Serial Killers and the Military: Misconceptions and Statistical Facts

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Abstract

There has been some speculation that military training either creates serial killers or makes them more efficient at taking lives. However, the studies done on this subject are either anecdotally based or have a limited sample size. This study will strive to explore if a serial killer can thrive in the military and if the training makes them more proficient or violent. The researcher will achieve this by collecting a large sample of serial killers, mass murderers and spree killers that have a military background and statistically compared them to a control group of killers without military backgrounds. Achieved military rank, length of service, discharge status and military records will be used to determine if the subject thrived in the military. Length of killing career, victim count and how the subject treated his victims will be used to measure violence level and proficiency of each subject. Military protocols that protect against unstable and unsuitable candidates along with the possible positive and negative effects of military training will be discussed.
Introduction

While researching the infamous serial killer Jeffery Dahmer, this investigator came across an obviously erroneous statement: 75% of serial killers were in the military (Yahoo Answers, 2011). This little “fact” inspired the investigator to seek out a more reliable number. While there have been several cases of serial killers who have served in the military, these cases are few and far between. John Allen Muhammad, Jeffrey Dahmer and David Berkowitz are just a few serial killers who once served in the military (Saunders, 2002). A study of 354 American serial murders yielded only 25 (7%) with military background (Castle, 2001).

Due to the small sample used by Castle and the lack of statistical information, this subject needs to be studied further. There were no studies that detailed how long a serial killer stayed in the military and little mention of a serial killer’s military records. Did Dahmer achieve a high rank and what was his discharge status? How long did David Berkowitz stay in the military? Did either have a negative military record? Considering the answers to these questions can be found within public records, this lack of information is inexcusable.

Military 101

Imagine moving from your home country to a foreign land with a different culture and language. You find yourself having to adhere to traditions and protocols that are foreign to you. You are expected to follow the rules and laws of this new country without question. On top of all this, you will be expected to learn new and challenging skills while being pushed to your physical and mental limits. You have just joined the military. The military is its own society. It has its own languages, its own code of conduct, culture and even its own court of law. When one enters into the military, they are leaving the environment they know and must assimilate to a new lifestyle.
Branches and Components

The Air Force became an independent military branch in 1947 and is responsible for military operations in air and space. Operations include transporting troops, reconnaissance, deploying aircrafts for defensive and offensive purposes, and bombing targets. This branch is made up of the Air Force, the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserves. In 2005, the Air Force had 365,377 active duty personnel. Air Force basic training is called Basic Military Training (BMT) and is less intensive than the other branches. BMT last for 6 ½ weeks and includes physical training as well as classroom education on military structure and regulations. After BMT, the servicemen are then sent to technical training facilities for the job they were selected for. If the recruit was selected for the Air Force Fighter Weapons School, they will go through a six month training program that includes hands-on and classroom training designed to teach the recruit all they need to know about the weapons and tactics they will be using out in the field. Towards the end of the training, the recruits go through wartime scenarios (Schading, 2007).

The Army has been around in one shape or form since 1775 and is the largest branch in the military. This branch is responsible for land-based fighting. If an operation is happening on land, chances are an Army unit is helping out. Like the other branches, the Army has a Reserve unit. As of 2005, the Army had a total of 488,000 active duty personnel. The Army’s basic training is called Basic Combat Training (BT), or Boot Camp, and lasts for nine weeks. During this time, recruits are put through physical conditioning, combat training, survival training and classroom education on military structure and regulations. Combat training includes armed and un-armed exercises. After Boot Camp, recruits are then sent to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) based on what job they were selected for (Schading, 2007).
The Navy is responsible for any at-sea operation or defense and began as two armed ships preventing other ships from aiding the British Army in 1775. The Navy is technically in charge of the Marines, the Marine Force Reserves and has its own Reserve unit. During times of war, the National Guard also comes under Navy command. As of 2006, the Navy has a total of 353,627 active personnel. The Navy’s basic training program is also called Boot Camp and is 9 ½ weeks long. Recruits are expected to meet physical, medical and academic standards before they are allowed to leave Boot Camp. The Navy’s Boot Camp is structured a lot like the Army’s but geared towards skills needed to operate Navy equipment (Schading, 2007).

The Marines were established in 1775 and have been developed into an amphibious fighting force. Marines are deployed when time is short and aggression is needed. As of 2005, the Marines had 178,000 active personnel. The 12 week Boot Camp for the Marines is extreme, harsh and intense. Emphasis is placed on combat and survival skills. The physical benchmarks are much higher than any other boot camp. Combat training includes firearm skills, hand-to-hand combat and weapons training. All Marines are trained riflemen (Schading, 2007).

U.S. Coast Guard is responsible for all maritime operations within the U.S. This includes law enforcement, navigation aid, search and rescue, and marine environment protection. This service branch includes the Coast Guard Auxiliary (a civilian branch) and the Coast Guard Reserve. The U.S. Coast Guard boasts of 39,000 active personnel as of 2006 (Schading, 2007).

U.S. Special Operations Forces are units with specialized capabilities and excel in unconventional fighting. These forces include the 160th SOAR “Night Stalkers”, Delta Force, Navy SEALs, Green Berets, Army Rangers, Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU), Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Air Forces Special Forces and the U.S. Army Special
Operations Command (USASOC). All these units go through intense, specialized training based on their functions (Schading, 2007).

**Language and Code of Conduct**

There are many long standing customs, formalities and traditions that make up the military’s culture. These traditions and customs create an etiquette that demands respect for authority and respect towards your peers. This etiquette encompasses a code of conduct that dictate how you are to behave in almost all aspects of your military life. You are expected to say “please” and “thank you”, expected to be on time, expected to show the American flag the utmost respect and you are expected to be formal during a phone conversation. If you are at a social gathering with your commanding officer, you are expected to remain until your commanding officer has left. Your uniform must be respected at all times because it represents the Armed Forces and the nation you serve (Schading, 2007).

There are many slang terms military members use for a variety of things. Just to name a few:

- **4-Striper**: A Coast Guard or Navy captain.
- **Ballgame**: an enemy encounter or firefight.
- **Page 11**: refers to the page in the Marine’s service record book that lists all of the person’s good and bad actions. This record stays with the Marine for life.
- **Snap in**: practice (Schading, 2007).

There are many other terms used to describe weapons, vehicles, machinery and food that a service member will come across. Like any language, a person needs to understand which words are appropriate for different situations. For example, calling a Marine a seagoing bellhop may get you into a lot of trouble (Schading, 2007).
Authority

The chain of command is what keeps things running smoothly. Because of this, there are many protocols that cover how to deal with a higher-ranking officer in different situations. For example, the lower ranking person always salutes first. A high ranking officer gets preferential treatment due to their length of service and the increase of responsibility. The lower ranking person has to obey lawful orders. With authority comes greater responsibility and an officer is responsible for the service members under their command. They are expected to keep their men under control and on task. Failure or success of a mission is considered to be highly dependent on the officer’s actions and orders (Schading, 2007).

Rank

Rank (or rate, depending on the branch) in the military is broken up into three categories: enlisted personnel, noncommissioned offices and commissioned officers. Rank can differ between branches. For example, the Army and Marines have the rank of Private while the Air Force uses Airman Basic and the Navy has Seaman Recruit. Each rank is assigned a pay grade, or a level of salary. The pay grade is equal across all branches. All the ranks previously mentioned are E-1s. Enlisted personnel pay grades go from an E-1 (the lowest) to an E-10 (the highest). Noncommissioned officers go from a W-1 to a W-5 and commissioned officers go from an O-1 to an O-10 (Schading, 2007).

