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# Military elite or sect?

A qualitative analysis of the British royal marines

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this essay is to investigate if there exists any relation between what is generally considered Britain's foremost elite military unit, HM Royal Marines and a manipulative religious sect. With theoretical data defining a manipulative religious sect, and empirical data gathered from interviews with a number of former royal marines, this essay looks at the attributes common to these two very different organisations. Interestingly, even though the experiences of members of such organisations seemed to bare some resemblance; the motivation for any comparability was quite different. This phenomenon seemed to affect the whole study, and the findings did not confirm any substantial relation between the two organisations in accordance with the strict definitions applicable to a manipulative religious sect.

Keywords: New religious movement, British royal marines, manipulative religious sect, military elite, sect, qualitative research.

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## 1. Introduction

On the 10th January 2004, a young woman, desperately confused and longing for the grace of god, drove through the night until she finally reached her destination in Knutby. Her subsequent actions that night sent shockwaves throughout the Swedish media and the world and caused deep religious and political debate surrounding the legitimacy of so called “Free Church” organisations.

Filadelfiaförsamlingen in Knutby,<sup>1</sup> as it is known, was defined as a manipulative religious sect and many articles and books were written depicting the actions of those involved that night. Why did Sara Svensson, an otherwise bright and positive young girl, attempt to murder two of her closest friends, resulting in one fatal death?

Reading the author Terese Cristiansson’s account of the events that night in her book, *himmel helvete, Mord i Knutby*, I began to question what relation if any did the British royal marines have to a manipulative religious sect, such as the one defined in Terese Cristiansson’s book above. Having served myself for 7yrs in this elite British military unit, I was familiar with the attributes experienced by certain sect members, attributes such as elitism, family, and bond. In view of the trauma I personally encountered on resigning from the British royal marines and the difficulty experienced adjusting to the outside world, I was compelled to explore this study further.

### 1.2 Aim

In this essay I shall be primarily looking at whether there is any relation between what is generally considered Britain’s foremost elite military unit, Her Majesty’s Royal Marine Commandos and a manipulative religious sect. With data from the theoretical chapter of this essay I intend to identify what characteristically defines a manipulative religious sect.

In my analysis I intend to compare empirical data from interviews with former members of Her Majesty’s Royal Marine Commandos, with theoretical data defining a manipulative religious sect. This will allow me to correlate the experiences of individuals affiliated to the two organisations and determine whether or not there are any similarities and or differences. In this essay I intend to answer the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> The Philadelphia Church was founded by the Swedish Pentecostal minister Lewi Pethrus in 1910

- What characteristically defines a manipulative religious sect?
- Are there any similarities experienced between individuals of a manipulative religious sect and former members of Her Majesty's British Royal Marine Commandos?
- What similarities and or differences, if any, are there between these two organisations?

### **1.3 Methodology**

This essay will begin with a theoretical analysis of new religious movements or sects, depending on definition, whereby I intend to define common characteristics relating to manipulative organisations. I also intend to study the experiences common to members of such organisations, which I believe will benefit my later empirical study.

According to the authors Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson<sup>2</sup> this essay is to be considered deductive in its nature, due to the fact that my interpretation of empirical data will be based upon my findings gained within the theoretical analysis. That is to say that I shall be better equipped to understand and interpret the individuals associated with the military, from the theoretical analysis of manipulative religious organisations, and their members.

A qualitative approach was used in this essay. Qualitative research methods help to signify the categories, descriptions, or models that best describe some phenomenon or context of the wider world. The data collected from material such as interviews, can be of various kinds and in various combinations.<sup>3</sup> This correlates well with the way in which I have chosen to analyse Her Majesty's Royal Marine Commandos based on interviews with former Royal Marines.

Another important distinction for qualitative research methods is that they assume the perspective of the subject.<sup>4</sup> According to the authors Holme and Solvang,<sup>5</sup> the researcher

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<sup>2</sup> Wiedersheim-Paul and Eriksson, (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Larsson, (1986)

<sup>4</sup> Alvesson & Sköldberg, (1994).

