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Happy Warriors in Arms  
Aspects of military life in Evelyn Waugh's  
*Put Out More Flags* and *Sword of Honour*

The documentary value of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy<sup>1</sup> has been widely acknowledged. Apart from the early, oft-quoted appraisals by Cyril Connolly—"unquestionably the finest novel to have come out of the war" (Stannard 337)—and Andrew Rutherford—"probably the greatest work of fiction to emerge from the Second World War" (113)—more recently it was described by the military historian John Keegan as "the greatest English novel of the Second World War", by Antony Beevor as one of the best five works of fiction about the Second World War, and listed by Jeffrey Archer as one of the top *roman-fleuves* in English, adding that it is "probably the best thing in English literature to be inspired by the second world war." Fellow Royal Marine officer John St John declared that Waugh "describes the war as I experienced it. Nothing is falsified" (55). In turn, Alex Danchev states that "Waugh's treatment of [...] regimental ideology is a miniature masterpiece of social history" (478). Certainly Waugh, who served in different units throughout the war—Royal Marines, 8 Commando, Layforce, Horse Guards, Special Service Brigade, Special Air Service, 37<sup>th</sup> British Mission in Yugoslavia—had an acute eye to dissect people, institutions and the environment he observed throughout his military career, attracted by whatever absurdities or farcical situations occurred within his view.

The perspective adopted in the trilogy is admittedly limited. Waugh wrote in the prologue to the unified edition that he "sought to give a description of the Second

World War as it was seen and experienced by a single, uncharacteristic Englishman, and to show its effect on him" (Waugh 1999, xxxiv). This "uncharacteristic Englishman" is Guy Crouchback, a melancholy and passive Catholic, who, although differing from his author in many respects, views the political implications of the war in a similar vein. Indeed, his passivity serves an interpretive purpose. In the words of Munton, he is "an empty vessel into which the Second World War is poured [...]. The war enters him, and in our reading of Guy Crouchback we enter the war ourselves" (227). Waugh's last hero, Guy still shares with almost all the previous protagonists the role of *ingénue* through whose innocent or decent eyes a predatory world is perceived. And, as far as his approach to the general mechanics of war is concerned, what we learn from Guy is disillusion.<sup>2</sup> Waugh believed that Britain had behaved ignominiously and had mismanaged the war effort, and his works reproduce such indignity on a smaller scale in a series of scenes of military inefficiency accompanied by presumption. Very seldom do we encounter heroism or prowess in Waugh's military: apart from a few exceptions, such as the heroic resistance of the Second Halberdier Battalion in Crete,<sup>3</sup> the behaviour of the military all through the trilogy is characterised by inefficiency, chaos, tactlessness or cowardice.<sup>4</sup>

But *Sword of Honour* was not Waugh's first attempt to deal with the devastating irruption of war. *Put Out More Flags* was written in 1941 on his return from the Battle of Crete, a novel reportedly "dashed off to occupy a tedious voyage" (Amory 158). Although little academic criticism has been written so far on this work<sup>5</sup> most critics agree that it prepares the way for the deeper incarnation of Waugh's views about the military and the management of war developed in *Sword of Honour*. This preparatory nature obviously includes a first-hand perspective of various and colourful elements of army life which will reappear in the trilogy in an expanded form. In Patey's words, "the military experiences here distributed among Alistair, Cedric and Peter [the heroes of *Put Out More Flags*] are all rendered again, briefly in *Brideshead Revisited*, at length in *Sword of Honour*" (Patey 198). This general perception has had little controversy among critics, but up till now no academic study has pinpointed the nature of these narrative patterns of military life that were essayed in the early novel and later developed in the trilogy. Consequently, our paper sets out to fill in this critical gap by analysing some narrative sequences taken from *Put Out More Flags*, *Sword of Honour*, and additionally from *Brideshead Revisited*. Written in 1944, *Brideshead* became the natural outlet for some earlier material from *Put Out More Flags* Waugh intended to re-use, and though not exactly a war novel but rather about a particular segment of English society before

its outbreak, the disruptive effect of war on the lives of the main characters is a major thematic presence in both *Brideshead* and its predecessor.

For our analysis we will select five sequences from *Put Out More Flags* depicting active army life, three related to Alistair Trumpington's<sup>6</sup> infantry battalion, the other two concerning Cedric Lyne's<sup>7</sup> regiment: the first one, that shall be named Sequence I (chapter 5 of the Winter section, pp. 102-109), describes the routine of military training in barracks, far from the battlefield; Sequence II (chapter 10, Winter, pp. 127-133) shows the inept organization and development of a battalion exercise; Sequence III deals with a favourite of Waugh's, the "flap", a chaotic or pointless embarkation move; the fourth and graver sequence narrates a clash between the British and German armies resulting in Cedric Lyne's death and without doubt a bitter Allied defeat (chapter 6, Spring, pp. 204-211); and last, Sequence V, placed at the opening of the brief Summer section, ironically presents Alistair's battalion converted "into first-line troops" (213) and eventually charged with a futile coastal defence (213-217).<sup>8</sup>

### **Training at home**

Most of the military activity recorded in *Put Out More Flags* is set against the background of the so-called "Bore War" or "Phoney War", a period of general inactivity lasting until April 1940 in which no Western power launched a significant offensive and Hitler's threat was not taken so seriously. Thus, the first military scenes in the novel reflect an atmosphere of lassitude; in fact, Sequence I opens with the companies parading (*POMF* 102), the quintessence of barrack routine. Significantly, *Officers and Gentlemen* ends with the same image: "That afternoon Guy paraded on the square with a mixed squad of recruits and officers in training" (*OG* 390), an image of Guy's downward fortune in the army. After his heroic behaviour and escape from Crete, he is incongruously sent back to barrack duties and is put "on the square to smarten up," a reversal that marks the beginning of his long period of inactivity and deep disillusionment.

Sequence I proceeds to picture the company commander, Captain Mayfield, going through the daily routines and minor official reports (*POMF* 102-103), small matters such as the ones occupying Captain Charles Ryder's mind as he lies awake before reveille, when he realizes that his love for the army has finally died (*BR* 11). One of Mayfield's tasks is to recommend two soldiers for promotion, the "O.C.T.U. candidates" (*POMF* 103), and the first one, named Brodie, shows no objection "if you [Captain Mayfield] really think I should make a good officer." The captain replies: "I don't suppose you'll make a *good* officer. They're very rare. But I dare

say you'll make an officer of some kind" (*POMF* 104). What we might call "the promotion of the unfittest" is illustrated in *Men at Arms* when Guy converses with his company commander, Major Erskine, about proposing one's own men for a commission. Erskine admits that he puts down the names of the nastier soldiers under his command so as to get rid of them for good, and concludes: "Jolly sort of army we're going to have in two years time when all the shits have got to the top" (*MA* 136). In *Officers and Gentlemen* Colonel "Jumbo" Trotter shares a similar scepticism about the whole promotion system: "Extraordinary system taking first-rate NCOs and making second-rate officers of them" (*OG* 218).