Military Law

When you belong to a branch of the U.S. Military, you are subject to Military Law. Military Law allows the U.S. Military to retain jurisdiction over its personnel no matter where in the world they are (otherwise you would be subject to the laws in whatever country you are in). So while something may be legal in Thailand, if it is illegal according to the Uniform Code of
Military Justice (UCMJ) it is still illegal for military personnel. Punishment under the UCMJ includes judicial punishments (court-martials), nonjudicial punishment and administrative sanctions. The UCMJ’s jurisdiction covers crimes that:

- occur on base or while the person is on duty;
- are drug related;
- are committed when the person was supposed to be on duty;
- are committed overseas and the person is there on military orders; and
- are of a military nature, such as desertion (Powers, 2011).

If a member of the military breaks a law under UCMJ, they may be subject to a court-martial. Court-martials are categorized based on what crime was committed and the rank of the defendant. The categories are summary, special or general court-martials (Powers, 2011).

Summary court-martials are for noncapital offenses. The service member has the right to refuse a trial by summary court-martial. If the service member agrees to this type of trial, they are not allowed to be represented by an attorney but they do have the right to testify, remain silent, cross-examine witnesses, call witnesses and submit evidence. If convicted, the service member faces a number of possible charges based on their rank. The court is allowed to hand down any punishment that is allowed by law except bad conduct or dishonorable discharge, dismissal or the death penalty. This court is presided over by a commissioned officer and can only convict enlisted service members (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011).

Special court-martials are used for misdemeanor offenses and the service member may have legal representation. The court is presided over by three or more service members and a military judge or the accused can request his case be heard by just a military judge. All military
members can be tried by this court. A special court-martial can inflict any punishment allowed by law except dismissal, a dishonorable discharge or death (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011).

A general court-martial is only for felony offenses and the accused service member may have legal representation. The court consists of at least five service members and a military judge or the accused may request his case be heard by just a military judge. As with a special court-martial, all military members can be tried by this court. This court may impose any punishment allowed by law, including the death penalty if the case and conviction meets the criteria set forth by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011).

Another avenue of prosecution is known as Article 15 or nonjudicial punishment. In an Article 15, the commanding officer alone decides if the person is guilty and what punishment they will receive. The punishment allowed for an Article 15 depends on the rank of the defendant and the rank of the commanding officer. Punishments can include reduction of pay grade, extra duties, confinement and reduction in pay. There is usually no official record of an Article 15 occurring (Powers, 2011 & Schading, 2007).

Administrative sanctions are another form of punishment and include counseling. This involves the commanding officer reprimanding the defendant in writing or verbally. Counseling can be used to praise someone as well as censure. Reprimands and admonitions are always a negative and can be verbal or written. Punishment of administrative sanctions can include reduction in rank. This usually happens if there is a history of bad behavior or failure to pass required benchmarks, such as fitness tests (Powers, 2011).

**Military and Stress**

It is understandable that military life can be stressful. In boot camp, it is normal to catch a cold or come down with something because “basic training is too crowded and too fast paced for
your body to get enough rest” (Volkin, 2011, p. 123). When a person has trouble adjusting to military life, they are said to have adjustment reaction (also known as an acute reaction to stress). A study done by Booth-Kewley and Larson (2005) showed that those who are the most at risk for adjustment reaction are Caucasians who joined the armed services at age 19 or older and those who lack a high school degree. Recruits who had been previously arrested for crimes were less likely to suffer from adjustment reaction than those who had no previous arrests. It has been suggested those who were previously arrested were more used to stressful situations than those without a criminal history (Booth-Kewley & Larson, 2005).

Of those who were hospitalized in a mental health facility while in the military, the majority of them had adjustment reaction. The second most common diagnosis of hospitalized service members was personality disorders. A person who had trouble getting along with those in supervision positions (teachers, job supervisors, etc.) were more likely to be hospitalized for a personality disorder. Those who were hospitalized with personality disorders were more likely to show suicidal tendencies (Booth-Kewley & Larson, 2005).

Even after basic training is over, men and women of the military are charged with the security of our Nation and are sometimes required to take on dangerous jobs or to leave their families behind. A study done by Pflanz (2001) showed that a majority of U.S. Air Force members suffered from work-related stress. Of those studied who were receiving care for a mental illness, almost half of the participants felt that their occupational stress directly affected their mental illness (Pflanz, 2001).

Women in the Military

Women have been involved in the United States military since the Revolutionary War, where they were camp cooks, nurses and laundresses. During that time, Deborah Sampson
served in the Army disguised as a man (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011). The Civil War saw women in official military roles such as cooks and nurses. During this time, Mary Walker, the first female field surgeon in the Army, was awarded the Medal of Honor (Walker, 2005).

In 1901, the Army Nurse Corps was established and about 21,000 nurses served during World War I. The National Service School was created in 1916 to train women in war-time duties and responsibilities. The Army, Marine Corps and the Navy helped teach women military drills and basic first aid for the field. By the time WWI was over, more than 35,000 women had served in the military (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011).

During WWI, about 400 nurses died while in service. However, the training for the Army Nurse Corps only included basic orientation of their post and didn’t receive basic military training until 1943. In 1942, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was created and trained women in basic drills, map reading, supply and mess management and military customs. The WAAC was soon changed to the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and the female recruits were assigned to the Army’s Air Forces, Ground Forces and Service Forces. During WWII, women were serving in many non-combat roles such as mechanics, pilots, electronic specialists and administrators (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011).

In 1948, the Women’s Armed Service Integration Act was passed and women were allowed permanent status in the U.S. military. Members of the WAC would continue to serve in the various wars and operations (including the Korean War and Vietnam) until it was disbanded in 1978. A year later, women were allowed to train with men and, in 1980, the first female cadets graduated from West Point (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011). Today, women make up 14.5% of active members of the military. Recently, the Department of Defense announced their
intentions to open up 13, 139 combat related assignments to females (Department of Defense, 2012).

**Why Did You Join?**

In response to the need of soldiers for WWI, the Selective Service Act was passed in 1917. The act allowed the government to conscript men into the United States Armed Forces. At first, men who were 21 to 30 years old had to register for service but the age limits were later changed to include 18 to 45 year olds. The men would receive a draft card with a number on it; if their number came up in the draft lottery, they had to report for military service (Coffman, 1968). Women were not subject to the draft because they were thought to be ill-suited to face combat. Local draft boards were created to determine eligibility and grant exceptions (Bailey, 2009).

During WWII, a large number of men were rejected for service based on psychological screening. Fathers and university students were deemed too important to maintaining a stable home life and too crucial to the future of the nation to be drafted. Farm workers were also excluded because of the fear that there wouldn’t be enough young men to keep food production going. Of the 16 million who served during WWII, 10 million were drafted into service. During drafts, many volunteered for service to better control the terms of their contract (Bailey, 2009).

Forcing military service wasn’t really working out; moral was low while AWOL rates and drug abuse were on the rise. In December 1972, the last man was drafted and started his term in June 1973. In that same year, the U.S. government finally admitted reluctant recruits didn’t make the best soldiers and made the military an all-volunteer force.

So why do people join the military today? “Army Strong”, ”USMC: When it absolutely, positively must be destroyed overnight”, “America’s Navy: A Global Force For Good” and “Fly-Fight-Win” are just a few of the slogans used to promote the U.S. Armed Forces (Bailey, 2009;
Ewing, 2009; Schading, 2007; U.S. Air Force, 2010). All of these slogans seem to promise a chance to achieve something great and an offer to be a part of something bigger than one’s self. Military men and women seem to get automatic respect: there are several national holidays that honor those who have served, many stores and restaurants offer discounts to those with military IDs and people will come up to a disabled military veteran to thank them for their services or buy them a drink. Beyond the respect given to our military members, the armed services are also associated with honor, bravery, glory and heroes (Schading, 2007). Some may join the military in order to be thought of in these terms.

For some, the military seemed like their best way to achieve a higher education. The military offers pay and educational benefits, both in the service and afterwards. While in the service, you are provided an opportunity to learn many skills. The military also offers programs like the G.I. Bill, which helps pay for college after your service is complete (Schading, 2007). Others see the military as a means of escaping a less than desirable situations at home, such as poverty (Elder, 1999).