<sup>5</sup> Holme & Solvang (1997).

adopting a qualitative approach, should take time to understand the respondent's own situation and from this develop a deep understanding of the problems studied.

According to the author Carlsson,<sup>6</sup> an unstructured and flexible form of study is preferable if, close proximity to the respondent is to be achieved. The respondents have been encouraged to talk freely, with minimal control throughout the interview process, which, I feel has benefited the results of my empirical data. I aimed to avoid strict adherence to the interview guide, which resulted in more detailed, and valuable reflections. Despite the unstructured nature of my qualitative research, all questions included within the interview guide were covered at each interview.

Hermeneutic is a general term for several approaches, where understanding and insight are important keywords. Within sociology hermeneutics are applied to understand social events by analysing their meanings to the human participants.

Hermeneutics can be helpful when interpreting interviews and theories, and advantageous when a researcher is looking to better understand his/her subjects actions or the actions of a group, such as a totalitarian organisation.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this essay is to gain a greater understanding for two very different totalitarian organisations and to compare the individual perceptions of former Royal Marine Commandos with the findings from my theoretical analysis. A major theme of hermeneutic, if one looks at this from a historical point of view, is that the interpretation of certain individuals can be understood in relation to the event as a whole.<sup>8</sup> For this reason alone I believe this essay to be hermeneutic in nature.

The empirical data within this essay originates solely from the interviews with former members of the British royal marines. Due to the fact that all subjects, at the time of interview, were residing within different locations in England and Ireland it was decided that all interviews be conducted via a telecommunications programme called *Skype, v2.8.0.722*.

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<sup>6</sup> Carlsson (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994.

Skype is a computer software application that allows users to make voice and video calls over the Internet. These interviews were subsequently recorded using software known as Audio Hijack Pro, v2.9.2. The information presented in the empirical chapter of this essay is therefore a true representation of the subjects' own words.

#### 1.4 Material

Sects arose as a protest movement against the established religions - just as Christianity itself was originally a sect. Though what characterises a sect? How easy is it for someone to become involved in a sect? And is there a particular type of person that is drawn to a sect? I intend to research these and similar questions, within the theoretical chapter of this essay. Some of the most important literary sources in my research into manipulative religious sects are journalist and former sect member Anders Haag's book, *Att vinna en tro och förlora sig själv*. A book that with the help of religious, psychological and sociological research looks at how individuals and groups are affected by regulating standards and common beliefs.

Håkan Järvå, psychologist and editor of the book *Sektsjuka, Bakgrund-uppbrott-behandling*, has many years experience helping people that have been banished from or have abandoned new religious movements in Sweden. The book is a review of much of the accumulated experience and research available concerning the problems facing individuals that suddenly find themselves having to exist in a world unknown.

Boken *Att leka med elden – sekternas värld*, is written by author Karl-Erik Nylund, who works as a priest in the Swedish Church and is frequently hired by the media as an expert in the field of sectarian organisations. Göran Gustafsson, a professor of sociology of religion in Lund has written several books, research papers and journals concerning various aspects of religious life in Sweden. He is also the author to the book *Tro, samfund och samhälle – Sociologiska perspektiv*, which affords its reader an interesting insight into sects and new religious movements.

Due to the fact that my interpretation of empirical data will be based upon the text material included within the theoretical analysis, I have tried to scrutinise the credibility of all literary sources used throughout this essay. One will find a large selection of material relating to the subject of manipulative religious sects, and I have attempted to select those sources that I found both credible and relevant within the scope of this essay. My personal suggestion for those wishing to further study the findings of this essay would be:

- Motivations to murder, the religious and military fanatical mind?
- The atheist at war, a look at how and why soldiers find religion at times of war?
- Blind belief, similarities between members of a manipulative religious sect and other social groups such as football hooligans and or motorcycle gangs?

It should be noted that the questions above will not be included within this text, as they do not fall within the scope of this essay.