*Put Out More Flags* makes another point on the mobilization procedure, about which Waugh must have felt very deeply. Indeed, at the outbreak of war it took him three months of painful applications and string-pulling to be admitted into the Royal Marines. Like his creator, the first obstacle that Basil Seal encounters is his age: "they say they want younger men. It's a typical army paradox. They say we are too old now and that they will call us up in two years' time. [...] The only logical policy is to kill off the old first, while there's still some kick in them" (*POMF*, 76). Similarly, Guy Crouchback clashes against "the official view" when the same objection is raised to his joining up and he tries to make army officials see that he is "ready for immediate consumption. You should take the 35s now and give the young men time to get sons" (*MA* 20).

On the other hand, this painful search and the ensuing humiliations contrast sharply with the facility with which some club members get a job in their friends' units by just hanging around. *Put Out More Flags* records a sentence that will be echoed in the trilogy: "most of war seems to consist of hanging about. Let's at least hang about with our own friends" (*POMF* 220), says Peter Pastmaster to his absurdly youthful and chummy colonel. Tommy Blackhouse, Guy's commanding officer in *Officers and Gentlemen*, reiterates this idea when he declares that "it's going to be a long war. The great thing is to spend it among friends" (*OG*, 228). A gentleman's club indeed appears the best place to get employed: "I should stick around Bellamy's as much as you can", Tommy says to Guy. "This is where one gets the amusing jobs nowadays" (*OG*, 201). The definite role of the club in war intelligence is already prefigured in *Put Out More Flags*; despite Peter Pastmaster's efforts to keep his (eventually cancelled) embarkation a secret, his club's barman already knows it all: "Good morning, my lord," said MacDougal, the barman. "I see you're off to Finland too. Quite a number of our gentlemen are going to-night" (*POMF*, 118).

Another trait Waugh shared with his characters-in-training is his abhorrence of physical exercise. His fellow trainee in the Royal Marines, John St John, states that “there was a daily session in the gym which Evelyn in particular hated –when unwatched, he delighted in what he called his ‘energy-saving Bedaux system’ of arm-stretching and trunk-bending” (9). Similarly, when he is summoned by his captain, “Alistair took his time to return to his platoon. At this time of the morning they were doing P.T. It was the one part of the routine he really hated (*POMF*, 105)”, and he later flaunts before his wife that he has “managed to shirk P.T.” (108). Guy Crouchback is not suited for the gym either. In fact, it is the only part of his Halberdier instruction that he positively dislikes. Whereas the gym is the only environment where his rival Trimmer succeeded, it “seemed to Guy to institute a sort of extra-territorial area, the embassy of an alien and hostile people, that had no part in the well-ordered life of the barracks” (*MA*, 41).

If we accept Basil Seal’s account, there is something that Alistair dislikes more than P.T.: “the worst thing about his training is the entertainments. They get detailed to go twice a week and the sergeant always picks on Alistair” (*POMF* 77). We get no further explanation of why the Ensa<sup>9</sup> shows are so unendurable, but a seasoned socialite such as Alistair might surely find them distasteful and vulgar. This hint will be expanded in *Men at Arms*, where Guy attends a similar concert and what he sees leaves no doubt about the low quality of the performance: “Under the Corps crest in the proscenium there was disclosed a little concert party comprising three elderly women, over made-up, a cadaverous old man, under made-up, and a neuter beast of indeterminable age at the piano. All wore the costume of pierrots and pierrettes [...] One by one the heads of the first two rows sank into their collars. Guy slept too” (*MA*, 44).

Sequence I displays one more replica of Waugh’s basic training, the session on small arms instruction. We learn that Alistair’s “platoon, left in charge of the sergeant, split up into sections and practised immediate action on the Bren gun” (*POMF*, 107) and we witness one lesson in which Alistair is required to solve some problems dealing with the different parts of the weapon. On his own admission to Sonia, he is “pretty good with the Bren [...]; only one mistake” (108). It is curious to notice that small-arms instruction is also a meaningful element in different chapters of *Men at Arms*, especially in Book I, “Apthorpe Gloriosus”. In a scene set in early February 1940, Guy and his colleagues are “being initiated in the same hard way into the mysteries of Fixed Lines” and are going through the different constituents: “gun, spare barrel, dummies, magazines, carrier’s wallet, tripod, aiming peg and night firing lamp” (*MA* 90). But the ferocious brigadier Ritchie-

Hook turns up rather unexpectedly and questions the probationary officers about the purpose of their small-arms instruction. Obviously, the right answer is “biffing the enemy”, but none hits on it. This scene implies a turning point in the brigadier’s training strategy: from then on he dismisses some instructing and probationary officers (Trimmer among them) and decides to take charge of the instruction.

Furthermore, a reference to the lesson on “Judging distance” appears in each of the three novels that make the trilogy. In the early stages of the disappointing military course at Kut-al-Imara School, Guy is taught how to measure distances: “At two hundred yards all parts of the body are distinctly seen. At three hundred yards the outline of the face is blurred. At four hundred yards no face. At six hundred yards the head is a dot and the body tapers” (*MA* 75). Later, in what he considers “the worst afternoon since he joined the army,” Guy returns to his room nervously repeating the protocol to himself. In *Officers and Gentlemen*, when Guy is beginning to experience the general demoralization prevailing at the withdrawal from Crete, he remembers the lesson learnt in “the *Manual of Small Arms*, at six hundred yards the heads were dots...” (*OG* 334) before he makes out the figure of Colonel Tickeridge at a distance. Finally, this enumeration of distance-judging criteria occurs again in *Unconditional Surrender*, when Guy and a party of distinguished Allied observers are watching over the fraudulent assault against the Yugoslav blockhouse, where Ritchie-Hook gets killed in an absurdly heroic way (*US* 558). Considering Waugh’s concern for narrative architecture, the successive, almost literal appearance of these three references does not seem random. The reference to such tactical criteria is brought in at moments of bitter frustration in Guy’s military career; indeed, the first occurrence coincides, as indicated above, with the first breach in his “love affair” with the army. Can we find a particular significance in this repetition? One possible interpretation may have to do with the need to correctly judge distances, personal, emotional and historical. One of the central themes of the trilogy is the shift from the individual’s desire to change the world’s structures to his conviction that only private acts of service are within reach. Or, in the words of Gallagher, “*Sword of Honour* portrays the futility of public or ‘quantitative’ solutions to the world’s ills: salvation, both personal and collective, will come from the individual” (Gallagher 34). The purpose of judging distance is, according to the sergeant-instructor, to “estimate the range of the target correctly. [...] Correct range makes fire effective and avoids waste of ammunition” (*MA* 75). Read metaphorically, Guy must learn throughout the trilogy not to waste emotional ammunition in attempting to change the world; he should rather aim at shorter-distance targets.