Psychological Screening

The military has been using aptitude test for screening since WWI. In 1917 the Army Alpha (if you were literate) and Beta (if you were illiterate) tests were developed to measure the recruit’s communication and math skills. During WWI, mental defects made up 6% of all the recruits that were rejected. Later on, cognitive tests were administered to determine general learning abilities, language skills and specialized knowledge (electrical, mechanical, etc.) as well as to determine if the recruit would excel in a position of leadership (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007).

After WWI, mental disorders made up 10% of all service-related disabilities among veterans but further studies showed many of those affected had preexisting conditions and
symptoms. These studies encouraged the military to screen for these preexisting conditions and minimize the future financial costs (the medical case cost for disabled WWI veterans was about $1 billion). Thanks to the psychological screenings of WWII, 10-15% of all those who were rejected for service were due to character flaws, high risk of adjustment difficulties or psychiatric disorders (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007).

The psychological screening process changed again in the 1950’s due to the disqualification of too many potential recruits. The new policy was less strict and allowed for all but the most serious psychiatric disorders. In addition, any character flaw that didn’t severely affect the recruit’s civilian life was allowed for service. As a result of these changes, the rejection rate for psychiatric disorders and character flaws went from 5.5 cases per 1,000 recruits to 1.9 cases per 1,000 recruits (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007).

Today, recruits go through three screening procedures: an aptitude test (the ASVAB), educational achievement assessment and a basic medical/psychiatric evaluation. The educational achievement screening looks at the highest level of school completed. Studies have shown that those with a high school diploma are able to perform better in service than those with a lower level of education. The aptitude test measures the intelligence capacity and specialized knowledge of the recruit, which is used to determine what kind of job the person is best suited for. The psychiatric screening has no “specific tools used in assessing personality or other psychological dimensions” (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007, p. 34-35). There are additional psychological screening measures for Navy and Air Force training facilities and recruits going into the Special Forces must also go through a more in-depth evaluation (Cardona & Ritchie, 2007).

**Literature Review**
Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory supports the idea that military training influences serial murders. This theory was created by Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers and is based largely upon Sutherland’s nine principles of differential association. Burgess and Akers state that there are two types of behaviors: respondent and operant. Respondent behaviors are reflective and are linked with the autonomic system. Operational behavior is based on “past and present environmental consequences” (Jacoby, 2004, p. 275). In other words when a particular behavior is met with certain stimuli, the frequency of that behavior will either increase or decrease. Operational reinforcement and conditioning play a major part in shaping a person’s behavior (Jacoby, 2004).

Our social interactions can act as a reinforcement of a behavior but social reinforcements are often intermittent and behavior can be learned without any direct social contact. Burgess and Akers go on to say that the “specific class of behaviors which are learned and their frequency of occurrence are a function of the reinforcers which are effective and available, and the rules or norms by which these reinforces are applied” (Jacoby, 2004, p.280). This means that when a behavior is learned, the rules or norms the behavior is learned under become a part of the learned behavior (Jacoby, 2004).

The military certainly shapes operational behavior by positively or negatively reinforcing behavior. When you do well, you receive medals and commendations. When you do something wrong, you are yelled at or receive some form of punishment. Some say the praise a soldier receives killing the enemy encourages them to keep on killing (Castle & Hensley, 2002). However, this theory fails to take into consideration influences that came into play before military training. What of the serial murderers who killed or showed other antisocial tendencies
before they entered the military? The social learning theory also fails to explain why more servicemen aren’t serial killers. If killing is glorified and praised in the military, why aren’t more servicemen serial murderers? If the military has such a strong influence on serial murders, why would they only absorb the killing techniques but not the code of conduct that is strictly enforced in the military?

In 2009, there were 21.9 million veterans in the United States. Of those veterans, 7.6 million served during Vietnam (1964-1975). The number of veterans that served during the Gulf War (1990 to 2009) was 4.5 million and World War II (1941-1945) had 2.3 million. About 2.7 million served in the Korean War (1950-1953) and 5.6 million served during peace time (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Considering the number of people that have been in the military, why is it the U.S. only has 147 serial murderers with military backgrounds (Aamodt, 2012)?

**Life Course Theory**

The life course theory (also known as the life course approach) states that a person’s behavior is shaped by their “ever-changing historical context” (Elder, 1998, p. 1). This theory encourages looking at a person’s life as a whole when analyzing their behavior patterns. By looking at the whole of a person’s life, one is better able to address continuous behavior (life-long habits), areas of transitions (short-term changes) and changes in behavior trajectory (long-term changes). Areas of transition are usually life events such as marriage or joining the military but don’t always change the trajectory of an individual’s behavior (Bouffard, 2003).

A multitude of studies have shown military service *can* influence a person’s behavior. The positive and negative aspects of military service have been analyzed with mixed results. Some studies show the military can decrease criminal inclinations, encourage a stronger bond with one’s community, provides an escape from poverty and teaches social independence (Elder,
1999; Sampson & Laub, 1996). Other studies show the stress unique to military service can increase aggression and cause problems in jobs and with marriage (Bohannon, et al., 1995; Bryant). Mattick (1954) did a study of Illinois convicts and found that those who were paroled into the Army were less likely to reoffend than those who received a normal parole. During Vietnam, studies showed drug abuse was commonplace during service but few servicemen used drugs after they were discharged. The same studies showed those that did continue to use drugs after service were more likely to be arrested than those who didn’t (Robins, 1993; Robins, et al., 1974).

Studies show that life events before military service also have an impact on behavior during and after service. According to Sampson and Laub (1995), men who had disciplinary problems as teenagers were more likely to be reprimanded in the military and receive dishonorable discharges than those without previous disciplinary problems. A study done by Hakeem (1946) show that the majority of the men with military experience who have been incarcerated had a criminal record before they enlisted. So while the military is an area of transition, the type of change (if any) seems to be influence by other factors in addition to the service itself.

**Military and Pop Culture**

*Hartman – Drill Sergeant*

**HARTMAN:** Do any of you people know who Charles Whitman was? None of you dumbasses knows? Private Cowboy?

**COWBOY:** Sir, he was that guy who shot all those people from that tower in Austin, Texas, sir!

**HARTMAN:** That’s affirmative. Charles Whitman killed twelve people from a twenty-eight-story observation tower at the University of Texas from distances up to four hundred yards. Anybody know who Lee Harvey Oswald was? Private Snowball?

**SNOWBALL:** Sir, he shot Kennedy, sir!

**HARTMAN:** That’s right, and do you know how far away he was?

**SNOWBALL:** Sir, it was pretty far! From that book suppository building, sir!
HARTMAN: All right, knock it off! Two hundred and fifty feet! He was two hundred and fifty feet away and shooting at a moving target. Oswald got off three rounds with an old Italian bolt action rifle in only six seconds and scored two hits, including a head shot! Do any of you people know where these individuals learned to shoot? Private Joker?

JOKER: Sir, in the Marines, sir!

HARTMAN: In the Marines! Outstanding! Those individuals showed what one motivated marine and his rifle can do! And before you ladies leave my island, you will be able to do the same thing!

-Full Metal Jacket, 1987

"Hoot": When I go home people’ll ask me, "Hey Hoot, why do you do it man? What, you some kinda war junkie?" You know what I’ll say? I won't say a goddamn word. Why? They won't understand. They won't understand why we do it. They won't understand that it's about the men next to you, and that's it. That's all it is.

-Black Hawk Down, 2001

Troy: That’s my kill! Fuck! That is my kill! That is my kill! You fucking desk jockey! You’re a fucking prick. You don’t know what we go through, man!

Anthony: Calm down, Troy!

Troy: Let go of me. Just fucking let go of me. I was trying... I was trying to explain...Fuck! Oh, man (cries).

Officer: You STA boys are some weird motherfuckers.(on the radio:) Hitman 45. Hitman 45. This is Bravo 4 Lima. Over.

