

ARTICLE

# ‘There is No Icebreaker like a Tiny Child’: Reuniting British Military Families in Cold War Germany

Grace Huxford 

Historical Studies Department, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom  
[Grace.huxford@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:Grace.huxford@bristol.ac.uk)

Family reunion had a deeply practical and symbolic significance in post-war Europe. Through the case study of British military families living in Germany, this article examines both official discourse and families’ own experiences of reunion and life overseas in the first decades of the Cold War, through the three national but also international visions of the family: as emblems of familial and domestic stability, as ‘unofficial ambassadors’ promoting European unity and as friendly faces of Western democracy. In all cases, the article shows the ways that official messages were embraced, subverted or ignored by families, highlighting the value of exploring context-specific agency. Military families seemingly lived in a world of limited choices, but a range of life narratives show how they came to see aspects of their family life as resolutely theirs.

## Introduction

On 1 September 1946 a small group of British military wives and children walked down the gang plank from HMT *Empire Halladale* to the shore at Cuxhaven, Germany. They were greeted by regimental bands and were guided onto different colour-coded trains, bound for their new homes. They were part of the post-war allied occupation of Germany at the end of the Second World War and under the auspices of ‘Operation Union’, the first major organised scheme to bring British military families to Germany.<sup>1</sup> This reception, one officer noted, ‘rightly sounded the notes of encouragement, of moral example, and of caution. “Germany” they emphasised emphatically “was not going to be a land of milk and honey. A pioneering spirit and a cheerful outlook were both equally essential”’.<sup>2</sup>

Although couched in the language of British wartime stoicism and even imperial endeavour, this kind of ‘family reunion’ had a far broader significance in post-war Europe. Bringing families back together, in the midst of housing shortages, demobilisation, mass displacement and individual and collective grief, was an objective of many states and international humanitarian organisations. At once practical and symbolic, the restoration of families (or reconstruction of new ones) stood as a talisman against future war and heralded a brighter ‘tomorrow’. Like other post-war European national governments, the British post-war Labour government stressed the importance of developing a welfare state at home: the restored family and, most importantly, the restored *father*, represented the righting

<sup>1</sup> Despatch of Families to BAOR, 10 Apr. 1946, The National Archives (TNA), Cabinet Papers, CP (46) 147, CAB 129-8-47; Sarah Paterson, ‘Operation Union: British Families in Germany’, *Imperial War Museum Review*, 10 (1997), 77; Sarah Paterson, ‘The Children of *Operation Union*: Setting up the initial infrastructure for British Families in Germany, 1946–9’, in Peter E. Fässler, Andreas Neuwöhner and Florian Staffel, eds, *Briten in Westfalen: Besatzer, Verbündete, Freunde?* (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2019), 204. Small numbers of families came to Germany when the British occupied the Rhineland after the First World War, but Operation Union was the first formalised scheme on any scale.

<sup>2</sup> John Stevenson, ‘The British Family in Germany [Part One]’, *British Zone Review*, 2, 16 (15 Oct. 1948), 16.

of the necessary wrong of wartime separation, in an era when the state was increasingly concerned with its citizens' mental wellbeing and 'family life'.<sup>3</sup>

But British families newly arriving in war-torn Germany also sat at a unique trifecta of identities: they were occupiers and victors over fascism; they were adapting to becoming junior partners in a Cold War alliance with the United States; and they were part of a rapidly decolonising empire.<sup>4</sup> As this article argues, these converging international contexts shaped the framing of British family life, more so than British historians have perhaps acknowledged, in addition to the more well-known values of the post-war welfare state. Military families were, for instance, intended to act as a bridge with former enemies, exhibiting the very best of liberal, Western life: as one resident noted, there 'is no icebreaker like a tiny child' and 'British family life has made good in observant German eyes'.<sup>5</sup> Authorities argued that British tutelage, honed by years of imperial rule, would both sever links with the Nazi past and repudiate the apparently 'anti-family' policies of Soviet-occupied East Germany and Eastern Europe, as tensions mounted with their former allies after 1945.<sup>6</sup> By the time of the creation of West Germany in 1949 and the end of the formal post-war occupation in 1955, British families were recast not just as 'quasi-diplomats' responsible for keeping on good terms with their neighbours but as 'Cold Warriors' themselves.<sup>7</sup> One regimental newspaper noted that a family-based, residential 'style of occupation . . . allowed a barrier between East and West to be slowly and surely built up'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, so integrated was the family into military life at this time that some British outposts were even known as 'family stations', including Germany, Cyprus, Hong Kong, and Gibraltar.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, as the history of this often overlooked yet large community shows, warfare continued to shape family life after 1945. Whilst in Britain itself the family had become a central organising unit in new health care, education and housing policies, military families' lives were far more often shaped by the needs of the 'warfare state'.<sup>10</sup> And that warfare state repeatedly changed and contracted, moving from a mass Second World War military to a post-war one with many post-war National Service conscripts, and then again to a more specialised Cold War force.<sup>11</sup> Its demands were constant throughout: military personnel took part in military exercises or overseas deployments; military families moved every two or three years to a new posting; and children went to boarding schools in the United Kingdom to mitigate against educational disruption. Yet despite these demands, some families

<sup>3</sup> Michal Shapira, *The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2; Anon., 'Reflections of a BAOR Wife', *British Zone Review*, 1, 28 (12 Oct. 1946), 5.

<sup>4</sup> My thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this piece for their direction here.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., 'Reflections of a BAOR Wife', *British Zone Review*, 1, 28 (12 Oct. 1946), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Ibid., 17. Communist countries similarly critiqued Western family life, though on different grounds; see Sarah Fieldston, 'The Nursery's Iron Curtain: Children, Childhood, and the Global Cold War', *History Compass*, 17, 6 (2019), 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Speiser, *The British Army of the Rhine: Turning Nazi Enemies into Cold War Partners* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 3; Christopher Knowles, *Winning the Peace: The British in Occupied Germany, 1945–1948* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 161–2; Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* (New York: NYU Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Anon., 'Germans under Soviet Control', *The Reinforcement*, 38 (29 Sept. 1946), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Clare Gibson, *Army Childhood: British Army Children's Lives and Times* (Oxford: Shire, 2012), 17. Small numbers of British military families had lived overseas from at least the early nineteenth century; see Paterson, 'The Children of Operation Union', 203.

<sup>10</sup> Zahra, *The Lost Children*; Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, 'Introduction', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945–64* (London and New York: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 15–16; David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951–57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 582; David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> David French, *Army, Empire and Cold War: The British Army and Military Policy, 1945–71* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

persistently felt as if they were an inconvenient encumbrance to the military man.<sup>12</sup> As this article shows, military families help expose uncomfortable inconsistencies in post-war national and transnational visions of family life.

Furthermore, as this wider special issue shows, the family was not simply a palimpsest upon which official messages about domestic stability, European integration and liberal democracy were etched: the family has historically acted as an *agent* as well as an object of state power, capable of shaping social and political landscapes. This article reveals how, whilst some British residents enthusiastically took up the tasks set out for them, others ignored official messages or responded in ways that exposed the inherent contradictions that faced military families. Using the case study of British military families in Germany, spanning the initial occupation from 1945–55 and the following twenty years (a period often associated with the post-war period or ‘First Cold War’) I argue that these inconsistencies offered families opportunities to modify, circumvent or ignore the ideals that were placed upon them.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, more significantly, repeated reunions also show instances of *context-specific* agency: as seen below in discussions over children’s education, families grasped at the limited choices available to them in a largely choice-less world and carved out their own vision of British family life overseas. Many military families in fact came to see enforced necessities, like regularly moving home, as part of their identity.<sup>14</sup> More broadly for historians, these responses reveal not only how the exercise of choice depends on specific contexts but also the subjective significance of decision-making itself. Agency has, of course, rightly been questioned as a category of analysis. It has become a ‘kind of “safety” argument’, an easy political statement for largely privileged scholars to make, a clichéd or homogenising approach to social history, or even a repetition of the antiquated ideas of liberal subjecthood.<sup>15</sup> Military families present an important opportunity to understand agency in a more nuanced way, what Lynn Thomas describes as a mess of ‘articulated intentions, frequently unspoken fantasies and ordinary efforts’.<sup>16</sup> First, their almost universal acceptance of ‘orders’ means any demonstration of agency is unlikely to be conflated with political resistance. Second, they are unusually visible in the historical record compared to many other types of family, due to infamously detailed military bureaucratic processes. Children moved from school to school with envelopes full of reports on their attainment, and every item that was used in family life was stringently accounted for in ‘marching out’ paperwork at the end of a tenancy.<sup>17</sup> The military had rigorous definitions of who constituted the family throughout the Cold War though: families were largely tied to the father (wives and children having to use his name and military number even to borrow a library book) and parents were always a married, heterosexual couple. Without even considering the hidden history of queer military family structures, these definitions were difficult for many, particularly for those who came from close

<sup>12</sup> Indeed troublesome families were cited throughout the period as stymieing male military careers; see Antony Beevor, *Inside the British Army* (London: Corgi, 1990), 78–9; Emma Williamson, ‘Domestic Abuse and Military Families: The Problem of Reintegration and Control’, *The British Journal of Social Work*, 42, 7 (2012), 1384.