### **1.5 Disposition**

Following the introductory chapter relating to, aim, methodology, material, disposition, research problems and background this essay will consist of a further four chapters. The second part of this essay will consist of a theoretical analysis of a manipulative religious sect, whereby I intend to define common characteristics relating to manipulative religious organisations.

The third part of this essay will consist of an empirical study of former British Royal Marine Commandos and their experiences whilst serving in Her Majesty's Royal Marines. The fourth part of this essay will include an analysis of both the theoretical and empirical data, whereby I shall be studying characteristics common to members of the two organisations, that is to say Her Majesty's Royal Marines and a manipulative religious sect. The fifth part of this essay will include a summary of my findings and personal conclusion.

### **1.6 Research limitations**

Qualitative research methods attempt to exceed the objective nature common to scientific research. This, according to the Swedish authors Holme and Solvang,<sup>9</sup> is best achieved by adopting an inner perspective of one's subject. That is to say that one does not analyse the data received from the stand point of one's own perception, but rather from the opinion of one's subject. This will, according to the authors, afford the researcher a better understanding of a phenomenon.

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<sup>9</sup> Holme, I. Solvang, B. 1997

However, in order for this method of research to succeed, the researcher should have close contact with the subject(s) being studied. That is to say a relationship that has developed over time, which according to the authors facilitates mutual respect between the researcher and his/her subjects.

For this reason alone I have chosen to limit my empirical study to former British Royal Marine Commandos, whom I have known for a number of years. As a former Royal Marine Commando I also feel that I will be better equipped to interpret and understand the data received. It should also be noted that this essay solely relies on the testimonials from former serving British Royal Marines only, as it is my belief that these individuals have had time to reflect upon their former experiences. That is to say that I am of the opinion that serving military personnel would have difficulty in valuating the experiences and environment that they currently exist in.

## **1.7 Background**

By decree of Charles II, the Duke of York and Albany's Maritime Regiment of Foot was formed on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1664. However, as the Duke of York was The Lord High Admiral, this regiment later became known as the Admiral's Regiment. The Marine Mutiny Act (1755) brought about the formation of independent Marine companies in Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham, and many historians regard this as the beginning of the present day Marine Corps.

Throughout the 18th and 19th century Her Majesty's Royal Marines played a major part in fighting to win Britain the largest empire ever created. Marines were aboard the first ships to arrive in Australia in 1788 and took part in the great victory at Trafalgar. They saw action in the Boer Wars of 1899 and in 1942 as newly formed Royal Marine Commandos, were involved in worldwide operations from Western Europe to the South Pacific. In 1982 the Royal Marines took part in one of the most ambitious amphibious landings in history to recapture the Falkland Islands. The last decade has seen the Royal Marines serving on operations throughout the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

Her Majesty's Royal Marines is a unique military institution in that officers and men train alongside each other from their first day in the Corps. Recruits see young officers training at

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<sup>10</sup> [www.royalnavy.mod.uk/royalmarines/history-and-ethos/](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/royalmarines/history-and-ethos/)

Lympstone on a daily basis and they see that the young officers have to submit to the same regimes of discipline and physical examination as themselves.<sup>11</sup> This creates a unique bond among all ranks and a strong sense of team, symbolised by the wearing of the coveted Green Beret. Royal Marines are unique individuals trained to operate in a variety of harsh environments, often under extremely arduous conditions. They are extremely proud of their history, and adhere to a long and respected ethos stressing the importance of individual commando spirit & group values.<sup>12</sup>

Sectarian movements arose as a protest movement against the established religions - just as Christianity itself was originally a sect. Though what characterises a sectarian organisation? The word *sect* comes from the Latin noun *secta* (a feminine form of a variant past participle of the verb *sequi*, to follow).<sup>13</sup> Its use was first documented as early as the 1500s whereby it was used within a religiously based context denoting the ramifications of various religious movements. Now the word has been given a somewhat broader term and in the Swedish National Encyclopaedia the word *sect* is defined as follows: a religious group that significantly diverges from society's main religious principle.<sup>14</sup> In Sweden, Jehovah's Witness, Livets ord and Filadelfiaförsamlingen in Knutby would be considered a religious group that corresponds to the definition above.