(The airstrike comes in and Anthony watches it from their position.)

Anthony: Are we ever gonna get to kill anyone?

Troy: Fuck if I know.

-Jarhead, 2005

Carl Sandburg once said “Hollywood is the foremost educational institute on earth [with] and audience that runs into an estimated 800 million to a billion” (Martin & Steuter, 2010, p.101). The military and the entertainment industry have always had a strong relationship. The military uses the entertainment industry to maintain (or sometimes regain) public approval and the entertainment industry uses the military to sell movies, books, graphic novels, video games and toys. Besides gaining public approval, the military uses the entertainment industry for recruitment purposes. There have been numerous songs (such as Kid Rock’s Warrior or Lee Greenwood’s God Bless the U.S.A.), cartoons (Disney’s Der Fuehrer’s Face and Commando
Duck featuring Donald Duck), children’s books (*The Boy Allies Series*) and movies (Martin & Steuter, 2010) but what messages are these types of media sending to potential recruits?

The quote from *Black Hawk Down* epitomizes the brotherhood felt between servicemen and highlights the sense of belonging felt by some in the military. It conveys the idea that those who haven’t risked their lives for their country will never truly understand those who have and glorifies those who have served. The quote from *Full Metal Jacket* highlights the deadly nature of military training as well as the “I’m a badass” attitude. This quote makes a connection between infamous killers with military training and implies the reason they were so successful was because they were trained Marines.

In *Jarhead*, two trained snipers are finally given a combat mission: shoot an Iraqi officer at a run-down airport. The soldiers have the officer in their sights and are about to pull the trigger when another Marine unit comes in and informs them they are calling in an airstrike instead of using snipers. One of the soldiers, Troy, begs the officer of the other team to let them take the shot. When the officer repeatedly denies the request, Troy has a meltdown and has to be restrained by his fellow soldier, Anthony (Wick, Fisher & Mendes, 2005). Troy wanted to kill to justify the sacrifices he and the others had to make during their training.

These movies imply the military is this selective group of tough-as-nails fighters who kill for their country. While this may be true of military service, these movies romanticize the service in such a way that may attract people who want to join the military for the wrong reasons. There have been several serial murderers who had applied to the military but were turned away for one reason or another, including people like Marc Lépine (killed 14) and others (such as Ted Bundy) seemed to be fascinated by authority (Langman, 2010).

*Antisocial Personality Disorder and the Military*
There is no one mental disorder or motive that applies to all serial murders. Some have personality disorders (such as narcissistic personality disorder), some have psychological disorders (such as schizophrenia) and some serial murders kill for financial gain while others suddenly “snap”. However, certain traits are commonly found in serial murders including impulsivity, a lack of remorse, sensation seeking and predatory behavior (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). These traits can be indicators of an antisocial personality disorder (ASPD).

A person with antisocial personality disorder shows a “pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 701). There are four main diagnostic requirements:

1. Must have shown three or more of the following since the age of 15:
   a. Doesn’t conform to the norms of their society, especially a disregard towards the law.
   b. Repeated lying or deceit.
   c. Impulsivity.
   d. Aggression and irritability.
   e. Reckless disregard for safety.
   f. Irresponsible, especially concerning financial and work obligations.
   g. Lack of remorse for harming others.

2. Must be at least 18 years old.

3. Conduct disorder is evident before the age of 15.


About 3% of American males have ASPD (Grossman, 2009). Someone with ASPD likes to intimidate others and seem tough. They do not care for the rights or feelings of others and
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People with this disorder are pathological liars, have vindictive natures and they often break the law. The more intelligent they are, the better they plan and thus the more successful they tend to be. The young, immature or lower intelligent ones are often impulsive and reckless, which can lead them to getting caught (Dobbert, 2007).

The military could offer the “rush” these personality disorders crave and a highly intelligent antisocial personality disorder could be successful in the military. However, if they are irresponsible or overly reckless, it could prevent them from achieving a high rank. A low intelligence individual would be too impulsive and prone to fighting to really be successful in the military. Their records would be too full of reprimands for them to achieve much (Dobbert, 2007; Schading, 2007).

**What is Needed to Kill?**

Movie characters like Rambo, James Bond and Indiana Jones make killing look easy. The hero comes in, kills the villains and casually walks out with his friends. As is often the case, movies don’t quite match the reality: the average human being is resistant to the idea of killing his fellow man. During WWII, only 15-20% of American riflemen would fire directly at the enemy and only 1% of American fighter pilots were responsible for the destruction of 30-40% of the enemy’s air force. It seems most soldiers were exercising their “right to miss” and firing either at enemies while they were too far away to accurately hit or firing over the enemy’s head (Grossman, 2009).

**Distance**

The closer the person is to their victim, the harder it is to pull the trigger and the chances of psychiatric consequences increases. Consider WWII bombers: a successfully delivered payload could kill thousands and many of the victims were women, children and the elderly. The
pilots understood they were taking the lives of civilians but were able to distance themselves from it because they couldn’t physically see their victims’ faces (Grossman, 2009).

Moral, mechanical, social and cultural distance can make killing easier (Grossman, 2009). We see the use of moral distance when politicians and the media try to convince the public that we are fighting a “good war”. In 2009, Obama said the following about the Afghanistan War:

“As we know, these men belonged to al Qaeda -- a group of extremists who have distorted and defiled Islam, one of the world’s great religions, to justify the slaughter of innocents. Al Qaeda’s base of operations was in Afghanistan, where they were harbored by the Taliban -- a ruthless, repressive and radical movement that seized control of that country after it was ravaged by years of Soviet occupation and civil war, and after the attention of America and our friends had turned elsewhere [...] we are passing through a time of great trial. And the message that we send in the midst of these storms must be clear: that our cause is just, our resolve unwavering. We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might, and with the commitment to forge an America that is safer, a world that is more secure, and a future that represents not the deepest of fears but the highest of hopes” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

Obama stresses our cause is just and so the killing is justifiable not only to the public but for the soldiers. WWI and WWII were “good wars” because we were defending ourselves or our allies. George W. Bush tried to convince the public we should send troops to the Middle East because we needed to protect ourselves from the WMDs (Martin & Steuter, 2010).
Cultural differences can make an enemy soldier seem less human and make it easier for soldiers to kill someone that is different from them. We can see cultural distance utilized in the insulting names each side gives to the other. The best example of this is Hitler and his notion of an Aryan master race. This feeling of superiority was a factor in allowing atrocities like the Holocaust to happen. Social distance is a lot like cultural distance except it acts on the animosity that can exist between social classes (Grossman, 2009).

Mechanical distance is achieved by viewing one’s intended victim through a screen, a scope or on a video screen as opposed to seeing them with one’s own eyes. Since the soldier is viewing his victim through a buffer, he can dehumanize the enemy. This type of fighting has been called “video game combat” or “Nintendo warfare” and has become more common since technology, such as thermal imaging and night vision, became more widely available (Grossman, 2009).

Authority

In the 1960’s, a scientist by the name of Stanley Milgram wanted to see if good people could do horrible things if they were ordered to do so by a person of authority. He was able to get 65% of his participants to administer high voltage ‘shocks’ to a human subject based on the order of someone who was seen as an authoritative figure. Some of the participants showed signs of extreme stress but they still inflicted the fake shocks when they were ordered to do so. However, the person was less likely to administer the shock if the authority figure wasn’t physically present (Milgram, 1974). A study done in 1973 found that being ordered to fire on the enemy was the most critical factor in determining whether a soldier would engage the enemy (Grossman, 2009).
The type of authority figure giving the orders is also a critical factor. In 1973, a study done in Israel showed soldiers are more likely to follow a command if it is given by someone that is deemed to be a respected leader than someone who is unknown or not respected (Grossman, 2009). Milgram’s experiment supports this by showing participants were more likely to take orders from someone wearing some sort of uniform (such as a lab coat) than if the person was wearing casual clothes (Milgram, 1974).