<sup>13</sup> Such a time period fits within Frank Beiss’s definition of the post-war period as not merely a chronological or thematic concept but an ‘epistemological tool’, one that acknowledges the continued legacy of the Second World War rather than just as an ‘incubation period of a new Cold War order’. See Frank Beiss, ‘Histories of the Aftermath’, in Frank Beiss and Robert G. Moeller, eds., *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1–2; Grace Huxford, *The Korean War in Britain: Citizenship, Selfhood and Forgetting* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Teachers observed how children often discussed ‘their’ postings or were proud of their travel; see J.M.B. Duckett, ‘Turbulence and Self-Concepts in a Service School’, *SCEA Bulletin*, 6 (Sept. 1973), 12; interview with Ollie W., 4 Oct. 2018, BAOR/GH/22, British Military Bases in Germany project, University of Bristol Research Data Storage Facility (UoB RSDF). Data available on formal request; Gibson, *Army Childhood*, 53.

<sup>15</sup> Lynn M. Thomas, ‘Historicising Agency’, *Gender & History*, 28, 2 (Aug. 2016), 324–39; Mona Gleason, ‘Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education’, *History of Education*, 45, 4 (2016), 446–8.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas, ‘Historicising Agency’, 330. Matt Cook similarly calls for a more nuanced approach to families; see Matt Cook, ‘Families of Choice? George Ives, Queer Lives and the Family in Early Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Gender & History*, 22, 1 (2010), 1–20.

<sup>17</sup> K. Winn, ‘Turbulence – the Nitty Gritty’, *SCEA Bulletin*, 10 (Autumn 1975), 20.

extended families, missed their tight-knit local communities back in Britain or who had families that were not two parents plus children.<sup>18</sup> Families were also *created* to some extent by such processes and formed into a unit, not dissimilar from the various military units that organised service life. The family was one of several integral building blocks of military life, though one sometimes eclipsed by the needs of the military.

But this article also compares official paper trails with experiential life-writing material and oral history testimony. This is another potential pitfall when analysing agency, Thomas points out, because oral historians are potentially more inclined to ascribe ‘agency’ to their narrators, owing to the relationships forged in research encounters.<sup>19</sup> In over sixty interviews conducted with a range of former residents (from parents and children to teachers, civilian workers and clergy), I as the interviewer grappled with whether families were expressing agency or rather offering a post-hoc justification of their decisions.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, how far were they expressing the collective views of the wider military culture? Instead of trying to unpick the individual from their wider discursive culture, this article embraces that interaction in great detail, making use of group or partnership interviews to understand communal dynamics as well as standard individual life-history interviews.<sup>21</sup> Oral history and life narratives, it argues, are some of the few places where historic family decision-making processes can be uncovered and for the language surrounding such actions to be analysed.

The article begins with an exploration of the discursive significance of family reunion in post-war Europe. It then examines the processes by which British families went to Germany and the opposition they faced, followed by a detailed analysis of the three overlapping official visions for the military family: first, as emblems of familial and domestic stability; second, as ‘unofficial ambassadors’ promoting Anglo-German friendship and (West) European unity in the initial decades after the war; and, finally, as the friendly faces of Western democracy in the simmering tensions of the longer Cold War conflict. Though Anglo-German relations are key to this case study, this article does not delve superficially into the perspectives of the German communities: German families were undergoing their own complex period of reconstruction and re-imagining, shaped by a different ‘triangle’ of forces. They too were under surveillance and had meaning ascribed to their actions.<sup>22</sup> Parallels are also drawn with many American military families stationed in Germany, though again the different cultures surrounding their base communities, the different international contexts shaping their presence in post-war Europe and the relative lack of interaction between allied communities (except in Berlin) limits the connections that can be made. Nevertheless, cumulatively this case study suggests that both domestic and wider discourses in post-war European history profoundly shaped how British families were viewed – and, indeed, how they saw themselves.

### Family Reunion in Post-War Europe

In October 1946, one military wife summarised the family’s significance in a British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) newspaper: ‘We have lived so long on the edge of a precipice, and have emerged from one crisis only to be faced with another for so many years, that the quiet, ordinary existence of a united home life is to many of us the unattainable ideal of which we dream’.<sup>23</sup> The war had marked an unprecedented assault on the family in Europe: forced displacement, mass murder, conscription and incarceration had damaged or destroyed many pre-war families, in all their various forms.<sup>24</sup> For others, separation was temporary but

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Susan W., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/04, UoB RSDF; Beevor, *Inside the British Army*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, ‘Historicising Agency’, 328.

<sup>20</sup> Fifteen of these interviews were conducted by research fellow Dr Joel Morley.

<sup>21</sup> Bethan Coupland, ‘Remembering Blaenavon: What Can Group Interviews Tell Us about “Collective Memory”?’, *Oral History Review*, 42, 2 (2015), 277–99.

<sup>22</sup> Alexandria N. Ruble, ‘Creating Postfascist Families: Reforming Family Law and Gender Roles in Postwar East and West Germany’, *Central European History*, 53 (2020), 416.

<sup>23</sup> Anon., ‘Reflections of a BAOR Wife’, *British Zone Review*, 1, 28 (12 Oct. 1946), 5.

<sup>24</sup> Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 18; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117.

still keenly felt: in Britain, wartime employment and evacuation had parted children from parents, the consequences of which ignited a voracious professional and state interest in young people and ‘troubled families’.<sup>25</sup> On both sides of the emerging iron curtain, the family became an emblem of a new future-facing mentality.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, the family was not ‘discovered’ in 1945: the ‘family unit [has long been seen] as a building block of state power’, one around which images of nationhood have been continually created.<sup>27</sup> The family could be used within nations to both include and exclude.<sup>28</sup> But, as Tara Zahra argues, the family did become more ideologically significant after the liberation of Europe in 1945. Humanitarian organisations and European authorities applied themselves with zeal to reuniting families and producing new forms of expert knowledge around child development and family relations. Family members were sometimes passive in these processes, but others engaged actively with it, opting to join new families, leaving behind memories of their pre-war families or even, in some cases, surviving family members.<sup>29</sup> Yet the logistical problems of bringing families back together were immense: in Britain, the memory of the poor state response to returning service personnel in 1918 fuelled concerns about the return of demobilised conscripted military personnel to their families.<sup>30</sup> It was a popular periodical topic in the 1940s, with women given particular advice about how to treat their returned husbands (and carefully curate their own appearance).<sup>31</sup> After an excited wait, much longed-for reunions were often anti-climactic, nervous or even distressing occasions, especially when appearances or lives had changed significantly. For children who did not know their fathers – and could not understand why they now slept in their mother’s bed – reunion could cause anxiety and confusion.<sup>32</sup> This unease sat at odds with the new passion among practitioners for *active* fatherhood or ‘family-orientated masculinity’.<sup>33</sup> Fatherhood was seen as a way for men to put the war behind

<sup>25</sup> Michael Lambert, ‘Between “Families in Trouble” and “Children at Risk”: Historicising “Troubled Family” Policy in England since 1945’, *Children and Society*, 22 (2019), 83; Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and the Mother* (London: Virago, 1983), 99; Laura Lee Downs, ‘Au Revoir les Enfants: Wartime Evacuation and the Politics of Childhood in France and Britain, 1939–1945’, *History Workshop Journal*, 82, 1 (2016), 121–50; John Welshman, ‘Evacuation and Social Policy during the Second World War: Myth and Reality’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 9, 1 (1998), 25–53; John Stewart, ‘The Scientific Claims of British Child Guidance, 1918–1945’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 42, 3 (2009), 407; Laura King, ‘Future Citizens: Cultural and Political Conceptions of Children in Britain, 1930s–1950s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 27, 3 (2016), 389–411; Laura Tisdall, ‘Education, Parenting and Concepts of Childhood in England, c. 1945 to c. 1979’, *Contemporary British History*, 31, 1 (2017), 36.

<sup>26</sup> Beiss, ‘Histories of the Aftermath’, 3; Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Hester Barron and Claudia Siebrecht, ‘Introduction: Raising the Nation’, in Hester Barron and Claudia Siebrecht, eds., *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c. 1870–1950* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2015), 2 and 7.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Stargadt, ‘German Childhoods: The Making of a Historiography’, *German History*, 16, 1 (1998), 7–8; Anna Davin, ‘Imperialism and Motherhood’, *History Workshop Journal*, 5, 1 (1978), 12–13.