## Field exercises

Sequence II in *Put Out More Flags* deals with a tactical field exercise carried out by Alistair's battalion. As could be expected, the organization turns out rather deficient, the spirit among the soldiers is very low, and the senior officers show incompetence and tactlessness towards their subordinates. St John notes that in the spring of 1940 the Royal Marines camped at Bisley, near Aldershot, a place that provided the background for what we have called Sequences I and II. "It was on nearby Chobham Common that poor Mr Smallwood's platoon put down smoke and there was the map-reading muddle over the third E and the B in 'Bee Garden'. Much of our time was taken up with route marches and increasingly elaborate battalion and brigade exercises" (St John 24).<sup>10</sup> The fictional representation of such widespread incompetence in practical matters illustrates Waugh's point that the Second World War was morally as much as strategically mismanaged. Other shoddy manoeuvres are described throughout the trilogy. Thus, while in Penkirk Guy faces "the most futile [day...] yet spent in the army", as his platoon "lay on a rain-swept hillside doing absolutely nothing" (*MA* 145). Like Alistair's unit, Guy's does a fair amount of fighting against imaginary opponents up and down the surrounding hills: "sometimes they stood on the beach and biffed imaginary defenders into the hills; sometimes they biffed imaginary invaders from the hills into the sea. They invested down-land hamlets and savagely biffed imaginary hostile inhabitants" (*MA* 111). Both protagonists respectively wonder whether, after all, "a real battle is much like this" (*POMF* 132) or "whether the exercises at Penkirk [bear] any semblance to real warfare" (*OG* 360). On the other hand, although the leaders usually get lost with their men in most field marches, *Officers and Gentlemen* describes a reverse situation in a Commando night-assault exercise in which Guy is acting as umpire and observer. The officers depart, leading their troops into the darkness, and within twenty minutes, two hours before expected, Ivor Claire's<sup>11</sup> troop reaches its position. It turns out that Claire has cunningly hired a local bus to get to the objective, and effectively excuses his action on the principle that "the Commandos were expressly raised for irregular action" (*OG* 259).

In the early stages of World War II the military experts expected Germans to use gas in bombing raids on British cities. *Put Out More Flags* abounds in references to gas scare and gas precautions. In Sequence II the exercise requires that the troops put on their respirators when the order "gas" comes back, and this makes them "suffer in silence" (*POMF* 129). A similar concern features in *Brideshead Revisited* while on the train towards Brideshead, where a rather absurd rehearsal of anti-gas precautions is carried out (*BR* 19). Such measures become farcical when Guy reports

back at Halberdier Barracks at the start of *Officers and Gentlemen*; a fatigue party wearing masks is perceived by Guy as “pig-faces, visions of Jerome Bosch,” whereas the two officers he finds at the adjutant’s office look like “two obscene fronts of canvas and rubber and talc.” Indeed, the adjutant immediately orders Guy, who is not wearing a mask, to “go and put it on” (*MA* 203).

Waugh’s reputation as stylist implies, among other things, that he took special pains in reproducing the peculiar idiom suiting his characters. Apart from the abundant military acronyms and technicalities that punctuate the speech of the soldiers, some items of military slang are skilfully reproduced. A valuable language note is provided in *Put Out More Flags* as Alistair learns more about the army jargon: “The first time that Captain Mayfield had asked him ‘Are you in the picture, Trumpington?’ he supposed him to mean, was he personally conspicuous” (128). The phrase “In the picture,” often in the lips of commanding officers, takes on a meaningful role all through *Officers and Gentlemen* and even features as the title for Book II, the most dramatic part of the trilogy, dealing with the Cretan debacle. Waugh certainly plays with the ironical pretence of being well-informed while characters move desperately back and forth in the context of a chaotic Allied withdrawal, where not even the high command knows what to do and the prevailing mood seems to be the ignominious principle of “*sauve qui peut*”.

There is another interesting language note in *Put Out More Flags* concerning the recurring term “shambles”, which according to the narrator does not mean “a slaughter, but a brief restoration of individual freedom of movement” (*POMF*, 128). Other implications might apply: in *Officers and Gentlemen* the first British officer to report what is going on in Crete, the “shuddering Lieutenant-Commander,” uses this expression in its most shocking sense, “It’s a bloody shambles” (*OG* 323). In Sequence II we also observe the occurrence of other cant expressions such as “recce” (*POMF* 129, *BR* 325) or “flap”, defined in *Men at Arms* as “alternating chaos and order” (*MA* 155), but applied mostly to the uncertainty that baffles the men before a new troop movement (*BR* 17, *MA* 155, 158, 167, *OG* 257, etc.). The term “O Group” is also introduced in *Put Out More Flags* in the context of the blatant disorganization of the field exercise, when Captain Mayfield’s rather pompous announcement that “soon the C.O. will send for his O Group” falls rather flat among the puzzled soldiers eating their haversack rations in silence. Similarly, the colonel commanding Charles Ryder’s battalion uses the term again rather pretentiously: “This is an Order Group. I expect you to attend properly dressed” (*BR* 18), he says to the unreceptive company commanders.

The word “rocket” is connected with one sublime act of arrogance: the humiliation of junior officers, a usual practice of Waugh’s strict and tactless colonels.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while Alistair’s colonel intimidates his junior officers —Captain Brown and Mr Smallwood successively— and leads them away for a “rocket” (*POMF* 131), Charles Ryder is unjustly reprimanded by his C.O. for mistakes he has not made (*BR* 17), although perhaps this reproof is not half as humiliating as the colonel’s ordering another subaltern to cut Hooper’s hair in the anteroom. In turn, at the end of *Men at Arms* Guy Crouchback cannot escape another “rocket” from his new C.O., though again he is not entirely to blame: “I don’t want to see you again ever. I shall apply for your immediate posting out of the brigade as soon as they’ve finished with you in England. The only hope I have for you is that you’re thoroughly ashamed of yourself” (*MA* 190).