Group Absolution

Group absolution is when a person participates in an action with a group, which allows him to spread the blame to dilute his own sense of guilt and can also help overcome the natural resistance to kill. Consider a sniper: a sniper does see his victim’s face through his rifle scope but still doesn’t have the same risk for psychological consequences that a soldier who kills an enemy face-to-face has. The sniper is usually part of a team and is carrying out orders from a person of authority. The sniper enjoys a mixture of physical distance, emotional distance and group absolution (Grossman, 2009).

Being a part of a group not only lessens feelings of guilt but can spur the soldier into action. Peer pressure and the need to not fail one’s comrades can enable a soldier to face their enemies in battle (Grossman, 2009). Audie Murphy is one of the most decorated soldiers of WWII and was awarded the Medal of Honor for fighting off a company of German soldiers on his own. Murphy was able to overcome his natural resistance to killing because the German soldiers were trying to kill his brothers-in-arms (Murphy, 2002).

Means, Motive and Opportunity

In order to kill someone, one needs means, opportunity and motive. As one can imagine, there can be many opportunities to take someone’s life during combat but it isn’t just limited to
having a victim present. Opportunity, in most cases, includes being able to kill your victim with the least amount of danger to one’s self (Grossman, 2009). For example, a soldier could go into an enemy camp but if the enemy guards are vigilant, there is a risk of the soldier getting caught before he can make his kill. The enemy’s camp isn’t an opportunity unless the soldier can lessen the risk to himself.

Means includes having the tool (whether it be a gun or bare hands) you need to kill someone, preferably without getting yourself killed. Means also covers the soldier’s physical and mental ability to pull the trigger. Without these three things, a soldier doesn’t have the means of taking someone’s life (Grossman, 2009).

There have been countless stories of enemy soldiers accidently bumping into each other but reframing from trying to kill one another. These accidents prove a good opportunity if the enemy is far removed from the rest of his group (risk is minimal) and a disciplined soldier should have the means to kill the enemy so why doesn’t he? Motive comes in two forms for the soldier: the killer’s gain and the enemy’s loss. In battle, tactics revolve around making one’s own position stronger or weakening the enemy’s position. The death of a single enemy that is lost doesn’t help the soldier’s position unless the enemy is actively threatening him and the loss of one lone soldier wouldn’t make much of a difference in the enemy’s position (Grossman, 2009). Lacking motive, a soldier (or anyone) will not kill.

Methods

The method one uses in killing can influence the extent of the psychological damage the soldier may suffer. Long range weapons seem to be the least harmful to the soldier’s psyche. Naval personnel and bomber pilots have a low rate of psychological causalities since WWII due
to the use of long range weaponry. Hand grenades had a relatively low risk of psychological damage as long as the soldier didn’t have to hear or see his handy work (Grossman, 2009).

Throughout history we see armies are reluctant to use bladed weapons for stabbing. When the bayonets were standard issue, the soldiers would use the butt of their weapons instead of the blade for close-range combat. The soldiers were trained in the use of the bayonet but would rather use the weapon to bludgeon their enemy. When a bladed weapon is used, the soldier seems to prefer slashing rather than stabbing and the slashing method tends to be less damaging psychologically (Grossman, 2009).

*Forced Killing: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

The factors listed above assume the soldier is fighting in an armed conflict due to a sense of duty or obligation, but what about soldiers who are forced to kill by their own government under the threat of death? In the early 1900’s, Leon Trotsky forced thousands of peasants into the Russian Army which caused mass desertion during Russia’s civil war. The only thing that would force the “soldiers” to return to the battlefield was the threat of death. In 1918, blocking units were used for the first time in Russia to execute the soldiers that tried to abandon their posts or tried to retreat without orders (Volkogonov, 1996).

In 1942-1943, Hitler and Stalin were locked in battle over Russian territory and neither leader cared how many lives they had to spend to maintain or improve their position. During the Battle of Stalingrad, Stalin ordered the use of blocking units, which executed about 13,500 of their own soldiers (Goebel & Keene, 2011). This situation moved the solider beyond self-defense or duty due to the involvement of a third party (the blocking units). For the soldiers in the Russian Army, they had little choice but to participate in battle or they would forfeit their lives.
The battle became less about whether they could bring themselves to pull the trigger and more about if they could endure the consequences of not pulling the trigger.

**Cost of Killing**

During WWI, a soldier had a greater risk of becoming a psychological casualty than he had of getting shot. More than 800,000 soldiers were classified as psychologically unfit for duty and about 504,000 suffered from psychiatric collapse during WWII. In the 1973 Arab-Israel War, about 1/3 of the military casualties were from psychological reasons. Of the soldiers who fought in WWII, 98% of them suffered from some kind of psychological distress. The 2% who didn’t become psychological casualties had a tendency towards aggression and antisocial tendencies (Grossman, 2009). Before the First World War, these psychiatric casualties were thought to be weak, cowardly or lack the motivation to fight. In WWI, soldiers were said to be suffering from “shell shock”. The term “war neurosis” was later used and was changed again to “combat fatigue” or “combat exhaustion”. Today, it is known as “combat stress reaction” or “acute combat reaction” which has been linked to the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder later in life (Yoram & Eliezer, 2000).

**Symptoms**

When a soldier remains in a situation where he is continuously in danger and is expected to fight and kill his enemies, he may be at risk for acute combat reaction. The symptoms for acute combat reaction include (Grossman, 2009):

- Fatigue: usually the first symptom, the subject will lose interest in group activities, will be overly irritable and may avoid responsibilities or activities that involve physical or mental exertion. The subject may suffer from fits of anxiety or terror and may have
crying fits. Physical symptoms of fatigue include increased sweating and heart palpitations.

- State of Confusion: the subject will mentally remove themselves and suffer from a psychotic dissociation of what is happening around them. They may suffer from delirium, manic-depressive fits and may act silly or display inappropriate humor to distance themselves from the reality of their situation.

- Conversion Hysteria: the subject is unable to tell where they are or has trouble functioning. In the battlefield, the soldier may wander aimlessly around or may overact to minor wounds and near-misses. When the soldier is injured, they may become hysterical. During both World Wars, there were reports of soldiers who suffered from paralysis that couldn’t be accounted for by physical injury.

- Anxiety State: the subject feels lethargic, tense and is unable to concentrate. He may experience trouble breathing, blurred vision, giddiness, pain, weakness or fainting. When he sleeps, he suffers from nightmares. The subject may also become obsessed with death or become overly concerned that he will let down those who depend on him.

- Obsessive/Compulsive State: a hysterical reaction that is similar to the anxiety state and is characterized by uncontrollable tics, tremors, palpitations and stammers.

- Character Disorders: the subject will try to escape the reality that brought on the acute combat reaction. He may develop schizoid, obsessional or paranoid traits. The subject may suffer from depression, fits of rage, antisocial tendencies or an extreme religious obsession (Grossman, 2009).

Treatment for acute combat reaction is relatively simple: remove the subject from combat (Grossman, 2009). However, today’s soldiers are usually specially trained and can’t be replaced.
on short notice (Rock, et. al., 1994). Since this type of treatment is often impossible during conflict, psychiatric treatment needs to be available as close to the front lines as possible (Grossman, 2009).

Responsibility in Combat

It was observing these devastating psychological costs to soldiers that inspired the bombing of civilians in WWII. Military leaders from Germany and the UK believed that if their soldiers suffered a great deal from battle, civilians must be even more valuable since they were never trained to endure those kinds of conditions. What’s more, a traumatized civilian population would probably force their government to end the war as quickly as possible through surrender (Grossman, 2009).

The civilians of England were subjected to bombing that was similar to the one’s the soldiers underwent. Thousands were either mutilated, lost friends or family members, lost their homes or died. Strangely, it wasn’t loss of life that had the biggest effect on the civilian population; it was the loss of their homes. Despite the terror the civilians went through there wasn’t any mass psychological casualties and only a slight increase in psychological disorders (Grossman, 2009). The citizens of Israel, Guernica, Rotterdam, Valetta, Congqing and Hiroshima show the same resilience when it comes to facing a citywide bombing (Mueller, 2010).