<sup>29</sup> Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 1, 13 and 18.

<sup>30</sup> Frances Houghton, *The Veterans’ Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 165–6; Deborah Cohen, *The War Comes Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Grace Huxford, Ángel Alcalde, Gary Baines, Olivier Burtin and Mark Eddele, ‘Writing Veterans’ History: A Conversation on the Twentieth Century’, *War and Society*, 38, 2 (2019), 118 and 120.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Howard, *Sex Problems of the Returning Soldier* (Manchester: Sydney Pemberton, 1945); Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 55.

<sup>32</sup> Barry Turner and Tony Rennell, *When Daddy Came Home: How Family Life Changed Forever in 1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), 74 and 82; Allport, *Demobbed*, 56–8 and 70; Claire Langhamer, ‘The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2 (2005), 342.

<sup>33</sup> Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6; Laura King, ‘“Now You See a Great Many Men Pushing their Pram Proudly”: Family-Orientated Masculinity Represented and Experienced in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Cultural and Social History*, 10, 4 (2013), 344–6.

them, to turn ‘away from soldierhood and war’.<sup>34</sup> Discipline in particular became a father’s responsibility, a way for the father to find a post-war purpose in the family.<sup>35</sup> Reunion was therefore not always a joyous occasion: it was a time of complex negotiation and learning familial dynamics anew.<sup>36</sup>

Yet this chronology of post-war British family life never fully applied to career military families. Fatherly absence characterised military life before and after 1945; it was a regular discussion point in regimental magazines, amongst military wives and frequently featured in community jokes.<sup>37</sup> Women sometimes expressed exasperation about the return of husbands and the impact on gender roles, family life and routine.<sup>38</sup> For those who ‘followed’ their partners overseas, they were separated from wider families ‘at home’ in Britain.<sup>39</sup> Children too expressed their views on family separation: one military spouse recalled a child stamping on a picture of his father, angry at his absence.<sup>40</sup> A former military child remembered that her stepfather was rarely present and they seldom knew how long he would be away.<sup>41</sup> Reunion was thus both a more common and fleeting experience for military families.

But it was not just fathers who periodically left the military family: since at least the 1840s, military children, especially officers’ children, had been sent away from imperial settings such as India when they reached early adolescence, on the grounds of ‘health’ and future prospects, departing temporarily or permanently for boarding schools and the homes of British guardians.<sup>42</sup> Children were important transnational historical actors within the family, but also in Britain’s wider colonial world. Military children beat the bounds of empire through their travel across its spaces and within its welfare systems, as well as through the decisions made about their futures by families.<sup>43</sup> Despite decolonisation, these historical precedents not only shaped administrative processes and educative traditions facing families in 1945 (such as longstanding connections with certain boarding schools) but also powerfully influenced the emotional and social discourses that military families in the post-war period used to explain their decisions. For instance, making sacrifices for ‘duty’ was a commonly expressed idea among families in the post-war years that descended directly from the lives of ‘empire children’.<sup>44</sup>

These older ideas collided with far newer concerns though. Not only were there a great many more children in post-war Europe (as a result of a baby boom), but childhood and family were central to both competing political ideologies in the new Cold War.<sup>45</sup> Citizenship was becoming a battleground, where children as ‘future citizens’ were centre stage.<sup>46</sup> Elaine Tyler May and Donna Alvah argue that this attention led to a re-conceptualisation of family in the United States, as the family became a ‘stronghold against Cold War threats to the nation and society’.<sup>47</sup> To some extent, children were

<sup>34</sup> Angela Davis and Laura King, ‘Gendered Perspectives on Men’s Changing Familial Roles in Postwar England, c. 1950–1990’, *Gender and History*, 30, 1 (2018), 71.

<sup>35</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*, 71; Shapira, *The War Inside*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Allport, *Demobbed*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Jennifer B. and Susan W., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF; R.J. Jeffreys, Unpublished Memoir, Private Papers of Major R.J. Jeffreys, 85, Imperial War Museum (IWM), Documents 20473; Anon., ‘Pads’, *Gateway: Magazine of Osnabrück Garrison* (Feb. 1979), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Williamson, ‘Domestic Abuse and Military Families’, 1381.

<sup>39</sup> For young military wives, the absence of their own mothers, as much as that of husbands, was keenly felt. Interview with Susan W., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/04, UoB RSDF.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Jennifer B. and Susan W., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004), 110.

<sup>43</sup> Wendy Webster, ‘Transnational Journeys and Domestic Histories’, *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 651; Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline of the British Worlds, 1869–1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3–7.

<sup>44</sup> Buettner, *Empire Families*, 110.

<sup>45</sup> Ann Kordas, ‘Review: A Generation Discovered: Children and Families in the Cold War’, *Reviews in American History*, 43, 4 (2015), 704–9.

<sup>46</sup> King, ‘Future Citizens’, 389–411; Huxford, *The Korean War in Britain*, 73–8.

<sup>47</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1999, revised edn: Basic Books); Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors*, 25.

passive within these visions, ‘innocent weapons’ around whom elaborate policies of protection grew in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> The hope placed in them in turn placed greater limits on their actions and behaviours.<sup>49</sup> *Real* children featured surprisingly little in these representations, an oversight of which historians of both childhood and the family are perhaps equally culpable.<sup>50</sup> But children could be actively engaged with the Cold War, even if they were simultaneously symbolically significant too.<sup>51</sup> In this special issue, for instance, Jennifer Crane highlights how the idea of gifted children was invested with promise and political power, but families could also mobilise the term themselves. Similarly, families in Cold War Germany were often keenly aware of the discursive significance of their presence and adopted different attitudes to it, starting with their arrival in 1946.

### Reunited on the Rhine: British Military Families in Germany

Conditions in Germany were not encouraging for family reunion in early 1946: acute food and housing shortages assailed the British Zone, as did problems with industrial outputs, ruined infrastructure and Displaced Persons (DPs).<sup>52</sup> The British occupation was tasked with overseeing the administration of the northwest regions of the country, assisting in demilitarisation, decentralisation and denazification processes and the transition to democracy, monitoring public sentiment and implementing economic change.<sup>53</sup> Even by 1946 though, BAOR’s potential role as a Cold War army, poised to face Soviet invasion, became another reason to maintain a presence in Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Several British ministers were adamant that bringing military families to Germany would cause further trouble. In 1946 William Beveridge, whose 1942 report had given him an international reputation as an expert on social policy, embarked on a lecture tour of the British Zone of Germany and Berlin.<sup>55</sup> In his regular column in *The Star* he conveyed the stark situation in Germany: ‘The British housewife can, perhaps, realise what the German rations would mean by considering her week’s rations of fats had to last not for a week but for a month’.<sup>56</sup> In this situation, Beveridge argued:

BAOR wives should not be allowed to enter Germany now. Their arrival in the British Zone is about to cause enormous trouble among the Germans. . . . The housing situation, such as at Hamburg, is bad beyond the understanding of anybody who has not been in the country. Hundreds of thousands of people are living permanently in cellars. To provide for the BAOR wives, homes and furniture are being requisitioned by the military. It is just like war. Since the requisitioning has begun, with troops with fixed bayonets controlling it, the feeling among

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Peacock, *Innocent Weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Mintz, ‘The Changing Face of Children’s Culture’, in Paula S. Fass and Michael Grossberg, eds., *Reinventing Childhood after World War II* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 41.

<sup>50</sup> Peacock, *Innocent Weapons*, 1–2; Victoria Grieve, *Little Cold Warriors: American Childhood in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3–4.

<sup>51</sup> Grieve, *Little Cold Warriors*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Many German families still refer to 1945–9 as ‘the difficult years’; see Sabine Behrenbeck, ‘Between Pain and Silence: Remembering the Victims of Violence after 1949’, in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39–40.

<sup>53</sup> Knowles, *Winning the Peace*, 1–2; Speiser, *The British Army of the Rhine*, 23–4.

<sup>54</sup> French, *Army, Empire and Cold War*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from William Beveridge to Lt Gen Sir Brian Robertson, HQ CCG BE, 29 July 1946, London School of Economics Archives (LSE), Beveridge Collection 11/52. He visited again in 1947, 1949 and 1952, delivering more lectures in German each time and decrying Western ‘denazification’ efforts as ‘useless’; see Letter from Alfred Nagel, 26 Jan. 1947, LSE, Beveridge Collection 11/60, Folder 1; Letter from William Beveridge to Jessy Janet Beveridge, 11 Aug. 1946, LSE, Beveridge Collection, Supplementary/1/35.