A special mention must be made of the military songs featuring in this sequence. When allowed to march at ease, Alistair’s platoon companions begin to sing popular army songs such as “Roll Out the Barrel’, ‘We’ll hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line,’ and ‘The Quartermaster’s Store’” (*POMF* 129). Curiously, the same three songs are performed by Guy’s company when they march back to camp after an exercise in Penkirk, but this time “The Quartermaster’s Store” is expanded: “There are rats, rats, rats as big as cats in the quartermaster’s stores.” Since this scene is set in Summer 1940 soon after the fall of France, Guy regards “Siegfried Line” as “a little out of date at the moment” (*MA* 157). “Roll out the barrel” is mentioned again in *Unconditional Surrender*, when Guy, as the officer in charge of the British mission in a Yugoslav town, is approached by the local leader, the Partisan Commissar, who wants to organise a concert of anti-fascist songs. He demands of Guy a list of the kind of songs that the British services “teach their soldiers” but, as could be expected, “Roll out the barrel” won’t do for the Commissar’s purposes (*US* 547).

### **Chaotic embarkations**

Connected with the incompetence of the British military, the various operational embarkations described in Waugh’s fiction appear no less chaotic than the field exercises or route marches. In fact, no single ship appearing in the novels seems to sail according to plan, and sometimes they do not even leave port, like Peter Pastmaster’s expedition (*POMF* 133). Once more, it seems that in his various descriptions Waugh was not excessively magnifying what he had witnessed with his own eyes, according to his diary from 1940 to 1941. Besides, we must not forget

that he wrote *Put Out More Flags* aboard a long voyage back from the Middle East and that these frustrated or flawed expeditions were still very vivid in his mind.

In *Put Out More Flags* Waugh condensed his experience of recent military voyages in Sequence III, the embarkation of Cedric Lyne's regiment. Most of the elements in the scenes distributed throughout the trilogy are already there: the ant-like lines of soldiers handling stores and moving darkly up the ladders on to the main decks, very often swearing monotonously (*POMF* 179); the laborious loading of equipment that will eventually be unloaded so as to be carried out again "tactically";<sup>13</sup> the insufficient capacity of the ship to carry as many men and stores as scheduled (*POMF* 182); the misunderstanding among the different officers coordinating the move and the collision of contradictory orders (like the episode of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who have been mistakenly ordered aboard the same ship as Cedric's regiment); the pathetic obsession of embarkation officers with bureaucracy such as the "nominal rolls in triplicate"; the lack of food for the boarding troops (*POMF* 181); the fact that the troopship is a converted liner maintaining part of its former crew and former habits; and the last-minute addition of assorted personnel to the expedition, such as "Field Security Police, Field Force Institute, N.A.A.F.I., two Pay Corps officers, four chaplains, a veterinary surgeon, a Press photographer, a naval beach party, some Marine anti-aircraft gunners, an air support liaison unit (...) and a detachment of sappers" (*POMF* 182).

Similarly, in *Men at Arms* the first embarkation takes place at the Pembroke docks, where Guy's Halberdiers "embarked in three ancient heterogeneous merchantmen" but "next morning they disembarked and saw the three ships sail away empty", only to re-embark later (*MA* 160). This episode, closely based on Waugh's experience with the Marines in June 1940, illustrates the nature of the so-called "flaps"; indeed, after days of rumours that the brigade is sailing to Ireland, they eventually entrain for Cornwall.

The second, more detailed embarkation described in *Men at Arms* actually departs from Liverpool bound for Dakar: "Quays and ships in absolute darkness. Bombs falling somewhere not far distant. Embarkation staff officers scanning nominal-rolls with dimmed torches. Guy and his company were ordered into one ship, ordered out again, stood-to on the dockside for an hour" (*MA*, 171). Once again we find the familiar elements of chaos, loading-unloading-reloading, nominal rolls, merchant ships converted... Indeed, the tone of the voyage is taken from "the Goanese stewards, who tinkled their musical gongs up and down the carpeted passages" (*MA* 173). One of them is given thematic relevance when he becomes the victim of cruel mistreatment by Guy's soldier-servant. In this particular expedition,

as in the one in *Put Out More Flags*, there has been a late addition of a “medley of strangers” to the force: “Free French liaison officers, Marine gunners, a naval beach-party, chaplains, an expert on tropical hygiene” (*POMF* 172).

*Officers and Gentlemen* narrates three more naval expeditions, and although the first two are less relevant for our discussion they reflect some of the features already outlined in *Put Out More Flags*. The first is the voyage of the Hookforce commandos from Britain to Alexandria, narrated retrospectively in the “Interlude” section (a passage eventually deleted in the revised one-volume version *Sword of Honour*). After the accustomed delays, the brigade sails from Scapa Flow and takes a long detour circumnavigating Africa. In the narration, emphasis is given to the animosity between the Commando officers —a group of self-sufficient “dandies” aware of their class superiority— and those in the Navy, who in turn are divided into regulars and volunteers (RNVR).<sup>14</sup> The second expedition recounted in *Officers and Gentlemen* is Trimmer’s sham Operation “Popgun”, this time aboard a submarine. Once more the force has to disembark, “on a report of new minelaying in the Channel” (*OG* 304). One of Trimmer’s men deserts and, although security has been seriously compromised, the HOO authorities decide to go on with the plan: “eventually Popgun Force re-embarked [...] Even thus depleted they seemed too many” (*OG* 304).

The next embarkation, Guy’s third and the last to be formally described in the trilogy, is bound for Crete, and consequently represents a turning point in the story. Through Guy’s dominant point of view, the description conveys futility perceived by a weary eye:

he callously watched the transactions, first earnest, then anxious, then embittered, between Brigade Major, Staff Captain and ESO, the lines of overburdened, sulky soldiers moving on and off the narrow decks, the sailors fastidiously picking their way among the heaps of military equipment” (*OG* 318).

As might be expected, the first start is a false one: due to technical problems, the destroyer turns around in the midst of the sea and returns to Alexandria for further unloading and reloading, carried out in the familiar way: “like a line of ants the laden men followed one another down one gang plank up another, swearing quietly” (*OG* 321).

Once more, Waugh is drawing on his first-hand experience of the imperfect operational organization of the British military, common in the early war years.

Exaggeration of the chaos seems evident, and, as argued in the discussion of the field exercises, it can be explained in terms of the political message behind the trilogy. Technical disorganization is an external symptom of the mismanagement of the conflict, and it provides a subtext for the author's denunciation of Britain's moral responsibility in it.