Civilians aren’t the only ones who have a strange immunity to the psychological damages soldiers are at risk for when faced with bombings. A study of WWI and WWII prisoners of war (POWs) found that the soldiers did not suffer from acute combat reaction from artillery fire while they were detained but the enemy guards in charge of them did. So what does a POW and a civilian have in common that could account for this resistance to psychological damages? Both
are unable to do anything to stop what is happening and their well-being is generally accepted to be someone else’s responsibility. For the civilian, it is up to the government to protect them against the war and for the POW, it is up to the guard to see to their protection. A soldier or a guard has been told they are not only accountable for themselves in dangerous conditions (i.e. combat or the custody of prisoners) but they also may be responsible for the taking of a human life to fulfill their duties (Grossman, 2009).

Hatred: Why Would They Want to Hurt Me?

When the civilians were being bombed or when Navy personnel were threatened with artillery, it seems the impersonality of the attack made it more bearable. Both populations could assure themselves that it wasn’t personal and that they, as an individual, weren’t the target (the ship or city was). A soldier who is up close and personal with the enemy has no choice but to admit someone is trying to personally kill them, regardless of motives (self-defense, orders, etc.). It is natural to want to be liked and it’s a shock when someone hates you enough to personally try to take your life (Grossman, 2009).

The survivors of the concentration camps during WWII suffer from many psychological problems (Lev-Wisesl & Amir, 2000; Suedfeld, 2000) but what makes the civilians in the concentration camps different from the POWs that endured bombings? Both were unable to change their situation, neither had the ability to strike at their guards and their well-being was put into the hands of someone else. The major difference between the two scenarios is the fact that the prisoners of the concentration camp had to experience the aggression of their tormentors directly. They knew the guards were personally denying their humanity and subject them to horrors (Grossman, 2009).

Conditioning
During basic training, one of the main goals is to teach the recruits that their bodies and minds are capable of extraordinary things when the situation calls for it. Recruits are put through brutal physical drills, exhausting tasks that require mental concentration and simulations that are outside any normal citizen’s experience (Schading, 2007; Volkin, 2011). This is all done in an effort to show the recruits they aren’t helpless. The constant abuse they receive from their trainers teaches the recruits they can achieve their goals in the face of personal aggression and hate, which will allow them to better withstand such hostility in battle (Grossman, 2009).

However, no matter how well trained the recruit is or how real the simulated fighting drills are, nothing can predict what he will do when faced with real combat and the possibility of taking a life (Artiss, 2010).

As stated previously, the firing rates for WWII was between 15-20% but the rate increased for the Korean War (55%) and Vietnam (90-95%). So what changed? The Armed Forces discovered they could condition their soldiers to fire. The term conditioning is used because the training focuses on conditioning the respondent behaviors of the soldiers, not the operant behaviors. The goal was to make shooting an effortless and automatic response. To this end, soldiers were put through realistic simulations and made to shoot at life-like representations of the enemy (Grossman, 2009).

Of those who have been conditioned and have killed, many say their actions were automatic. Their bodies took over and their muscles followed the training drills. While these conditioning methods may help overcome the initial resistance to kill, it does nothing to lessen the psychological impact killing has on a soldier. In Vietnam, the non-firing rates were 5% but 400,000 to 1.5 million soldiers came back with PTSD (Grossman, 2009).

**Serial Murderers vs. Soldiers**
Motive is the biggest difference between a serial murder and a soldier. Serial murderers and soldiers take lives but one takes a life to (ideally) serve one’s country while the other does it purely for personal gain. For most soldiers, killing is done in the heat of battle. There is chaos everywhere and the choices are to kill or be killed. A serial murderer will either stalk their victim or choose a victim of opportunity. A serial murder may kill someone out of anger, financial gain or for the sheer pleasure of killing while a soldier has a duty to kill if lawfully ordered. Both require the means and opportunity but a serial murderer has a less daunting task in terms of personal risk. A soldier must face others who are also trained in combat while a serial murderer often picks victims they can easily subdue (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012; Grossman, 2009).

A serial murderer doesn’t normally receive the group absolution a soldier enjoys. A soldier knows he is a part of a big fighting force while only 16.8% (of 2,225 cases) of serial murderers killed with others (Aamodt, 2012). In the same vein, a serial murderer is rarely acting under orders unless they believe a higher power told them to kill or if they are obeying a dominant partner (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012).

Guns seem to be the preferred method for serial murderers. About 32.73% (of 1,668 cases) used a gun to kill, 24.82% stabbed their victim and 16.18% bludgeoned their victims (Aamodt, 2012). As discussed previously, soldiers seem to have an easier time using long distance weapons, including guns. Every branch in the military has some sort of firearms training (Powers, 2011; Schading, 2007) which can make a serial murderer with military training more familiar with this method than other methods of killing.

One area where soldiers and serial murderers are alike is the need to distance themselves from their victims. The majority of soldiers need to not only overcome their natural resistance to
killing but also need to deal with the psychological cost of killing their fellow man (Grossman, 2009). A serial murderer, on the other hand, has very little regard for human life and may have no problem dehumanizing their victims (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012). A soldier may need multiple buffers (social, cultural mechanical distance, etc.) but a serial murderer doesn’t seem to possess the natural resistance to killing that most people have.

Methods

Study 1- Military vs. Non-Military

Internet sites, books, newspapers, journal articles and the Aamodt Serial Killer Database were examined for information pertaining to serial killers, spree killers and mass murderers to determine a population of potential subjects with military backgrounds. Of the 2,052 identified complete cases, 190 were found to have had military backgrounds. A random sample of 190 killers, selected from the Radford Serial Killer Database, that had no military background was the comparison sample (non-military).

Statistical comparisons were made between the military and non-military samples to determine whether military training influenced proficiency, method used or violence of the killings.

Two-sample independent t-tests were used to compare victim count, total killing career and active killing career between the two samples. Pearson Chi² was used to compare how the killers from each of the samples treated their victims and the methods they used to kill.

Study 2- Military Service

Of the 190 cases identified as the military killer population, only the 147 who served in the United States military were included in this study. Of the 147 subjects with U.S. military experience, the researcher was able to collect the military records of 62 cases.
Linear regression procedures were performed to determine how much variance in killing success, as defined by active killing career, total killing career and victim count and viciousness of the killings, as defined by if they tortured their victims was explained by military achievement. Achievement was measured using rank upon discharge, total time in service and highest award category achieved.

Participants:

For the purpose of this study, the definitions are as followed:

- **Hitman**: a person who has killed four or more victims. The murders must have occurred on at least three separate events. The motive for the killings must involve either furthering an organized crime agenda or financial gain.

- **Mass Murderer**: a person who has killed four or more victims in a single event and location.

- **Serial Killer**: a person who has killed two or more victims. The murders must have occurred in different locations and as separate events. A cooling off period is needed between events.

- **Spree Killer**: a person who has killed three or more victims. The murders must have occurred in at least two separate locations with no cooling off period between events.

- **War Criminal**: a person who has participated in three or more unlawful killings of non-combatant civilians while serving during the capacity of their combat duty. They must have personally participated in the killings.

It is important to note that the definitions were created in such a way to allow for the biggest sample size possible for this study. This was done in an effort to ensure the study population was large enough to be statistically significant.
Measurements:

Service:

The majority of the time variables are expressed in months. The exceptions are the subject’s age and years when they entered and left their military service. To determine how well an individual did in the military, the variables studied include:

Military Trend:

- **Highest Award Category**: the highest award category a person received while in service. See Appendix III for details.

- **Rank**: a person’s pay grade upon discharge. Note that the person could have had a higher rank during service but was demoted for disciplinary reasons.