<sup>56</sup> William Beveridge, ‘Nightmare in Germany’, *The Star* (21 Aug. 1946).

cooperative Germans has grown against us. We are playing into the hands of Communists and what is left of the Fascists.<sup>57</sup>

His claim that requisitioning, the main form of accommodation before specific blocks were built in the late 1940s and 1950s, was unpopular tallied with British intelligence reports.<sup>58</sup> As in the longer history of the family, housing proved a particularly contentious issue. Beveridge was not insensitive to the calls for military families to be reunited and agreed that children needed to grow up in a family setting to become 'healthy, happy and productive citizens'. Yet he pointed out that in DP camps across Germany 'an agonising large proportion' of people were also separated from their husbands, wives and children.<sup>59</sup> His rationale for preventing military wives from re-joining their husbands came from a concern over the fine balance of public and political opinion in Germany that could once again endanger the continent.<sup>60</sup>

Education Secretary Ellen Wilkinson opposed reunion for reasons that centred on the families themselves. In a Cabinet meeting discussing Operation Union in June 1946, she voiced her 'personal' opposition to the costs involved and the transfer of 150 to 250 teachers to Germany to educate the children of service personnel, even though the officials in the Ministry of Education itself thought it would be possible.<sup>61</sup> Prime Minister Clement Attlee had similarly expressed his concern about sending children to BAOR: 'Should we send the children to [a] country where there may be disorder, disease and famine[?]', though Health Minister Aneurin Bevan had pointed out that children could not be left behind in Britain for very long without their mothers.<sup>62</sup> Wilkinson conceded eventually that, if they had to go, it was 'essential that the children receive a proper education'.<sup>63</sup> The concerns voiced by Beveridge, Wilkinson and Attlee expose the practical problems and ideological inconsistencies that family reunion posed: for Beveridge, whilst family life was the best incubator for future 'citizens', British family life must not be prized above that of other Europeans; for Wilkinson, the education of children – another fundamental value of the welfare state – must not be imperilled for the sake of military family reunion; and for Attlee, British children must not be exposed to dangers needlessly. Government must, as Attlee argued, 'be careful and go slowly'.<sup>64</sup>

Yet calls for families to go to Germany became steadily louder. The Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster, John Hynd, responsible for the administration of the British Zone, reported that the commanders-in-chief in Germany thought a reunion scheme would improve morale, recruitment and retention.<sup>65</sup> More sensationalised reasons were given too. The most-discussed argument was that families prevented 'fraternisation' between British service personnel and Germans.<sup>66</sup> As Lauren

<sup>57</sup> News Chronicle Reporter, 'Too Soon to Send Wives to BAOR', *News Chronicle* (17 Aug. 1946).

<sup>58</sup> Headquarters Military Government Regierungsbezirk Osnabrück, Monthly Report No. 15, July 1946, TNA, FO 1005/1683, 3; Monthly Report HQ Military Government Hansestadt Hamburg, July 1946, TNA, FO 1005/1646, 1; Headquarters Military Government Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf, Monthly Report, Mar. 1947, TNA, FO 1005/1640, 1; Bettina Blum, "'My Home, Your Castle": British Requisitioning of German Homes in Westphalia', in Camilo Erlichman and Christopher Knowles, eds., *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945–1955* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 126.

<sup>59</sup> William Beveridge, 'The Family Must Come First', *The Star* (12 June 1946); William Beveridge, 'Nightmare in Germany', *The Star* (21 Aug. 1946).

<sup>60</sup> When asked why he was interested in the British Zone at all, Beveridge responded that: 'To be sure we fought the war for something and to avoid another. I saw the end of the first World War and the seeds that were sown for the second'. See Notebook of a Visit to Germany and Accompanying Note, 1946, LSE, Beveridge Collection, 11/53.

<sup>61</sup> Cabinet Minutes CP (46) 21, 6 June 1946, TNA, CAB 128-5-56, 113–14; Despatch of Families to BAOR, Cabinet Papers, 3 June 1946, TNA, CAB 129-106, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Cabinet Minutes CM 42 (46), 6 May 1946, TNA, CAB 195-4-30, 171; also see Cabinet Minutes CM 42 (46) Conclusions, 6 May 1946, TNA, CAB 128-5-42, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Cabinet Minutes CM 56 (46), 6 June 1946, TNA CAB 128-5-56, 114.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Cabinet Minutes CM 42 (46) Conclusions, 6 May 1946, TNA, CAB 128-5-42, 22.

<sup>66</sup> This aspect of British-German relations has captivated historians, novelists and filmmakers alike; see: Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounters in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina



Stokes points out elsewhere in this issue, family reunion has often been pitched as a preventative measure. John Stevenson, the Permanent Prosecutor for CCG in Berlin, later stated that: “The results of this prolongation of “soldier-bachelor” life, following on years of war separations, were thoroughly harmful and unsettling . . . and also led to a lot of living that they would not have dreamt of doing in a less rackety environment”.<sup>67</sup> Stevenson’s allusions to ‘harmful and unsettling’ elements were widely discussed in 1945 and 1946. One padre urged soldiers ‘to keep in regular contact with their wives’ and to remember that ‘you promised God to stick to your wife for better or for worse until death. . . . “Falling in love” with someone you have just met does not release you from your promise to God. . . . Write to your wife – every day is a good rule.’<sup>68</sup> Some even argued that those who ran schools for military children overseas were actively improving ‘morale and morality’ in the forces and had become the ‘guarantors of family life’.<sup>69</sup> Institutions that facilitated children joining parents in Germany would ‘go far to mitigate a danger which strikes at the very basis of British life – the Family’.<sup>70</sup>

But this was not the only reason given for reunion: mirroring the wider protrusion of the ‘psy’ disciplines into post-war family life, military family reunion was also increasingly framed in terms of psychological development.<sup>71</sup> In her article in 1946, a ‘BAOR wife’ argued that:

From the children’s point of view, apart from the broadening influence of a new country, the stabilising effect of having that magic person ‘Daddy’ as part of everyday life cannot be overestimated. In the secure and shifting sands of present day existence a well-balanced home in which both parents play their part, and Daddy is not merely ‘that man who comes to stay every few months’ provides a foundation to a child’s life that nothing can replace or destroy.<sup>72</sup>

Active fatherhood was regarded here as a key component in post-war family life, including the military family. From the 1940s, the British soldier was depicted as a ‘soldier-citizen’, capable of thinking and discussing world politics, as well as defending his country.<sup>73</sup> He was to be the weapon of the warfare state, but also a citizen of the welfare state and a ‘thinking’ member of his community, as well as present with his family.<sup>74</sup> One later training film for teachers asserted that ‘the soldier of today is a family man, well-versed not only in the skills of his military profession but also in his duties as a husband and a father’.<sup>75</sup>

However, this rebranding did not change the soldier’s ultimate task and the expectation of familial closeness exposed an early tension in the welfare state rhetoric: in the case of Soviet invasion, it was

---

Press, 2002); Tamara Domentat, *Hallo Fräulein! Deutsche Frauen und Amerikanische Soldaten* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1998); Rhidian Brook, *The Aftermath* (London: Penguin, 2013); *The Aftermath* (dir. James Kent, 2019).

<sup>67</sup> John Stevenson, ‘The British Family in Germany [Part One]’, *British Zone Review*, 2, 16 (15 Oct. 1948), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Anon., ‘The Padre’s Colum’, *The Reinforcement*, 3 (27 Jan. 1946), 2.

<sup>69</sup> Lt Col G.T. Salisbury, Address to BTE [British teachers in Egypt] First Teachers’ Convention, 22–3 Sept. 1950, National Army Museum (NAM), 2008-04-118, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Anon., ‘Editorial’, *The Reinforcement*, 18 (12 May 1946), 2.

<sup>71</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>72</sup> Anon., ‘Reflections of a BAOR Wife’, *British Zone Review*, 1, 28 (12 Oct. 1946), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Mr Charles Simmons MP, 9 Mar. 1953, *Hansard*, HC Deb, vol. 512, cols 844-910; Colin Flint, ‘Mobilizing Civil Society for the Hegemonic State: The Korean War and the Construction of Soldiercitizens in the United States’, in Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert, eds., *War, Citizenship, Territory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 348.

<sup>74</sup> C.B. Baxter, ‘An Integral View of General Education’, *Army Education: The Journal of the Army Educational Corps*, 26, 1 (Mar. 1952), 7–8. In line with a wider interest in group theory in the 1940s and 1950s, Colonel Baxter of the RAEC wrote that soldiers are ‘members of regiments, of platoons, of sections, of sports groups, and of canteen cliques. They are a part of family groups; they have church affiliations and are admired members of groups of friends in the home neighbourhood, in the Y.M.C.A., or on the street corner. All of these groups satisfy a soldier’s needs – for love, for status, and for security. In return these groups exact a price of loyalty and conformity’.