### **Real battle**

Contrary to the average reader's expectations of what can be termed war fiction, in *Sword of Honour* we see very little front-line fighting. The few episodes of actual combat are alternately preposterous —Guy's platoon's skirmish on the beach of Dakar in *Men at Arms*—; sham —Trimmer's Operation "Popgun" in *Officers and Gentlemen*—; or both —the assault on the Croatian blockhouse where Ritchie-Hook gets killed in *Unconditional Surrender*. The re-creation of the debacle of Crete is perhaps the closest we get to actual fighting in the trilogy. And yet, with the exception of two flashes of combat between "lightly armed, equally weary small forces" that Guy witnesses when he visits the lines of his former Halberdier Battalion (*OG*, 359-60), most of the military action in Crete consists of German aerial bombardments over the Allied troops, who resist in their hide-outs by day and withdraw to the southern coast by night.

Sequence IV in *Put Out More Flags* offers perhaps the most effective fighting scene that we find in all Waugh's military fiction. This sequence, coinciding with Chapter 6 of the Spring section, is set in an unspecified battlefield, presumably in Norway, while the staff of Cedric Lyne's battalion hides in a cave trying to coordinate deployment of different companies under the threat of the German air bombing and cavalry advance. The British troops get eventually outflanked by a German column of armoured cars and infantry, and the sequence culminates in Cedric's death by a stray bullet whose origin is never clear. Although the landscape is frozen, very different from the Mediterranean spring, there is ample agreement among Waugh's commentators that the sequence recreates the last days of Crete rather than any Norwegian campaigns. Just a few weeks before writing this scene Waugh had witnessed the devastating panorama of defeat, demoralization and fear that prevailed in the last days of the battle of Crete,<sup>15</sup> so these shattering impressions must have been very vivid in his mind. Indeed, when he wrote *Officers and Gentlemen* some fifteen years later, he would still be capable of recreating the atmosphere with forceful intensity.

Not surprisingly, then, the sequence opens with a description of what constituted the major nightmare of the Allies in Crete, the German aerial bombardments, with particular emphasis on their punctuality and precision:

Like horses in a riding school, line ahead to the leading mark, changing the rein, circling to the leading mark on the opposite wall, changing rein again, line ahead again, orderly and regular and graceful, the aeroplanes manoeuvred in the sharp sunlight. The engines sang in the morning sky, the little black bombs tumbled out, turning over in the air, drifting behind the machines, breaking in silent upheavals of rock and dust. (*POMF* 204)

The affinity with the narrative of the German procedure in the actual recreation of the Crete bombings is remarkable: “[The aeroplanes] followed an unvarying course, coming in from the sea at five-minute intervals, turning, diving, dropping bombs, machine-gunning, circling, diving, bombing, firing, three times each along the same line” (*OG* 337). Other elements found in Sequence IV reproduce an atmosphere we shall later identify with the Cretan debacle: Cedric’s Battalion HQ hides in a cave like those along the road to Sphakia (Crete), and the stony landscape is surprisingly similar. Furthermore, Cedric, an intelligence officer like Guy, is assigned a mission in which he is required to walk alone, and he becomes “exhilarated with the sense of being one man” (*POMF* 208) as much as Guy “paddle[s] in his lustral freedom” (*OG* 354) when he manages to get away from his demoralized unit on Crete.

Perhaps the description of so much disorganization and negligence made it advisable for Waugh to write this initial disclaimer in *Put Out More Flags*: “No existing unit of His Majesty’s forces is represented there, or anywhere, directly or indirectly” (*POMF* 4). Although most of the military units featuring in the novel remain anonymous<sup>16</sup> there are exceptions such as the reference to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who are mistakenly embarked on the same ship as Cedric’s regiment. A curious element features in Sequence IV, the apparition of the Royal Loamshires, who are expected to cover the left flank and defend the British position. Waugh resorted to a fictional regiment often used both in military training as a placeholder and in literature, thus bringing in some intertextual connections. Earlier in *Put Out More Flags* there has been a mention of “Bulldog” Drummond, a character in the popular novels by “Sapper” (Cyril McNeile) rather ironically proposed as a possible model for Basil Seal.<sup>17</sup> In this sequence the Loamshires are expected to arrive soon and to cover the left flank, but they have been decimated

by the Germans, and when Cedric goes to look for them he finds the remainders, “twenty of them under the command of a subaltern.” They have been severely bombed on the previous day and only that small party could get away (*POMF* 208-9). From intertextuality to intratextuality, the Loamshires appear again in *Men at Arms*, a company of the 5th Regiment arriving at Guy’s post to take over from his company without previous notice during the period of coastal defence in Cornwall. Guy’s imagination being excited with alarmist rumours that German parachutists can land at any moment, he suspects the newly arrived Loamshire officers of being fifth-columnists, and while they innocently accept Guy’s invitation to take a bath he posts soldiers aiming at them, examines their kits and almost gets them killed. It all turns out to be a misunderstanding caused by the negligence of one of Guy’s fellow-officers. The episode is narrated vividly in the novel, but Waugh decided to cut it out in his revised version of the trilogy, together with other events stressing Guy’s naivety.

### **The Balloon Goes Up at Last**

Back in the spring of 1940, while advanced expeditionary troops were meeting with defeat abroad, units training in Britain, like Alistair’s, were forced to get ready for the “real action”. When Sequence V opens, we are informed that “Alistair’s battalion found itself overnight converted from a unit in the early stages of training into first-line troops” (*POMF* 213). As the phrase went, the “balloon was up at last”, and the subsequent defeats in Europe made the British wake up from the doze associated with the “Bore War.” But this final stage of army rearrangements recreated in *Put Out More Flags* is not conclusive either. In fact, we see through Alistair’s eyes that the state of emergency for British forces leads to little more than further confusion and disorganization.

Once more, the immediate source for these episodes is Waugh’s own experience in the summer of 1940. He was by late June a captain and company commander in the Royal Marine Brigade when they received an order to move to Haverfordwest, South Wales, and left their training camp at Bisley with “unnecessary haste” (*Diaries* 472). On 30 June they moved again, this time to Pembroke, and embarked on a small and dirty ship called the *Lady of Mann*, where they lived for some days at six hours’ notice to sail. At this stage the commanders were convinced they were bound for the Irish Coast and were busy acquiring intelligence of the area. Finally the destination turned out to be the Cornish coast of Liskeard, where from early July they were put in charge of coastal defence duties. “None of us can quite make out why anyone should want to attack it. Even the CO says he cannot rid himself

of a sense of unreality" (*Diaries* 473). It was in this period that Waugh, weary of his uneventful activity with the Marines, took advantage of a short leave in London and applied for transfer to the newly formed Commandos.