- **Total Time Served**: includes active and inactive service (months).

Comparison Population:

- **Military**: did the subject serve in some type of military?

Killing Career:

The majority of the time variables are expressed in months. When an exact date was unknown, it was assumed the longest length of time had passed. For example, if a subject’s first and last known victims were from 1990 to 1991, it was assumed 12 months had passed.

Military Trend:

- **Active Killing Career**: the time from their known first kill to their last known kill (months).

- **Total Killing Career**: the time from the first known kill to the date they were arrested or captured (months).
• **Victim Number/Count**: the generally accepted number of people the subject killed. These include confessed murders (if the confession is deemed reliable), murders that can strongly be tied to the subject and murders the subject has been prosecuted for.

**Comparison Population:**

• **Active Killing Career**: the time from their known first kill to their last known kill (years).

• **Total Killing Career**: the time from the first known kill to the date they were arrested or captured (years).

• **Victim Number/Count**: the generally accepted number of people the subject killed. These include confessed murders (if the confession is deemed reliable), murders that can strongly be tied to the subject and murders the subject has been prosecuted for.

**Method of Killings:**

If a serial murderer is influenced by their time in the military, the one place it is most likely to show is in the methods the subject used to kill his victims. All branches receive some form of firearms training and basic hand-to-hand combat training (Schading, 2007) so a subject with military training should be familiar with (and may be more inclined to use) guns and efficient killing methods.

**Comparison Population:**

• **Gun**: did the subject use a gun to kill their victims?

• **Quick**: did the subject kill the victim quick and efficiently?

**Victim Treatment:**

In order to gauge how cruel or vicious a subject is, the way they treated their victims was studied. The most heinous crime one could commit upon another person is torture. The goal of
torture is the victim’s pain whereas the other acts, such as rape, pain can be incidental to the 
main goal.

- **Torture**: did the subject deliberately and with malicious intent inflict pain on their victim?

  Causing the victim pain must be the main objective.

**Data Collection:**

The investigator researched serial killers, spree killers and mass murderers to determine a 
list of subjects with military backgrounds. Resources such as books, internet sites, newspaper 
articles and Dr. Aamodt’s Serial Killer Database were used to create the population pool. Of the 
190 cases found with military backgrounds, the researcher further limited the sample to those 
who served with the United States military (N=147). In order to get information about the 
subject’s military background, the subject’s date of birth, date of death and social security 
number will be collected. It is important to note that this information is only being collected to 
acquire the subject’s military record and will be destroyed after the military records are obtained. 
The information will be used to request the subject’s military background from the National 
Archives. Of the 147 subjects with U.S. military backgrounds, the researcher was able to collect 
the military records of 62 cases.

**Results**

**Overall Serial Killer Population: 2,052 Cases**

Of the 2,052 cases in Dr. Aamodt’s Serial Killer Database (2012), the majority of the 
killers were male (88.1%). The average victim count was 10 with a killing career average of 4 
years. The average killer started when they were 29 and stopped when they were 33. The 
majority of the cases didn’t rape or torture their victims. After death, the majority of the killers 
did not mutilate, eat or have sex with the body. Of the records that indicate nationality, 60.6%
(1,243) of the cases were from the US. The U.S. sample had 147 cases (11.8%) that served in the military. Worldwide, only 12.8% (190 cases) of the serial murderers had served in some form of military (See Figure 1) and all were males.

**Military Trends: 62 Cases**

*Description of Service:*

The average age of enlistment was 19 years of age and the average discharged age was 27. The subjects had an average of 49 months (about 4 years) in service and 39 months of active duty. Upon discharge from the service, the average pay grade was an E-3. The majority of the cases held support personnel jobs and 34.9% held combat-related jobs. The majority enlisted in 1970 and most were discharged in 1974. Only 49 of the 62 cases received an award during military service. About 46% of those that received awards had a Military Campaign Award as their highest category of awards (See Figure 2). Of the service records that had enough information (N=31), 51% showed evidence of disciplinary actions.

*Descriptive of Branch:*

Of the 62 comprehensive military cases, the Army held the majority of the study cases (46.8%) The Army also had the highest average of kills (24.4%). The Navy had the second largest killer population (24.2%) but had the lowest average of kills (15.7%) (See Figure 3 & Figure 4). The Air Force tended to have the lowest average of total and active military time but had the highest average of total killing career time (102.5 months).

*Descriptive of Killing Types and Careers:*

Within the military population studied, most started their killing career 93 months (about seven years) after completing their military service. The average total killing career lasted 64 months and the average time between the first and last victim was 43 months. The average
inactive kill career was 20 months. The method used most often was strangulation. Of the 62 cases, 13 killed while still in the military (only 10 cases killed while they were active duty) and 3 killed before they enlisted.

**Proficiency & Victim Treatment Comparisons:**

Least squares linear regression model was showed there was no correlation between success in the military and a successful killing career. Nor did doing well in service correspond with how they treated the victim.

**Military Verses Non-Military Comparison: 380 Cases**

Military training did not reliably affect victim count \([t(378)=1.119, p>0.290]\), total killing career duration \([t(378)=2.100, p>.140]\) nor active killing career \([t(378)=0.001, p>.260]\). Having a military background did not reliably affect the use of torture \([\chi^2(df, 1)= 0.393 (p>.05)]\) or quick kills \([\chi^2(df, 1)=0.353 (p>.05)]\).

Serial murderers were significantly more likely to use a gun in their killings if they had military training \([\chi^2(df, 1)= 0.037 (p>.05)]\).

**Discussion**

**Military Influence**

Did the familiarity firearms training in the military influence serial murderers who went through that training? We did see a higher number of serial murderers with military backgrounds using guns to kill their victims but we also see that 32.73% of serial killers also use this method (Aamodt, 2012). The possibility that military training does impact how the serial murderer kills their victim cannot be ruled out at this time.

**Women in the Military**
Women have been a part of the military since the Revolutionary War. They account for 11.9% of serial murderers (Aamodt, 2012) and 14.6% of all active U.S. Military personnel (Women’s Memorial, 2011). While many combat related jobs aren’t open to women, they still faced combat situations and it wasn’t uncommon for them to work near or in the front lines. In every war the U.S. has fought, there have been fatalities among servicewomen and most of the deaths were due to combat situations (Nordland, 2011). As discussed in *Women in the Military*, females have received basic training from the Armed Forces since WWI. So, if women have been exposed to military training and the stress of combat, why aren’t there any cases of female serial killers with military backgrounds? A more in-depth study of female serial murderers needs to be done to determine if any of them were a part of a military medical unit and what kind of training they went through.

**Notable Cases**

Jeffery Dahmer targeted young men and killed 17 people. His methods for killing were bludgeoning and strangulation Dahmer killed his first victim 6 months before he enlisted in the military (Aamodt, 2012). His military records show he was in the Army for 26 months and was a Medical Aidman in Germany. Dahmer enlisted when he was 18 and was discharged as an E-1 when he was 20. While in service, Dahmer earned the Marksman Badge with Rifle and Pistol Bars and the Sharpshooter Badge with Hand Grenade Bars. Note that even though Dahmer had the training, he did not seem to use his military training during his killing career.

Donald Harvey killed 37 victims via poison and suffocation. His first known kill was May 30th, 1970 (Aamodt, 2012). Harvey joined the Air Force on June 16, 1971 and served for 8 months. He was discharged as an E-2 and received the National Defense Service Medal. Harvey was a part of the 60th Civil Engineering Squad in the Travis Air Force Base from June 1971 to
January 1972. Most of his record was redacted and there was no evidence as to why he spent less than a year in service. Like Dahmer, Harvey also killed before he enlisted and his methods don’t exhibit his military training.

Edward Leonski killed three people while serving in Australia and was caught while in service (Aamodt, 2012). He served in the Army from February 1941 to November 1942 and was an E-1. While sources say he was hanged for his crimes (Calgary Herald, 1942; Evening Independent, 1942; Milwaukee Journal, 1942), his military record is lacking his court martial transcript and only says he “died on active duty”.