<sup>75</sup> *School Is Everywhere* (London: Central Office of Information and Ministry of Defence, 1965).

clear that the serviceman's first priority was his wartime role, not his family.<sup>76</sup> One former military child recounted in an interview that: 'they were soldiers first, and families were sort of second, even to the extent that mum was known as "wife of Corporal M--". It wasn't – you weren't Mrs, you didn't have your identity like that. So you were literally baggage, that's what you felt like.'<sup>77</sup> Critical military theorist Victoria Basham goes even further, arguing that the modern welfare state was built not on utopian principles for human betterment but *wartime* expectations and understandings of family, gender and race.<sup>78</sup> It was these ideas which swiftly came to underpin peacetime ideas of citizenship and which again relegated families in the military hierarchy. Restoring fathers to children was thus always a secondary motivation for reunion.

Yet whilst Cold War imperatives placed the soldier's combat role above his role within the family, the prevailing international tensions did actually encourage reunion in some specific settings, such as Berlin. Senior diplomat William Strang wrote to Orme Sargent, Permanent Secretary to the Foreign Office, in early June 1946 to complain that 'Senior Soviet military and civilian officers have had their families with them here since the early days of the occupation'.<sup>79</sup> A fellow diplomat hinted that the presence of wives in Berlin gave diplomats a quite 'different footing' and that they were needed for social occasions, especially as French, Russian and American wives were in frequent attendance.<sup>80</sup> Sargent reflected in a confidential note that Strang had a point and that 'our prestige' could potentially be damaged, but that the arrival of Strang's wife should ideally coincide with that of other British wives, 'so that any charge of discrimination in favour of senior officers can be met'.<sup>81</sup> Equality, or overtures towards it, was vital in the immediate post-war period: for instance, Mary Bouman, a CCG civilian employee, noted the 'great outcry and ill-feeling' when officers had been trying to 'earmark' furniture for their families' arrival.<sup>82</sup> Reunion, it was felt, had to proceed along fair and equitable lines in the prevailing political and social climate.

Strang, meanwhile, had not let the issue lie and used the threat of the Cold War to further his case. In a telegram on 21 June, he noted that: 'It is also freely rumoured among the Germans that the British have delayed having their families here because we are convinced that there will be war with the Soviet Union'.<sup>83</sup> Such an observation, whether correct or not, played on a key characteristic of Cold War politics: watching one another's militaries but also observing any changes in the social and communal life in Germany. Strang was pointing out that families' presence would reassure the Soviets that war would not take place imminently and would ease tensions at a critical moment.

In the face of these multiple pressures, the Cabinet relented. They estimated that, including children, 22,500 new arrivals would come; by June 1950, there were 32,881 family members in Germany.<sup>84</sup> In all these early deliberations, military families were caught between Britain's domestic rhetoric and international concerns: whilst restoring family life was a crucial dimension of the new welfare state, British military families were embroiled in Anglo-German and European relations from the moment of their arrival.

### European Integration, Post-War Peace and Military Children

Families were initially tasked with giving their German neighbours an example of ordinary and orderly lives under a liberal democratic system and, after the formal end of the occupation, contributing to

<sup>76</sup> Grace Huxford, 'Escape from the Cold War: Planning Civilian Evacuation from British-Occupied Germany, 1946–1955', *Journal of Contemporary History* (forthcoming).

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.

<sup>78</sup> Victoria Basham, *War, Identity and the Liberal State: Everyday Experiences of the Geopolitical in the Armed Forces* (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 37.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Sir William Strang (Control Commission) to Sir Orme Sargent, 12 June 1946, TNA, FO 371/55478.

<sup>80</sup> Telegram from Mr Steel (Berlin CCG) to Foreign Office, 4 July 1946, TNA, FO 371/55479.

<sup>81</sup> Draft Minute, Sir Orme Sargent to Secretary of State, 12 June 1946, TNA, FO 371/55478.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Mary Bouman to family, 11 Sept. 1946, IWM, Private Papers of Miss M Bouman, Documents 16779.

<sup>83</sup> Telegram from Sir William Strang (Control Commission) to Foreign Office, 21 June 1946, TNA, FO 371/55478.

<sup>84</sup> Evacuation from Abroad: Operation Chivalrous, 27 June 1951, TNA, CO 537/6430, 1.

European integration. Lt. Col. Stevenson noted that ‘I honestly think that the majority – and not least the younger generation of Germans – have gained a permanent, spiritual and not merely material benefit from their contacts with those whose first coming was greeted with only sneers, or cynical words and laughter’.<sup>85</sup> Families’ role in Anglo-German integration was promoted throughout the Cold War period and beyond, right up until the closure of the final military bases in 2020.<sup>86</sup>

Children were seen as an important element of this bridge-building. Despite Wilkinson’s misgivings, the British Families Education Service (BFES) strived to offer children an education equal to that offered to British children in Britain under the 1944 Education Act.<sup>87</sup> Dubbed a great ‘educational experiment’, BFES’s early tasks included adapting buildings, ensuring supplies or furniture and equipment and attending to the considerable administrative tasks involved in setting up British schools.<sup>88</sup> Yet from the start, the possibilities of raising children in Germany struck many civilian educators and military officials. The *British Zone Review* argued in 1946 that educating British children in Germany ‘may even sow the seeds of a better international relationship for future generations. Much may depend on the success of the education of these children while they are in Germany’. The article noted that British children should ‘obviously’ learn German and that ‘children out here may well be our best “ambassadors” and it may be that the German children who are too young to be indoctrinated with the Nazi doctrines may see in the British children something which leads as they grow to adult life to the beginnings of a new and better relationship between the two nations’.<sup>89</sup> Much of this discourse echoed post-war ideas of reconciliation, which was increasingly being embraced by British organisations, towns and individuals.<sup>90</sup> The BFES director stated their friendships might lead to a ‘future relationship between the two nations which will contrast favourably with the relationship in the past thirty-five years’, but that this relationship must not be forced.<sup>91</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that teachers, if not the children, took such messages to heart. The logbooks of one primary school at RAF Wildenrath show concerted efforts of teachers in forging connections with a local school in Effeld village; by 1959, the school was hosting an Anglo-German day, a common event among British communities.<sup>92</sup> Many other schools made connections with local communities, orphanages and old people’s homes, giving food and gifts at Harvest Festival.<sup>93</sup> Outside of school, some British children spent time with German children – and those from many other European countries – through groups like the Scouting movement.<sup>94</sup>

Crucially though, as West Germany moved from a vanquished post-war state to a Cold War partner, marked by its accession to NATO in 1955, the ambassadorial function placed on children shifted away from example-setting to their new role as ‘world citizens’ instead. The 1965 BFES film *School Is Everywhere* stated, alongside the shots of children examining shells on the Maltese sea-shore, visiting

<sup>85</sup> John Stevenson, ‘The British Family in Germany [Part One]’, *British Zone Review*, 2, 16 (15 Oct. 1948), 16.

<sup>86</sup> HQ BFG and Army Press Office (G), ‘Buoy, What a Send-Off’, *Sixth Sense*, 1985 (1 Sept. 2016), 22–3.

<sup>87</sup> N.T. St John Williams, *Tommy Atkins’ Children: The Story of the Education of the Army’s Children, 1675–1970* (London: HMSO, 1971), 161.

<sup>88</sup> J. Trevelyan, ‘An Educational Experiment’, *BFES Gazette*, 1 (6 Aug. 1947), 1; J. Trevelyan, ‘Living and Learning’, *BFES Gazette*, (15 Dec. 1948), 1.

<sup>89</sup> Anon., ‘Education for British Children’, *British Zone Review*, 1, 31 (23 Nov. 1946), 8.

<sup>90</sup> Nick Clarke, ‘Town Twinning in Cold-War Britain: (Dis)continuities in Twentieth-Century Municipal Internationalism’, *Contemporary British History*, 24, 2 (2010), 173–91; Martina Weyreter, ‘Germany and the Town Twinning Movement’, *Contemporary Review*, 281, 1644 (2003), 37. Bristol and Hannover, in the British Zone, were the first towns to be twinned in 1947.

<sup>91</sup> J. Trevelyan, ‘An Educational Experiment’, *BFES Gazette*, 1 (6 Aug. 1947), 1.

<sup>92</sup> School logbook for Wildenrath School, 10 Sept. 1952 to 22 Sept. 1972, Institute of Education Archives (IoE), BFE/B/3/66; Anon., ‘Children from Clive School’, *Gateway: Magazine of Osnabrück Garrison* (Nov. 1975), 12.

<sup>93</sup> School logbook for Dulmen Primary School, 1971, IoE, BFE/B/65.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Sandra P., 2 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/01, UoB RSDF; Interview with David and Rosemary T., 19 Mar. 2019, BAOR/GH/44, UoB RSDF; Emily Swafford, ‘The Challenge and Promise of Girl Scout Internationalism: From Progressive-Era Roots to Cold War Fruit’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington, D.C.*, 55 (2014), 105–24.