Thus, the pattern Waugh had lived through was reproduced in the two novels dealing with that period. As usual, alarm is fed by rumours, and *Sequence V* opens with those circulated by men like Sir Joseph Mainwaring, who "believed and repeated everything he heard" (*POMF* 212). Stories such as the invasion of England by German airborne troops disguised as nuns, or those about market women acting as snipers, are offset by Sir Joseph's blindly optimistic expectations based on erroneous reasoning. In *Men at Arms* similar tales go round, this time "that a German army had landed in Limerick" (*MA* 160), or that "the enemy were attacking with arsenical smoke" (164). Indeed, this emergency state implied that England could be invaded or bombed by German aviation at any time: "Parachute landings were expected hourly" (*POMF* 213). Under the new regime, men are subject to new measures: they have to carry full equipment all day long, food is rationed, week-end leaves suppressed and training is extended.

Such a state of readiness is inevitably followed by sudden troop movements, procedures surrounded by high secrecy. The destination is unknown even to officers, and no relatives are allowed to see soldiers off at the train stations. The narrator in *Put Out More Flags* explains the weird transformation men go through when they entrain:

Troops in the train manage to achieve an aspect of peculiar raffishness; they leave the camp in a state of ceremonial smartness (...); they are detailed to their coaches and there a process of transformation and decay sets in; coats are removed, horrible packages of food appear, dense clouds of smoke obscure the windows, in a few minutes the floor is deep in cigarette ends, lumps of bread and meat, waste paper; in repose the bodies assume attitudes of extreme abandon. (*POMF* 214-5)

Trains often appear in Waugh's fiction as places of darkness, sometimes providing a phantasmagoric setting where the boundaries between dreaming and waking are never clear, where a different time dimension applies and men suffer a peculiar degradation in their personal dignity. Already in *Put Out More Flags* we have read a sequence when Cedric took a train to rejoin his regiment after a frustrating embarkation leave and a fruitless attempt to communicate with his estranged wife, Angela. Coherently, his carriage was "quite full" and the passengers' "faces in the surrounding darkness were indistinguishable" (*POMF* 166-7). Darkness becomes

an apt atmosphere for his melancholy recollection of the last meetings with his wife and son.

*Brideshead Revisited* reintroduces the “flap” motif outlined in *Put Out More Flags*. Charles Ryder explains that “there had been many such moves since the wildly exhilarating morning in 1940 when we had erroneously believed ourselves destined for the defence of Calais. Three or four times a year since then we had changed our location” (*BR* 12). As Ryder and his subaltern Hooper march at the head of their men towards the station, they discuss the nature of this new move. Hooper asks whether it is going to be the real thing, and they conclude that it is, once more, “just a flap” (*BR* 17). As regards secrecy, Ryder explains that “our new commanding officer was making an unusual display of ‘security’ and had even put us to the trouble of removing all distinguishing badges from our uniforms and transports” (*BR* 12-13), since the C.O. was concerned that no female camp followers should be waiting on the other end. Once aboard the carriage, Ryder sat with his three subalterns, who “ate sandwiches and chocolate, smoked and slept. None of them had a book” (*BR* 18). Just as Davidson, Guy Crouchback’s subaltern, would do on their train journey to Brookwood in *Men at Arms*, Ryder’s companions “noted the names of the towns and leaned out of the windows [...]. Later they lost interest” (*BR* 18). The darkness of the carriage increases when the colonel orders a rather absurd exercise in which they must assume they are “being sprayed with liquid mustard-gas,” which entails shutting the windows (*BR* 19). Finally they reach their destination, but security precautions involve eschewing stations and platforms, with the consequence that “the drop from the running board to the cinder track made for disorder and breakages in the darkness” (*BR* 20).

In the case of Alistair’s regiment, their destination did not turn out to be the service abroad they were expecting but a rather incongruous defence of seven miles of coastline, the “coastal —ing defence” (*POMF* 215). Alistair’s battalion took up the task with distaste, but “they entered with relish into the work of destroying local amenities” (*POMF* 216). While thus engaged, the smallest suggestion of an enemy landing was regarded by the officers with alarm. Reference is made to a preposterous suspicion: “telegraph posts are numbered with brass-headed nails and believed to be the work of the fifth column” (*POMF* 216), an anecdote taken directly from Waugh’s diary observations.

As we know, it was while spending a few weeks leading his company in the defence of the Cornish coast of Liskeard that Waugh, dispirited by long months of inaction and hopeless prospects, applied for transfer to the newly formed commandos, which he achieved through the intercession of Brendan Bracken, a

man in Churchill's confidence and future Minister of Information. Sequence V closes with a conversation between Alistair and Sonia Trumpington in which he, after "three weeks of coastal defence" and no longer "enjoying the army" (*POMF* 216), asks for her permission to volunteer for special service. Alistair presents weighty reasons for the transfer: the commandos "have special knives and tommy-guns and knuckle-dusters; they wear rope-soled shoes". Indeed, Sonia sadly realizes that she cannot "keep him from the rope ladder" (217).

The pattern outlined above, so close to Waugh's real experience, is further expanded in *Men at Arms*, which explores the atmosphere of the "Bore War" and its transition after Dunkirk. This time the perspective comes from Guy, who commands a company, but the stages are very similar. The German advance in France triggers temporary splitting of the Halberdier brigade; the regulars are supposed to embark for France to strengthen the Expeditionary Force, but they never leave Britain and the brigade is re-united in the vicinity of Brookwood, the same place where Alistair's battalion was training. In the following days the brigade gets moved around, first to Pembroke, in the west of Wales, where they are expected to embark for Ireland; but, in "one more flap" they entrain for the Cornish coast to be employed in the (familiar) coastal defence. Guy's company has "two miles of cliff to defend against invasion" (*MA* 163), and some of the anecdotes outlined in *Put Out More Flags* are re-used here with slight expansion. For example, the absurd contention that the telegraph poles have been marked by fifth-columnists is dramatized. A "neat young staff officer" informs the Halberdiers of the latest intelligence: "'Fifth columnists,' said the Intelligence Officer, 'will be your special concern. (...) We happen to know that the telegraph posts have been marked to lead the invading units to their rendezvous. Little metal numbers. I've seen them myself. Remove them and report to headquarters when you find them'" (*MA* 164). But as pointed out by Guy's subaltern, Brent, all the poles have been numbered by the Post Office.