## 2. Theoretical research

In some cases, sectarian movements arose in objection to elements of their parent religion - just as Christianity itself was formed in objection to elements of early Judaism. The vast majority of new religious movements or sects have of course good intentions, and early Christianity is of course but one good example of such a sect. The sociologist Scott Mlyakawa found for example in his research of Christian separatist groups like the Methodists and Baptists denomination, that these groups rarely came into conflict with other elements of society, and were often appreciated for their contribution to the populace.<sup>15</sup>

However, in today's society the term *sect* has become synonymous with religious, solitary

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<sup>11</sup> Commando Training Centre in Lympstone, Devon, England.

<sup>12</sup> The four elements of Commando Spirit- courage, determination, unselfishness, and cheerfulness in the face of adversity.

<sup>13</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sect>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ne.se/sok/sekt?type=NE>

<sup>15</sup> Haag 2009, s28.

movements in conflict with their surrounding social environment. As a result no religious or political organisation wishes to be identified as a sect, and many religious movements deny the definitions given to them. If one thing is for certain, defining a sect or sect-like organisation is inherently difficult, as there does not exist any definitive definition of this term.<sup>16</sup>

Within the field of sociology of religion sociologists do not use the word sect in its negative sense, and prefer to define a sect in neutral terms so as not to offend or harm its members. The term *New Religious Movement* is just one example to appease all sects. However, this infuriated certain sects such as Hare Krishna whose roots can be traced as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

The German professor Max Weber (1864-1920) was one of the first sociologists to attempt to systematically define new religious movements. Weber's renowned work in the field of sociology of religion started with the essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which grew out of his field work among Protestant sects in America<sup>18</sup>. Weber claimed that one was born into the church, yet deliberately chose to become a member of a sect.

This rather simplified definition of a sect was later refined by the German protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), who remarked that one was born into the church, yet recruited or converted into a sect.<sup>19</sup> Obviously Troeltsch is defining the difference between Weber's suggestion relating to the individuals self-intent and the coercive forces at work within a sect. According to Troeltsch the church was a large organisation characterised by a hierarchical system, whilst sects in comparison were small and democratic. The priesthood and Holy Scripture defined the churches collective authority whilst a sect sought to gain authority directly from the Bible or God. Troeltsch described the church as a religious organisation consisting of all members of society in a given society, an organisation that enforced very few demands on its members. He believed that a religious sect in comparison made great demands on its members, enforcing them to follow the sect's ideological ideals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Geels 1993, s297.

<sup>17</sup> Nylund, 2004. s37.

<sup>18</sup> Gutsafsson 2000, s16.

<sup>19</sup> Nylund 2004, s38.

<sup>20</sup> Nylund 2004, s38.

The sociologist and anthropologist Benton Johnson (1901-1991) believed one could refine Troeltsch's definition further and suggested that the church was a religious group in harmony with its social surrounding, whilst a sect was a religious group in conflict with its social surrounding. However, the sociologists Stark and Bainbridge understood that in a pluralistic society one should abandon the traditional division between the church and new religious movements for the division between low-tension denominations and high-tension sects. Similarly, one could define political groups or other organisations on a similar scale. That is to say that the greater the tension between an organisation and its surrounding community, the more likely it is to be termed a new religious movement or sect.<sup>21</sup>

The author and priest Karl-Erik Nylund's typology of new religious movements further defines the difference between sects with what he terms an *open* and *closed* relationship to the outside world. Based on Bryan Wilson's (1926-2004) typology of new religious movements, Nylund summarised his findings into the following three groups:

- *Physical commune* – is a definition of a closed religious movement that insist their members live together in a commune. Members are also expected to abandon their former lives, by carrying out certain specific rituals or initiations, in accordance with the movement's set of laws. By abandoning ones former life, one is actually abandoning his/her former identity. Communication with the outside world, including family members is not encouraged and a totalitarian style regime is not uncommon within such movements.
- *Ideological commune* – unlike the definition given above an ideological commune does not require its members to live within a commune. Members are however united by their collective identity as a chosen elite, worthy of special treatment with the second coming of Christ. This movement is reluctant to communicate with the outside world and displays little regard for society. Although leadership within this movement cannot be classed as totalitarian, it is still dictatorial in relationship with a normal democratic society. Members are expected to devote the majority of their time and attention in studying the movement's ideological ideals and stringent social demands are placed upon all.