David Berkowitz, also known as the Son of Sam, killed six people and used a firearm as his weapon of choice. His first known kill took place July 29th, 1976 (Aamodt, 2012). Berkowitz joined the Army when he was 18 and spent 71 months total in service (he was active for 36 months). While in service, he held a combat job and was on his way to become a non-commissioned officer. Berkowitz served in Korea and was discharged as an E-4 at the age of 24. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, two Overseas Service Bars and a Sharpshooter Badge with Auto-Rifle Bar. Most sources say Berkowitz was discharged from the military before he started his killing career but his military records show he was still in the Army Reserve up until June 22, 1977.

**Conclusions**

This study shows that military training doesn’t create a more proficient serial murderer or a more malicious one. The military and non-military population had no statistically significant difference in kill count, active killing career or total killing career. The military sample population wasn’t more or less likely to torture their victims than those without a military background. However, it would be wrong to say military training doesn’t influence a serial
murderer at all. The military sample did have more cases where a firearm was used to kill than the non-military population, which may be due to familiarity from training. Overall the subject needs to be studied more in depth.

Limitations and Recommendations

Records Limitations:

Due to privacy rights, only certain information is available to the public about discharged military personnel. Without the consent of the veteran, the information one can request includes (National Archives, 2012):

- Name
- Service number
- Dates of service
- Final Duty Status
- Salary
- Assignments and Geographical locations
- Military Education Level
- Transcript of court-martial trials
- Place of entrance and separation

Note that you cannot request the veteran’s discharge status or access their full disciplinary record. This means nonjudicial punishments and reprimands were not disclosed. Some of the records the researcher was able to attain seemed incomplete. For example, several subjects had court-martials but the transcript of the trial could not be found. One subject, Edward Leonski, was even sentenced to death at his court-martial but his record only said he died while in service. Some records will be impossible to find complete copies of due to the 1973 fire at the St. Louis National Archive building, which destroyed 16-18 million personnel files (National Archives, 2012). The researcher plans to explore different avenues to try to obtain more complete records.

Recommendations and Further Studies:
As stated in the *Introduction* of this paper, it is inexcusable that this type of public information wasn’t already explored. A military career, whether it is a single tour or a lifelong commitment, is a big life event. The service member is expected to leave their house and their family in order to train and serve in the Armed Forces. Their daily routine and environment are drastically changed. These types of life events need to be thoroughly investigated to help the scientific community understand what factors contribute to the making of a serial killer. What other life events haven’t been explored? This investigator recommends that a serious effort should be made to fill in what information hasn’t been adequately investigated.

Beyond collecting additional and more complete records of serial murderers with military backgrounds, the researcher intends to collect foreign military records to gain a bigger sample size to study. The researcher also plans on conducting interviews with military personnel who are connected to the enlistment and training of recruits to get a better understanding of the techniques that are taught and the way they are taught. A more in-depth case review will be done to determine if any military training is evident in the way victims were killed. By gaining more of an insight into these areas, the researcher hopes to have a better understanding of how military training can influence a person’s behavior.
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Appendix I: Variable Definitions

- **Active Killing Career**: the time from their known first kill to their last known kill.
- **Active Time Served**: length of time a subject is serving out a contract. During this time, the subject is subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and regulations.
- **Branch**: Military or reserve branch served under. If the subject served in a second branch, such as the Reserves, that information was put in the Secondary Branch category.
- **Combat Job Category**: a person whose main job is related to the use or management of combat related equipment. This category includes tank drivers, bombardiers and those attached to military combat units. Note a subject’s job category does not indicate whether or not they were in actual combat.
- **Evidence of Trouble**: any indicator of disciplinary actions including loss of rank, evidence of a person going AWOL, correctional stays, evidence of a court martial and anything below a general discharge.
- **Gun**: did the subject use a gun to kill their victims?
- **Inactive Killing Career**: the time from their last known kill to the date they were arrested.
- **Medical Job Category**: a subject whose main job is medically related. This includes military surgeons, dentist and field medics. Note a subject’s job category does not indicate whether or not they were in actual combat.
- **Military**: did the subject serve in some type of military?
- **Quick**: did the subject kill the victim quick and efficiently?
• **Support Personnel Job Category**: a person whose main job is related to the management of military personnel. This includes clerks, cooks, engineers and repair personnel. Note a subject’s job category does not indicate whether or not they were in actual combat.

• **Time Between Military Service and Killing Career**: the time from the subject’s discharge from the military to when they killed their first known victim.

• **Total Killing Career**: the time from the first known kill to the date they were arrested or captured.

• **Total Time Served**: includes active and inactive service.

• **Torture**: did the subject deliberately and with malicious intent inflict pain on their victim? Causing the victim pain must be the main objective.

• **Victim Number**: the generally accepted number of people the subject killed. These include confessed murders (if the confession is deemed reliable), murders that can strongly be tied to the subject and murders the subject has been prosecuted for.
Appendix II: Award Categories

When you receive multiple medals you are expected to wear them in a certain order, which is called the order of precedence (Army Publishing Directorate, 2011):

1. **U.S. Military Individual Decorations**: An award given to an individual to reward heroism, outstanding service or achievement. Examples include the Medal of Honor, the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

2. **U.S. Military Unit Awards**: An award given to the members of a unit who participated in a notable action or mission. Those who did not participate but were assigned to the unit are allowed to temporarily wear the medal. Examples include the Presidential Unit Citation, the Valorous Unit Award and the Meritorious Unit Commendation.

3. **U.S. Non-Military Individual Decorations**: An award given by a non-military agency of the United States to honor an action done by a person. Examples include the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the NASA Space Flight Medal.

4. **U.S. Military Campaign Awards**: An award given to signify an operation, war or mission the person was a part of. Note that being awarded this category of medals doesn’t mean the soldier participated in combat. Examples include the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal and the Vietnam Service Medal.

5. **U.S. Military Service and Training Awards**: An award given to signify a service done or the completion of specialized training. Examples include the Navy Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, the Army Sea Duty Ribbon and the Marine Corps Drill Instructor Ribbon.
6. **U.S. Merchant Marine Awards:** Any award that is given by the Merchant Marines.

7. **U.S. Non-Military Unit Awards:** An award given by a non-military agency of the United States to honor an action done by a unit. Examples include the National Intelligence Meritorious Unit Citation and the Public Health Service Unit Award.

8. **Foreign Military Individual Decorations:** Any award given by a foreign military. The person must be authorized by the U.S. military to receive the award or the person cannot display the award on their uniform. Examples include the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Vietnam.

9. **Foreign Military Unit Decorations:** Any award given by a foreign military. The person must be authorized by the U.S. military to receive the award or the person cannot display the award on their uniform. Examples include the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation and the Republic of Vietnam Civil Actions Unit Citation.

10. **Non-U.S. Service Awards:** Any award given by a foreign agency. The person must be authorized by the U.S. military to receive the award or the person cannot display the award on their uniform. Examples include the NATO Medal and the United Nations Medal.

11. **Marksmanship Awards:** An award given to show specialized firearms training for Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard personnel. Examples include the Air Force Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon.
12. **State Awards for National Guard Soldiers:** Awards presented to the members of the National Guard.
Appendix III: Charts

Military Service?

Figure 1: Overall Serial Murder Population with Military Experience

Highest Award Category

Figure 2: Highest Award Category
Figure 3: Breakdown of Cases by Branch of Service

Army, 46.8%, 29
Navy Reserves, 4.8%, 3
Marine, 11.3%, 7
Air Force, 12.9%, 8
Navy, 24.2%, 15

Figure 4: Average Kill Count by Branch

Marine, 18.8%, 10.286
Army, 25.4%, 13.931
Air Force, 21.9%, 12
Navy Reserves, 18.2%, 10
Navy, 15.7%, 8.6