field, ownership of the research, reflexivity, doing military research in conflict environments and studying host-nationals.
- The second part is about qualitative methods, counting nine chapters dealing with respectively historical research, archival research, process tracing, participant observation, in-depth interviewing and oral history, qualitative data analysis, visual social research, the study of auto-narratives and the use of the Internet for research purposes.
- The third part is about quantitative methods, containing nine chapters as well, on respectively survey research, longitudinal studies, multilevel analysis, cross-national research, experimental studies, computational modelling, assessing the military's effectiveness and business analytics.
- The final part is about finishing a research project, comprising three chapters referring to ethics, theory development and doing practical research and publishing in military studies.

Because methodological issues can easily turn into abstract arguments and debates, we have chosen to present a well-published book or article as an illustrative study opening to each chapter. The main findings and methodological characteristics of each study are presented in a textbox, at the beginning of each chapter.

These illustrative studies range from war in ancient history via actions during the Second World War to the recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and current UN peace operations. Also included are examples of studies that relate to the military organization and community as well as to the military people when they are not in operation. Next, studies pertaining to the political and social context of military actions as well as the development of violent conflicts are used as illustrations of specific methodological topics. Finally, also topical studies concerning the use of Internet and big-data-mining facilities are illustrated in a textbox.

Hence, this volume provides knowledge on studying the military in two ways: by providing methodological know-how and concerns and by presenting a gamut of important empirical studies on the military that have been published over recent decades, in all parts of the world. The reader will, consequentially, learn about using methodologies in a military context but also about the military itself.

We are truly grateful that so many researchers from all over the globe, including Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, South Korea and the USA, were willing to contribute to this book. This broad representation of authors has contributed to the book's international outlook and usefulness. As to the authors' affiliation with the military, there is the whole gamut of experiences. Many of the authors work closely with the military either as active duty or retired personnel, or they are employed as civilians for the military in one way or another. Others are scholars without a military affiliation. Thus we bring a variety of experiences and perspectives to the problem of research methods in military studies. We are all, however, committed to a fair treatment of the subject taking into account the need to balance involvement and detachment, which is the appropriate way to conduct research, we believe.

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