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<sup>21</sup> Haag, 2009, s29.

- *Open religious movements* – are democratic movements encouraging an open dialogue with society. Members have greater control and influence over themselves and the movement as a whole, which technically negates this form of movement being defined a sect. The majority of new religious movements and free-churches here in Sweden would fall into this category. Open religious movements do however differ from the traditional church, whereby divergence from the teachings of the Bible, can lead to exclusion.<sup>22</sup>

We have briefly acknowledged the difference between the church and a new religious movement, as well as an organisation in conflict with its surroundings as oppose too the church, which is not. We have accustomed ourselves with the term low and high-tension religious movements as well as Karl-Erik Nylund's definition of a movement with an open and closed relationship to the outside world.

For the purpose of this essay I am primarily interested in new religious movements characterised by their closed relationship to the outside world, high ethical demands upon members and totalitarian style of leadership. The former professor of sociology at Oxford University, Bryan Wilson identified one such movement typical of the definition above. In his book *Religious Sects: a sociological study* (1970) Wilson identifies several different types of new religious movements,<sup>23</sup> though it is his impartial definition of a manipulative religious sect that interests me.

- *The repentance sect* – emphasising personal repentance and a radical lifestyle change in order to improve the world around us.
- *The revolutionary sect* - believe that the world is too dilapidated to be saved and that the end is nigh. Therefore, a conversion can only be made through Christ's imminent second coming. Those that received this knowledge must spread it and help others realise the same thing. Great emphasis is placed on the so-called apocalyptic scriptures (the Book of Revelation in the New Testament and the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament). Jehovah's Witness are a good example of such a sect.
- *The introverted sect* – also believe that the world is too dilapidated to be saved and that the end is nigh, though choose to have as little contact as possible with non-believers so as not to be corrupted by their immorality. The Plymouth Brethren movement are

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<sup>22</sup> Nylund 2004, s44.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, Bryan. *Religious sects: a sociological study* 1970, (Nylund, 2004, s42).

typical of such a sect.<sup>24</sup>

- *The manipulative sect* – like most other sects, they have a very firm view that the accepted way of life is totally wrong. They do not reject the values of others but rather see themselves as religious perfectionists that have experienced and or understand the truth. The movements own scripture and teachings are often considered superior to that of the church and members are often coerced to view themselves and the world in which they live in, in a completely different way to before. That is to say that ones own identity is often redefined. The Scientology church, Jehovah Witness, Hare Krishna, The Unification church, Livets Ord and Filadelfiaförsamlingen in Knutby are typical examples of such movements.
- *The thaumaturgical sect* – show little interest in society and focus instead on miracles, health and success, which are central to all sect members. This is achieved through spiritual mediums at a spiritual gathering or séance for example. Wilson notes that this type of sect is common within the third-world.
- *The reformist sect* – common to Europe this sect is primarily interested in improving society through means such as social and ethical debate. This sect also displays an interest for religious mysticism. Kväkarrörelsen<sup>25</sup> or Swedish friends are a typical example of such a sect.
- *The Utopian sect* – according to Wilson these movements aim to influence the outside world by creating their own alternative communities as role models for society.

The majority of new religious movements or sects have of course good intentions and pose little, if any problem for their members and or society as a whole. However, there does exist a minority of movements with uncompromising dogmatic leaders that do pose potential risk to their members and surrounding social environment. The author and priest Nylund noted that manipulative sects are notorious for trying to erase ones individual identity and replace it with a pseudo-identity that can be controlled by an uncompromising dogmatic leader or ideology.<sup>26</sup> In an attempt to identify attributes typical for manipulative religious sects, Nylund the Swedish church's expert on new religious movements identified the following characteristics:<sup>27</sup>

- *Aggression* – internal criticism may not occur and dissenting voices are not tolerated,

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<sup>24</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth\\_Brethren](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth_Brethren)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.kvakare.se/engelska.shtml>

<sup>26</sup> Nylund 2004, s41.