German industrial plants and watching Chinese clippers in Hong Kong, that: '[f]or nearly 300 years, the Army has been educating its children. Children who are growing up with a greater understanding of the world and its people, future citizens of the whole world of tomorrow'.<sup>95</sup> The video stressed that British children overseas would be educated to British standards, but the broader experiences that military overseas education afforded them would make them more engaged with the world around them.

But, as Zahra argues, these internationalist visions – of children and their restorative capacities for both families and societies – were in themselves deeply national projects.<sup>96</sup> An identity crisis plagued post-war Europe and, in the vacuum of identity, 'fantasies of post-war reinvention were projected onto Europe's children'.<sup>97</sup> State pronatalist policies and humanitarian groups both maintained that children *in families* were the key to the rehabilitation of Europe: only the family and the 'creation of nationally homogeneous nation states would guarantee lasting peace'.<sup>98</sup> The British context was further complicated by the withdrawal from empire and perceptions about British decline, a background against which all such internationalist projects were framed. Empire still affected the British sense of 'mission' in its early days, with one *British Zone Review* author boldly claiming that the 'greatest test' of British colonial administration would be the overseeing of 'a very highly organised European community' in post-war Germany.<sup>99</sup> Family life again adopted a greater significance in the post-war and post-imperial world.

Yet the extent to which children actually fostered links with local German children is unclear: by 1977, W.S. Rollings, a head teacher visiting BFES from Norfolk, said that he felt that 'British Army bases appear to be British islands set within the German mainland'.<sup>100</sup> Oral history interviews with former residents support the 'British islands' idea, though memories are doubtless complicated by their later lives and outlooks, as well as the context of many of the interviews during the Brexit negotiations of 2016–20.<sup>101</sup> Whilst some military children did not find the lack of common language an impediment to certain outside games, exploring or trading NAAFI chocolate, some found the language barrier harder to overcome when playing, particularly in smaller groups.<sup>102</sup> Many schools offered German lessons to British children, but some schools saw this as a 'token gesture' to some extent.<sup>103</sup> The situation was different for families who lived in smaller British communities, particularly in the days of the early occupation: one narrator, Jan, recalled how there were no other English children to play with when she lived in Hamburg and Lübeck in the immediate years after the war, so she learnt to play and speak in German, something which produced a degree of 'ill-feeling' among neighbours and friends when she returned to post-war England.<sup>104</sup> In those early days before the establishment of vast base complexes in the 1950s, containing crèches and other family facilities, a few parents opted to send their children to the local German kindergarten, again facilitating language

<sup>95</sup> *School Is Everywhere* (London: Central Office of Information and Ministry of Defence, 1965).

<sup>96</sup> Zahra, *The Lost Children*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20; Riley, *War in the Nursery*, 151–2.

<sup>99</sup> 'CDA', 'Britain's Greatest Test', *British Zone Review*, 1, 38 (1 Mar. 1947), 4; source also cited and analysed in Huxford, 'Escape from the Cold War'.

<sup>100</sup> W.S. Rollings, 'UK Headteachers' visit to BFES in Germany', *SCEA Bulletin*, 14 (Autumn 1977). Also cited in Grace Huxford, "'Deterrence Can Be Boring": Gender, Agency and Boredom in British Military Base Communities during the Cold War', *Critical Military Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>101</sup> Similarly, when discussing the history of empire in the context of 'Brexit Britain', Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch call for interpretations appreciating 'the plurality of imperial afterlives . . . without resorting to the reductive moral categories that give the debate its distinctive emotional edge'. Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch, 'Greater Britain, Global Britain', in Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch, eds., *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 5.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Alwyn T., 6 June 2019, BAOR/GH/25, UoB RSDF; Interview with Andy M., 6 June 2019, BAOR/GH/42, UoB RSDF; Interview with Ann P., 17 Apr. 2019, BAOR/GH/32, UoB RSDF; Interview with Fiona H., 30 Oct. 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF; Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF; Interview with Lorna L., 8 May 2019, BAOR/GH/36, UoB RSDF.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Sue A., 25 May 2018, BAOR/GH/12, UoB RSDF.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Jan and Ron H., 2 May 2019, BAOR/GH/35, UoB RSDF; interview with Brian D., 5 May 2019, BAOR/GH/41, UoB RSDF.

learning and friendships.<sup>105</sup> Some older children were aware of Germany's Second World War history and their games around ruined buildings re-imagined Nazi atrocities ('for we all knew such things had happened', one former military child wrote in a later memoir), but others simply accepted Germany as a 'posting' and an exciting one at that.<sup>106</sup> In some cases, families actually stood in the way of further integration, with some children forbidden to play with German children, an edict many chose to ignore.<sup>107</sup> Overall, over time it became harder for children to establish meaningful contact with local German children, particularly those who lived in larger British base communities, and they did not necessarily understand or identify with the ambassadorial role bestowed on them.

Not all British military children lived full-time in Germany though: in 1955 when the official occupation ended, the military established an Education Allowance, meaning that parents could opt to send their children to boarding school in the United Kingdom instead.<sup>108</sup> The decision to send children to boarding school, usually in Britain or in one of the few that existed in Germany during this period, or to keep them in day-schools also proved to be one of the most emotionally charged issues for military families in Germany across the Cold War period. Official historian of Army Education N.T. St John Williams put the decision down to personal preference: some families simply placed 'a higher priority on family unity, preferring to take their children with them rather than face the emotional and social problems of separation'.<sup>109</sup> Within the community too, there was a cultural expectation that boarding school was the norm within certain ranks (particularly those where military service spanned the generations) or else families followed the lead of other families to whom they were close.<sup>110</sup> But in some cases it was economic factors, not just emotional ones, that bound the military family together in Germany, as private funds were usually needed to supplement the boarding school allowance.

However, the *language* surrounding the decision to send children to boarding school is revealing in understanding context-specific agency. In oral histories and life narratives, parents and children frequently described how it was *their* decision and their family response to military life and regular postings. Most families decided when children were aged ten or eleven, but for others it was far earlier, particularly those familiar with the British preparatory school system. Some parents felt that keeping children in Germany was best, either for their particular child's needs or in terms of learning and development, as it was 'good for them to be going into new situations each time' they moved.<sup>111</sup> Rank played a part too, meaning that the secondary schools and local organisations like Scout groups in Germany were sometimes largely filled with the children of lower ranked soldiers who did not go to boarding school, something that did not go unnoticed among parents and children.<sup>112</sup> Some described the 'terrible, terrible guilt' some parents felt at sending their children 'away', even if they had few issues at boarding school.<sup>113</sup> On the allowance itself, one parent interviewed felt that it was 'reasonable that as a society we do that', acknowledging the familial sacrifice endured in the service of the military.<sup>114</sup> The language of sacrifice, originating among 'empire families', implied a personal or familial commitment to a greater cause, despite the ramifications that it might have on individual or collective happiness. In these narratives, they *chose* to endure separation for the sake of something bigger. Separation also

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Roger W.G., 16 May 2019, BAOR/GH/38, UoB RSDF.

<sup>106</sup> T.H. Friend, 'Recollections of a Fifties Kid' (unpublished memoir), IWM, T.H. Friend Private Papers, Documents 19782, 58; interview with Anne Williams, 5 Mar. 2018, BAOR/GH/07, UoB RSDF.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Andy M., 6 June 2019, BAOR/GH/42, UoB RSDF.

<sup>108</sup> State boarding schools in Germany under the auspices of the 1944 Education Act were founded in 1947 and 1948; see Paterson, 'The Children of *Operation Union*', 211.

<sup>109</sup> St John Williams, *Tommy Atkin's Children*, 182–3.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Fiona H., 30 Oct. 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF; interview with Susan W., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/04, UoB RSDF.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Derek and Viv E., 13 Apr. 2018, BAOR/GH/11, UoB RSDF.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with David and Rosemary T., 19 Mar. 2019, BAOR/GH/44, UoB RSDF; interview with Alwyn T., 6 June 2019, BAOR/GH/25, UoB RSDF; interview with Jeremy H., 6 Aug. 2018, BAOR/GH/20, UoB RSDF.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Robin and Mary F.S., 11 July 2018, BAOR/GH/17, UoB RSDF.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Jeremy H., 6 Aug. 2018, BAOR/GH/20, UoB RSDF.

bound military families closer to one another, particularly those of similar (larger higher) social class or rank, whose children might attend the same schools or share travel arrangements.