## Conclusion

Even before the outbreak of World War II, Evelyn Waugh was aware that, as a writer, there would be "[n]othing more likely to stimulate [him] than a complete change of habit" (Davie 438). This statement proved right: his service as an officer for the duration of the war inspired his most outstanding literary output. As one of the first English novels written in the midst of the Second World War, *Put Out More Flags* had, however, considerable external restrictions and could not display Waugh's sense of purposelessness about what he came to regard as "a sweaty tug-

of-war between teams of indistinguishable louts” (in the words of his post-war novelette *Scott-King’s Modern Europe*). It is not unbecoming to interpret the novel as the historical testimony of “a nation discovering its inner strengths at a time of unprecedented crisis” (Rossi 296), or as “the individual’s moral responsibility to society, however chaotic that society might be” (Cook 183), but the ironical undertones of the “new spirit abroad” that serves as its conclusion are a hint of Waugh’s sour disillusionment. In the words of Davis, “even before *Put Out More Flags* was published [...] ‘the new spirit’ of the ‘Churchillian renaissance’ that it celebrated was considerably deflated for Waugh by personal as well as global defeats” (Davis 1992 110). Writing in 1941, he would see still more bitter war years, and his perception of the historical developments would become even more pessimistic. But then neither did Captain Waugh have full freedom to express what he felt about his country’s military effort, nor had he yet reached the rock bottom of his despair. It is only natural that *Put Out More Flags* was from the beginning destined to be a sort of foreword of a later, more complex piece of fiction, once the wine had rested for some years “bottled and carefully laid in the cellar” (Davie 547). Waugh needed time and leisure to fictionalize his military experience, and if his diaries were a sort of rough draft of *Put Out More Flags* and *Brideshead Revisited*, in turn these novels became a draft of the trilogy in certain aspects. Furthermore, it was the success of *Brideshead Revisited*, written in a few months during a special leave in 1944, that secured for Waugh the time and leisure required to write the trilogy. Obviously, the three novels that comprise *Sword of Honour* are very different from *Put Out More Flags* or *Brideshead*, but they return to similar materials. In what he considered his *magnum opus* Waugh displayed his first-hand knowledge of the military and included meticulous descriptions of army machinery and civilian life under pressure. This he did with his memorable eye for detail, his acute sense of the grotesque<sup>18</sup> and a repose he did not have in 1941.

Moving on from the general assertion that *Put Out More flags* displays elements that will later be re-used in Waugh’s war novels, this paper is the first attempt to classify these recurrent narrative patterns contained in five successive sequences, which represent elementary stages in the preparation for war: early training, field exercises, embarkations, battlefield fighting and defence duties. For the construction of most of these sequences Waugh drew on his own biographical experiences; it is evident that he felt much more comfortable when writing about events he had witnessed.<sup>19</sup> But such scenes are not just reportage, each one has a function in Waugh’s narrative and stylistic network, quite often bearing symbolical implications.

Thus, in the novel's first sequence we see Waugh's approach to conscription and training, his presentation of string-pulling and socializing as essential ingredients to find a good job in the armed forces, the exclusive clubs being an apt centre for job-hunting; parading as the essence of barrack routine, a symbol of disillusion and of the futility of the individual's role in the conflict; officer promotion conceived as the survival of the unfittest; some unpleasant aspects of army training such as physical exercise and the official entertainments; and examples of technical training such as small arms instruction. There is also a presentation of field exercises surrounded by incompetence and mismanagement; an excessive zeal on matters that turn out to be useless in the context of World War II, such as the gas precautions; the senior officers' habits of humiliating their juniors; and some colourful aspects such as the army slang and the choice of songs. No less incompetence appears in the depiction of embarkation moves, since no single ship in Waugh's fiction sails according to plan. From *Put Out More Flags* onwards some patterns are replicated whenever Waugh's soldiers embark: ant-like lines of men handling stores; backbreaking loading of equipment that will eventually be unloaded and reloaded "tactically"; the fact that the ship cannot put up with so many men and so much equipment; contradictory orders that get the embarkation officers muddled up, and keep them anxious about pointless bureaucracy while none ever thinks of providing food for the boarding troops; the dubious adequacy of a former liner and its crew to perform military duties; and the last-minute addition of assorted and incongruous personnel to the expedition. In the fourth sequence of the novel we see what is perhaps the most effective battle scene in the entire Wavian fiction (which is not much to say as far as military action is concerned, usually preposterous, sham or both). Waugh's nightmarish experiences in Crete are transposed into Norway, including the punctuality and precision of the German air bombings; the use of caves as refuges amidst the craggy landscape; the employment of fictional names for the belligerent regiments; or the pervading atmosphere of allied passivity and defeatism, which makes the hero wish to be alone. Finally, we have discussed some common motifs associated with the end of the "Bore War", coinciding with the defeat of France and Britain's isolation against the Axis. Rumours of German invasions become very frequent, and they bring about "alarm and despondency", hasty troop movements or "flaps", hardening conditions for the troops and a general dynamics of "order, counter-order and disorder" that spreads demoralization among them. This state of premature readiness entails, among other things, the inappropriate conversion of half-trained units into full fighting ones, although in the novels discussed this new

consideration results in little more than their assignment of coastal defence tasks, presented as utterly pointless.

Our analysis has attempted to go beyond the mere descriptive verification of recurrent patterns and has occasionally ventured new interpretative readings that may explain some of the narrative effects possibly intended by the author. According to Waugh's diary accounts from 1940 to 1941, some of the episodes that provided inspiration for the military scenes were adapted into fiction with very little exaggeration. But his descriptions of incompetent or mismanaged march routes, field exercises, embarkations or move orders may rather illustrate his point that the Second World War was morally as much as strategically mishandled. From fictional and non-fictional sources we have plenty of evidence that Waugh's vision of the conflict evolved from an initial conception in terms of good versus evil, freedom versus totalitarianism, and that the debacle of Crete proved a turning point in his sense of national shame, aggravated by the Anglo-Russian alliance in June 1941. Henceforth his disillusionment grew deeper as the war went on, and Britain's eventual support of the Yugoslav partisans enhanced it. Therefore, Waugh deeply believed that Britain had behaved dishonourably and had betrayed certain eastern countries (Poland and Yugoslavia, among others) by abandoning them at the hands of Communism. By the summer of 1941, when Waugh wrote *Put Out More Flags*, he already felt this way, though perhaps less fiercely than in 1952, when *Men at Arms* was published. Thus, the technical disorganization that we appreciate in the above mentioned scenes is conceived as an external symptom of the morally graver mismanagement of the conflict, and it provides a subtext for the author's denunciation of Britain's role in it.<sup>20</sup>

Waugh's emphasis on some particular aspects of army life may accept similar interpretations. For instance, the continual references to the lesson on judging distance, a part of small arms instruction, may acquire symbolic dimensions. Guy joins up with the conviction that he can do his bit to help in the fight between Freedom versus Totalitarianism, but in the end he realizes that an individual is neither able to make sense of the workings of history nor capable of stopping the crazy machinery of war. The lesson we (or at least Guy) may learn is that our range of influence should be shortened: there is little we can do to change the world's structures, the "big picture", but there are some private "acts of service" that only we can carry out. "Quantitative judgements don't apply" is Mr Crouchback's final teaching. But much earlier in the story Guy's sergeant-instructor had taught him to "estimate the range of the target correctly ... [to] make fire effective and avoid waste of ammunition". This apparently insipid advice could prefigure the trilogy's

ultimate lesson, that one should not waste ammunition in attempting to change the world's global structures, but rather aim at targets within one's reach.