<sup>27</sup> Nylund 2004, s58.

violence has been known to be used to coerce members into accepting an organisations doctrine. Nylund continues that members are unable to express their own views for fear of being punished and so accept the given doctrine. This a phenomenon that can be best explained using the American social psychologist Leon Festinger's dissonance theory that explains why people tend to change or adapt their views and values accordingly. For example a person who just spent too much money on a new car might decide that the new vehicle is much less likely to break down than his or her old car. This belief may or may not be true, but it would reduce dissonance and make the person feel better.

- *Aversion* - criticism is directed towards the outside world in an attempt to distance the relationship between sect members and outsiders. By outsiders Nylund means parents and other family members, other churches, help organisations, non-believers and society in general.
- *Alienation* – the sect isolates itself from society and other religious organisations, and believes that the accepted way of life is totally wrong. In order to illustrate their rejection of society a movement will establish a commune where all members are expected to settle. Members can also be organised into an ideological commune so as to affirm the sect's doctrine and discourage interaction with outsiders. It is common among manipulative sects to try and neutralise ones identity and replace it with a pseudo-identity that can be controlled by an uncompromising dogmatic leader or ideology.
- *Absolute truth* – as a consequence for those sects fulfilling the first three criteria above, the truth and or accepted way of life only exists within the sect. This is very apparent among movements such as The Church of Scientology, Hare Krishna, Jehovah Witness, Livets ord and Filadelfiaförsamlingen in Knutby, whereby great animosity is displayed towards former members.

Also worth noting is the English sociologist Roy Wallis' study of the Church of Scientology, which as already noted is a movement characterised by their closed relationship to the outside world, high ethical demands upon members and totalitarian style of leadership. In Wallis' study he defines the following seven attributes typical for this style of sect. However, unlike the previous definitions before, it is my belief that Wallis' study affords one greater understanding for individuals associated with manipulative religious sects.<sup>28</sup>

- *Voluntary organisation* - where membership has to be earned either by process of

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<sup>28</sup> Nylund, 2004, s48.

initiation as practised by Hare Krishna or educational study as with the Church of Scientology.

- *Selective* – members are expected to follow certain ethical and ideological ideals, which according to Wallis defines the sect as excluding. Failure to follow group norms may result in membership being withdrawn.
- *A spiritual elite* - members are encouraged to see themselves as a hand picked elite who is in possession of special knowledge.
- *In conflict with society* – as a consequence of the above sects are usually in conflict with their surrounding social environment.
- *Everyone is equal* – according to Wallis all members are valued equally though a hierarchal system does exist and it must be adhered to.
- *Strong ethical values* – high demands are made on members to adhere to the sects' ethical and ascetic norms. The day is compartmentalised and members are obligated to attend service as well as sacrifice their leisure time if required.
- *Absolute loyalty* – the sect demands absolute loyalty and members have very little influence over matters concerning themselves and the organisation. Wallis refers to this attribute as the sects' totalitarian quality.

Irrespective of the self-regarding, individualistic society we now live in today our social necessity to live and interact within a group/society can be traced back to our earliest days. This may explain why we find it so difficult to be excluded, left out or even worse intimidated for not conforming to the social norm. It is apparent that within a secularist society many of us are certain to experience feelings of abandonment at some point in our lives.