Overall, many life narratives implied that this type of family separation was purposefully undertaken by families in the face of difficult circumstances, rather than enforced by the military. This particular form of agency, so fleeting and limited, might be easily dismissed as post-hoc justification, but it remains a powerful indication of families' 'articulated intentions, frequently unspoken fantasies and ordinary efforts'.<sup>115</sup> It also reveals the impact such choices had on how people regarded their families back in Germany. Whilst some children missed their parents deeply, boarding school was an alternative family or 'family of choice' for others: one former military child, for instance, noted that 'you were far closer to your friends, you needed your friends as you didn't have a family'.<sup>116</sup> School could provide security and routine, both in Britain but also in Germany itself when the personnel were deployed.<sup>117</sup>

Childhood separation increasingly overlapped with fatherly absence from Germany too. By the early 1970s and amid rising tension in Northern Ireland, some described family life as inflected with 'anticipation' in the run-up to a deployment from Germany to Northern Ireland and then a countdown until the father returned. As with post-war British discourse on 'stable' family life, it was the mother who was deemed responsible for smoothing over any difficulties that fatherly absence entailed.<sup>118</sup> But once service personnel had left, one former military child recalled, there was plenty of support from the other regimental families, noting 'that was where our family was, if you like'.<sup>119</sup> Military life contained its own 'families of choice' when the defined family unit could not provide support.<sup>120</sup> The idea that a military unit could substitute or emulate family life *for soldiers* is well-covered in histories of modern conflict, but its significance for families left behind is less understood. Military communities in Germany were very young, with large numbers of women with babies and young children. Whilst the family often stood at odds with the military, the military could itself provide a simulacrum of family life when needed, and narrators recall trips, contact points and events put on while 'the men' were away.<sup>121</sup>

Significantly though, these constant cycles of family reunion and separation, as well as often painful decisions about educational futures, became a badge of pride among parents and children: 'that real sense of *belonging* for want of a better word, all in the same boat, you know, your dad's in the army', as one former military child put it.<sup>122</sup> Some families depicted themselves as like a military unit themselves: one former military chaplain, whose son later followed him into military service, noted that 'the forces are what we *do* as a family'.<sup>123</sup> Such statements also explain the long-term pattern of British military life overseas, where military children themselves often chose to follow a similar career path to their parents or married someone with a military connection.<sup>124</sup> As in colonial India, the long period of time the British spent in Germany and the breadth of their communities led to many cases of *déjà-vu*: one military wife recalled returning to her former childhood family home in Sennelager, whereas one former army officer remembered how his office was adjacent to one previously occupied by his father.<sup>125</sup> The distinct nature of and pride in British military family life thus perpetuated itself, against the background of Britain's continued presence in Germany.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas, 'Historicising Agency', 330.

<sup>116</sup> Cook, 'Families of Choice?'; interview with Jennifer B., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/03, UoB RSDF.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Sue A., 25 May 2018, BAOR/GH/12, UoB RSDF.

<sup>118</sup> P. Dean, 'Children in a Mobile Community', *Cambridge Institute of Education Bulletin*, 2, 10 (Dec. 1962), 2–7; Riley, *War in the Nursery*, 151.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.

<sup>120</sup> Cook, 'Families of Choice?'

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Anne W., 5 Mar. 2018, BAOR/GH/07, UoB RSDF; interview with Paul G., 19 Mar. 2019, BAOR/GH/28, UoB RSDF. Though some families opted to return to Britain temporarily while personnel were deployed.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Jeremy H., 6 Aug. 2018, BAOR/GH/20, UoB RSDF.

<sup>124</sup> Eric Lower, 'Service Parents Are Good Parents', *Sixth Sense* (27 Jan. 1977), 4; Buettner, *Empire Families*, 1–2.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF; interview with Ken H., 12 Mar. 2019, BAOR/GH/26, UoB RSDF.

### Sustaining the Iron Curtain and the British 'Way of Life'

While children and husbands came and went from Germany more often after 1955, British wives largely remained on bases, the main bearers of family life on this new Cold War frontier. Their behaviour needed to be exemplary, not only to help 'improve' their 'host' nation, but also increasingly to prove that the democratic way of life was far superior.<sup>126</sup> British wives were encouraged to meet their German neighbours relatively early in the occupation. In 1948, it was reported that the atmosphere of the Women's Institute has 'crept into Hamburg'. The Anglo-German Frauenklub, for instance, was a fairly socially conservative occasion where 'German and British women sit informally together at small tables – once again, there are the inevitable cups of tea, a variety of hats with and without flowers and veils, uniforms of CCG, German Women Police, Red Cross – and, around it all, a cheering buzz of chatter, some of it a little halting perhaps, a curious mixture of English and German, but nevertheless a really good conversation.'<sup>127</sup> Donna Alvah argues that through such events women acted as a pseudo 'peace corps' in West Germany. Post-war humanitarian internationalism placed great emphasis on family reunion, but it also spurred many women on to get involved with charitable initiatives.<sup>128</sup>

Yet examples such as the Anglo-German Frauenklub spoke to ideas of a particularly 'British way of life' too. The phrase 'way of life' was a much-repeated Cold War shorthand for liberal democracy, 'fair play' and freedoms, and was widely used in post-war culture and society, but it had specific British inflections in this case as well.<sup>129</sup> One Mrs Piehler wrote in 1946 that: 'many wives are using their opportunities to promote good feeling by "putting across" the British way of life and creating a feeling of sympathy between themselves and their German neighbours'. Some worked with the British Red Cross, Salvation Army and Society of Friends to aid local civilians and DPs, while one woman gave up her garden as a sunray clinic for German children.<sup>130</sup> The church was a particularly prominent vehicle for such good works and some felt that religiously-informed life was the key to the occupation: as 'BAOR wife' maintained, 'unless we can revive our religious instincts and live them openly among the Germans, our occupation of Germany is doomed to ultimate failure'.<sup>131</sup> This 'common Christianity' could stand as a post-war balm and a Cold War weapon.<sup>132</sup>

But again, if we move beyond the message of official documentation to interrogate the very *existence* of such advice, a more fragmented picture of British Cold War efforts forms. The force behind these diplomatic messages reflects the degree to which they were ignored by families: the majority of oral history interviewees pointed out the isolation of the British community and lack of integration, even if they had a few German friends themselves.<sup>133</sup> In 1950, J.G.E. Hickson, the British Resident in Kreis Lemgo (a regional division of the British Zone), bemoaned how service families failed to connect with their West German allies, particularly in the areas of religion, sport and the cinema: 'most British cinemas have rows and rows of empty seats. There are many Germans who understand English, but who do not often get invited by us, and it would seem that a good opportunity of showing the British way of life through films is being thrown away'.<sup>134</sup> The British were not, in other words, doing their best to promote their 'way of life', which had the potential to expunge both the German totalitarian past and the communist threat. Hickson felt this was true of the British cultural centres set up shortly after the war, *die Brücke*, which were 'recognized as the focal point of free

<sup>126</sup> Donna Alvah, "'I Am Too Young to Die': Children and the Cold War', *OAH Magazine of History*, 24, 4 (2010), 25–6.

<sup>127</sup> 'BC', 'British and German Women's Activities', *British Zone Review*, 2, 13 (26 June 1948), 8.

<sup>128</sup> Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors*, 81.

<sup>129</sup> Huxford, *The Korean War in Britain*, 78.

<sup>130</sup> H.A. Piehler, 'The British Family in Germany [Part Two]', *British Zone Review*, 2, 16 (15 Oct. 1948), 18.

<sup>131</sup> Anon., 'Reflections of a BAOR Wife', *British Zone Review*, 1, 28 (12 Oct. 1946), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors*, 147.

<sup>133</sup> Examples include: interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF; interview with Anne W., 5 Mar. 2018, BAOR/GH/07, UoB RSDF.

<sup>134</sup> 'Discussion on Conference of Assistant Commissioners and British Residents', Apr. 1950, 4, Private Papers of Lt Col the Reverend JGE Hickson, IWM, Documents 12234, Box 387.

discussion and tolerance' but which required hard work to run. 'Are we so half hearted', Hickson questioned, 'about democracy and our way of life that we cannot spare a few thousand pounds to advertise it? What will the Germans think when we close them down after all our talk about fostering Anglo-German relations?'<sup>135</sup> Despite these failings, Christopher Knowles has argued that families or small groups were still one of the most successful settings for interaction and integration, with cocktail parties succeeding where Anglo-German clubs and larger initiatives sometimes faltered.<sup>136</sup>

But who was to take the lead in such interactions? Already, sociability was an obligation for senior British military wives, who were expected to fulfil several social roles, from hosting dinner parties to organising coffee mornings with other wives. One officer wrote home to his fiancée in 1949 that 'there may be a certain amount of visiting to be done. . . . There may also be a bit of tactful settling of differences too. Other Ranks' wives are notorious for quarrelling'.<sup>137</sup> Later that year, after their marriage, she wrote to him from Germany (while he was away on exercise) about the obligation to hold events like this: 'I think perhaps I'd better ask Mrs Newman again. She has had me twice and I've only asked her once so I'm definitely owing her a morning's coffee'.<sup>138</sup> Women's sections in regimental magazines suggested that women should extend this social network beyond just the British on the base too: 'if you're a "Mum at Home", why not make a summer resolution to get out a bit more in the German community?'<sup>139</sup> The burden was placed on wives to break the pattern of insularity, alongside their domestic or family lives.