Thus, Waugh's narrative artistry gave his fiction new dimensions that went beyond mere documentary function. The narrator's tone, his omissions, understatements and subtle insertions offer an acute interpretation of history, and the skilful handling of character and plot suggests insightful philosophical and moral concerns. If, borrowing from *Brideshead Revisited*, the tabernacle flame "could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians" (BR 331), such a literary masterpiece as *Sword of Honour* could not have achieved its status without the previous experiments conducted in *Put Out More Flags*. This is not the novel's only merit, of course, but it is certainly not a minor one.<sup>21</sup>

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## Notes

1 The original trilogy comprises *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961). *Sword of Honour* is the title of the revised one-volume version published in 1965, containing some deletions of the original text and a few additions. For the purpose of our analysis we will refer indistinctively to this final version or to the trilogy. An indication will be made whenever there are significant textual differences between each of the three novels and the revised version.

2 Lewis MacLeod (2010) offers an original approach to Guy's predicament using the terminology of postcolonial theory. Accordingly, Guy is "a kind of endangered species" who refuses "to submit to the demands of the colonizer" (74), which in this context is the new cultural order brought about by World War II.

3 Colonel Tickeridge and his Halberdiers embody an old-fashioned notion of honour and chivalry, outstanding in the early stages of the trilogy, but later undermined near the conclusion of *Officers and Gentlemen*, when the colonel short-sightedly (at least by Waugh's standards) welcomes the alliance with the USSR.

4 In the words of DeCoste (2000), "Waugh's war was ripe material for farcical treatment, a confused and pointless series of engagements overseen by officers all too ready, it would appear, to sacrifice others for their own safety and comfort" (471).

5 Some of the few academic articles or book chapters available on *Put Put More Flags* are Johnson 2009, Rossi 2002, DeCoste 2000, Lassner 1994, Hopley 1984, Gorra 1980, Riley 1978 and Manning 1976.

6 Alastair (Digby-Vane-)Trumpington first appeared in Waugh's *Decline and Fall* (1928) as a wealthy and boisterous undergraduate, one of the most characteristic "Bright Young Men" of Waugh's fictional universe. As such he undergoes a transformation from indolence to responsibility that is one major thematic issue in *Put Out More Flags*, which portrays "a race of ghosts [...] disturbed in their habits by the rough intrusion of current history" (POMF 7). He joins an infantry battalion because he realizes that his life has been completely lethargic to date, and he even refuses to accept officer training since he does not wish to receive the special favours related to his aristocratic background.

7 A tragic character in *Put Out More Flags*, before World War II Cédric Lyne had served for years in the army. When war breaks out he becomes his battalion's intelligence officer and ends up in Norway, where he gets killed in action.

8 References to the five novels will be made parenthetically in the text using their respective title acronyms: *Put Out More Flags* (POMF), *Brideshead Revisited* (BR), *Men at Arms* (MA), *Officers and Gentlemen* (OG) and *Unconditional Surrender* (US). For the trilogy I will be quoting from the Penguin edition of 1984 containing the original versions; note that, although the acronyms will vary for a better identification of the source, the page numbering is correlative.

9 The Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was set up in 1939 to provide entertainment for the British armed forces.

10 According to this narrative, ineptitude does not seem to have been greatly exaggerated by Waugh: "The day invariably ended with what the CO called 'another bloody awful shambles', what with units arriving at the wrong rendezvous or firing blank cartridges at their own side" (St John 25).

11 A central character in *Officers and Gentlemen*, Ivor Claire is one of Guy's fellow-officers in the Commandos. His cunning behaviour in this exercise prepares the way for his act of cowardice at the end of the novel, an act that acquires symbolic dimensions in the book.

12 Curiously, in *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* Waugh's alter ego is described as a "combination of eccentric don and testy colonel" (Waugh 1957, 15).

13 This expression is ironically emphasized in Waugh's different narratives; "tactical" comes to imply what was pompously meant to be efficient and according to the rules, but has turned out to be mismanaged and/or excessively theoretical for the actual situation.

14 RNVR stands for Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, mostly yachtsmen whose experience of sea matters made them good recruits for the naval reserve. According to Cliffe, "despite this advantage they did not quickly gain the confidence of the regular naval officers."

15 Sykes notes that every time Crete was mentioned, Waugh "was full of anger. He said that he had never seen anything so degrading as the cowardice that infected the spirit of the army. He declared that Crete had been surrendered without need; that both the officers and men were hypnotized into defeatism by the continuous dive-bombing which with a little courage one could stand up to; that the fighting spirit of the British army was so meagre that we had not the slightest hope of defeating the Germans; that he had taken part in a military disgrace, a fact that he would remember with shame for the rest of his life" (Sykes 295).

16 Or with a disguised name; thus, in *Put Out More Flags*, the so-called Bombardiers must stand for the Coldstreamers, since they are one of five regiments that make the Home Guards.

17 A dashing ex-army captain of the Royal Loamshires during the Great War, Drummond later solved hazardous cases as a private investigator with the help of a number of former army colleagues. Marina MacKay has called attention to the fact that in *Put Out More Flags* Waugh plays an ironic game in which the "nostalgic, heroic version of imperial history is imagined as the cause of and pretext for every kind of stupidity" (MacKay 131).

18 "How right [Waugh] was to avoid treating 1939-45 as an epic, instead he unmasked it as an ironic series of muddled, sordid, often cruel and pointless episodes," writes St John (55-6).

19 Indeed, soon after the publication of *Men at Arms* Waugh intended to follow up with a second volume dealing with Dunkirk (presumably developing the character of Tony Box-Bender), and consequently advertised for men who had served as "junior officer[s] taken prisoner un wounded [in] France, 1940" (quoted in Lane 402). Waugh interviewed a few, but he finally gave up, realizing that "one cannot live other people's experiences" (305).

20 Ivor Claire's act of cowardice at the end of *Officers and Gentlemen*, prefigured in his cheating at the night march episode commented on above, becomes a symbol of the large-scale ignominy that for Waugh marked his country's war effort.

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