Even if wives took up these tasks, not all saw them in a Cold War light even as the conflict warmed up during the 1950s and 1960s. Proximity to the border or residence in Berlin did sharpen attention to the possibility of Soviet invasion, as did the job roles of their family members, but this was not uniformly felt.<sup>140</sup> When asked to recall her level of awareness as a child (a difficult feat), Jenny, a former military child living in Germany in the 1950s, commented that 'I don't think it was a question of not knowing, it was a question of being brought up with it and that was normal and that's what you did'.<sup>141</sup> Another former military child claimed she also felt 'the seriousness of it'.<sup>142</sup> Some recalled the briefings later in the Cold War to wives on what to do in case the Soviets did invade (though many later claimed they would have wilfully ignored the instruction to leave their family pets behind).<sup>143</sup> Military exercises had the most obvious impact on family life, with husbands away for days or weeks enacting their 'war roles': some teachers felt that this impacted on the children, whereas others felt that school continued the same regardless of this instability at home.<sup>144</sup> One senior officer stated in an interview: 'I don't think most British soldiers or their families spent a lot of time worried about the Soviet Army. They worried about whether they could afford duty-free goods in the NAAFI . . . not so much the grand politics of it all'.<sup>145</sup> Others claimed that their life in Germany was so 'magical' that even the rumbling of tanks on nearby training ranges did not alarm them.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Knowles, *Winning the Peace*, 161.

<sup>137</sup> Letter from C.R.W. Norman to Mary Timpson, 27 Feb. 1949, IWM, Private Papers of Colonel C.R.W. Norman, Documents 1706, Box 87/57/3.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from Mary Norman to C.R.W. Norman, 4 Oct. 1949, IWM, Private Papers of Colonel C.R.W. Norman, Documents 1706, Box 87/57/3.

<sup>139</sup> Nathalie Rich, 'At Home with the Children? Get to Know the Germans!', *Gateway: Magazine of Osnabrück Garrison*, 140 (June 1987), 14.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Derek and Viv E., 13 Apr. 2018, BAOR/GH/11, UoB RSDF; interview with Jeremy H., 6 Aug. 2018, BAOR/GH/20, UoB RSDF.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Jennifer B., 12 Sept. 2017, BAOR/GH/03, UoB RSDF.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Debbie G., 29 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.

<sup>143</sup> British Forces Germany, NEO, BFGPubnB1 (c. 1983).

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Ann P., 17 Apr. 2019, BAOR/GH/32, UoB RSDF; interview with Ollie W., 4 Oct. 2018, BAOR/GH/22, UoB RSDF.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Peter W., 5 Mar. 2018, BAOR/GH/08, UoB RSDF.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Denis and Josephine T., 13 July 2018, BAOR/GH/18, UoB RSDF.



Yet it is very difficult to ascertain the level of past anxieties, even in retrospective settings like oral history interviews. A senior army wife stationed with her family in Germany in the 1950s recalled how: 'I was certainly very aware of the Cold War. You know, there was a nuclear dump just down the road there, that my husband used to have to go off and guard every so often . . . [but] it was certainly, looking back all those years, it was in many ways a much easier thing to live with than some of the . . . particularly the Northern Ireland business'.<sup>147</sup> The increasing IRA threat to British service personnel from the mid-1970s meant that many narrators could recall measures put in place for their safety then with far greater detail, such as using mirrors under their cars to check for explosive devices, not travelling in uniform and being circumspect about their conversations in public places.<sup>148</sup>

By contrast, the earlier period of Cold War anxiety between 1945 and 1975 was on the whole remembered less vividly. Most had a sense of why they were in Germany, explaining both Germany's troubled past and the brooding presence of the eastern bloc a few miles away. The Cold War was even a source of fascination: senior officers' wives organised tours to Berlin, with some even permitted to go beyond Checkpoint Charlie and later trips to Moscow before the Berlin Wall came down.<sup>149</sup> The 'iron curtain' itself became a common sight for many wives: several interviewees recalled taking friends and family from Britain to visit the inner border with East Germany in the Harz mountains, as 'everybody wanted to go there'.<sup>150</sup> For those living in or visiting West Berlin after 1961, itself a divided city within East Germany, the Berlin Wall became a popular tourist site among British service personnel and their families.<sup>151</sup> By 1971, Gordon Lee wrote in *The Economist* that BAOR and RAF Germany's continued presence in Germany to combat Cold War foes was easy to 'half-forget', so accustomed had the British public, politicians and even service families themselves become to life in Germany.<sup>152</sup> They may not have been Cold warriors at heart, but British military families saw Germany as an inevitable and accepted part of military and family life in the post-war period.

## Conclusion

Family reunion was a much-desired aim in the post-war period, but a phenomenon all too regular and fleeting for military families. For them, the visions of the welfare state constantly conflicted with their position within the military and their compliance with its continual demands. But the discourse of post-war liberal internationalism, which so enthusiastically emphasised the redemptive power of family, did touch military families to some extent: they were to act as quasi-diplomats in forging new links with past foes and demonstrating the positive democratic 'way of life' now open to them. In restoring British military families, however briefly, the state also sought to provide domestic stability after an era of profound dislocation. That this never fully applied to Britain's many military families, whose itinerancy continued much as before the war, was one of the abiding inconsistencies within the post-war welfare state. As the 1940s drew to a close, Cold War exigencies meant that British military families would remain an acceptable exception to the norms now set down in Britain itself. They were also embroiled in the task to actively defend that very same liberal democratic welfare state, increasingly part of the division between east and west and bolstering the military presence in Western Europe.

However, within this seemingly immovable system of security, strategy and enforced movement, British military families did carve out spaces for agency and choice. The difficult decisions to send children to boarding school for educational continuity or to 'keep the family together' were

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Fiona H., 30 Oct. 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Sandra P., 2 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/01, UoB RSDF; 'Know Your Enemy: The IRA under Vehicle Booby Trap', *Spotlight on Os*, 8 (Nov. 1989), 3; *Hohne Officials Family Guide* (Golspie: Method, 1987), 51.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Derek and Viv E., 13 Apr. 2018, BAOR/GH/11, UoB RSDF.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Sandra P., 2 Aug. 2017, BAOR/GH/01, UoB RSDF; interview with Ollie W., 4 Oct. 2018, BAOR/GH/22, UoB RSDF; interview with Julie and David M., 3 Apr. 2019, BAOR/GH/31, UoB RSDF.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Roger W.G., 16 May 2019, BAOR/GH/38, UoB RSDF; interview with Tania B., 31 May 2019, BAOR/GH/39, UoB RSDF.

<sup>152</sup> Gordon Lee, *The Half-Forgotten Army: The British Forces in Germany* (London: Economist, 1971), 28.

consciously made by families. Whilst the choices themselves might appear limited, British families nonetheless depicted them as *their* choices. For historians examining agency in communities who did not express themselves in terms of rebellion or speaking out, the articulation of the language of choice is sometimes as significant as effecting actual change. Families also subtly managed to subvert or ignore the roles set out for them: whilst the insularity of some members of the British community was embarrassing for senior military authorities, it nevertheless demonstrated a resistance to play a part in wider Cold War politics. Whether due to apathy, unfamiliarity or the sheer busyness of everyday life, British integration into the German community was often patchy. And whilst the Cold War undoubtedly shaped everyday life in Germany – indeed, their whole presence there was predicated on it – its presence was not universally felt by families. Historians need to understand family agency in its full context if that term is to retain its analytical usefulness and that context can range in scale, from broad international discourses to individual families' specific circumstances. Military families might well seem a homogeneous group, not known for speaking out and with few options for individual action or resistance, but their syncretisation of centralised messages and the multiplicity of narratives that emerge from their life stories demonstrate that their choices, actions and outcomes were not in any way uniform. Their important history complicates much broader dichotomies of peacetime and wartime; of welfare and warfare; and of powerlessness and agency.

**Acknowledgements.** My thanks go to the AHRC Leadership Fellowship Scheme (AH/S002634/1) and to the British Academy/Leverhulme Small Grant scheme (SG152333) for funding this research. I would also like to sincerely extend my thanks to all oral history narrators for their generosity in sharing their stories with me, to the organisations that put me in touch with interviewees, and to colleagues and reviewers for reading earlier drafts of this piece, particularly Jennifer Crane, Julio Decker, Will Pooley, Lauren Stokes and Sarah Paterson. My thanks also go to Joel Morley as post-doctoral research assistant on the 'British Military Bases in Germany' project. Informed consent was granted for use of oral history interview material for research purposes and publication and interview recordings are available on formal request from the University of Bristol Research Data Storage Facility.