A natural phenomenon, neglect can occur in a large city or small community, at work, in school or in the home. In the West, the debate concerning the exclusion of certain groups and individuals has long been discussed, yet a difference of opinion relating its cause remains. Experts are in agreement however regarding the subsequent consequence of excluding certain groups and individuals, and many suggest that social exclusion often leads to religious extremism, formation of gangs, criminality and violence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Haag 2009, s.51

Taken that experts are in agreement as to the consequence of social exclusion, does there then exist a common factor as to why individuals might choose to embrace such extremist groups. The sociologist Bryan Wilson argues that it is impossible to define a homogeneous characteristic among new religious movements as they all aspire to very different ideals and approaches. It is therefore impossible to define a homogeneous characteristic among the individuals that embrace or are recruited within these movements. We must therefore accept that members may have very divergent motives for embracing such a movement.<sup>30</sup>

### **3. Empirical research**

The empirical chapter of this essay was based upon recorded interviews conducted with two former royal marines and a former royal marines officer. This chapter is based solely on the information gathered from these individuals, who have all served a minimum of 5 yrs and more in various units of HM British royal marines. Information from the interviews has been compiled under nine main headings, aggression, aversion, alienation, voluntary organisation, selective, elite, equality, strong ethical values and absolute loyalty. Interview responses are presented in a continuous form, under the appropriate heading. The purpose of this approach was to present the information in such a way that best served the purpose of this paper, and avoided individual respondents being identified within the text. Anonymity has been an important part in my study where sensitive information may have been discussed during certain interviews. In cases where there is a risk that a respondent may be identified, I have contacted the person in question for his approval.

#### **Aggression**

Q. Were you free to express your opinions or give critic?

You would never tell an officer to his face that what he'd done was not particular good, but rather have a whinge about it with your mates. Speaking among your mates allows you to get things off your chest, and clear your system otherwise you pretty much have to take it on the chin and do as your told. Being within such a close knit environment you do not want to be having confrontation with people you work with, especially the officers.

Not fully, no. You don't really have a choice as you have to follow orders. It's not like being a civilian whereby you have a choice. If you don't follow orders you would probably face

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<sup>30</sup> Göran 2000, s.122

disciplinary charges... You may also lose your status within the group and or respect of your colleagues. Although I have never personally felt as though I could not express myself freely.

As an officer I was encouraged to give my opinion in relation to the performance of other marines, tactics, strategy, the corps' evolution etc. I'd also encourage my marines to express their opinion. Dogmatic style leadership is not something that works within the royal marines, because we expect the common marine to be able to think for himself. However, that is only true to a certain extent and officers, particularly non-commissioned officers will not be encouraged to give their opinion at brigade level. I personally was never afraid to speak out which was considered a positive attribute, though only within the right context. Most officers however would not speak out or ask the opinion of the lower ranks. It is all really dependant upon the situation and or officer in charge. I would say that my opinion as a junior officer was sought, but not as frequently as in the latter part of my career... Internal criticism of the corps was appreciated but only if constructive. I did not personally fear or consider the consequence of being openly critical of the organisation or certain aspects of it, however, a lot of officers don't openly criticise the corps because they are more concerned with their career path.

Q. How is the Marine Corps doctrine enforced?

Through fear, before you go to a commando unit your instructors generally tell you how to behave and to basically keep your mouth shut, learn and speak only when spoken to. And it's pretty clear when you get to your unit that that is probably the best way to do things. It is to make you understand that you have still got a lot to learn and that there is a hierarchal system dictating that the new recruits are at the bottom of the pile. Sometimes a kick-in, fear or humiliation is used to enforce a doctrine. (Interviewer) "Have you personally had experience of that"? Yes, I wouldn't say I was physically assaulted, but the threat of violence was there if I didn't shut up and get what was coming to me, so I took the easy option and shut up.

I would say via official lectures as well as each other as a result of the strong bonds formed by living and socialising together. You also have the older marines passing their knowledge on to the younger marines. I have known of incidents where violence has been used, though I have never experienced this personally.

It is interesting because the ethos is first of all created in the mind of the individual and carried out through self-discipline as a result of commando training. The whole basis of commando training is based upon looking after yourself and then your mate, which is why we train blokes to be both physically and mentally resilient and capable... The core's basic unit is the marine and it is the marine's self-discipline rather than enforced discipline, which is important. However, if things were to get out of hand in a section it would be the corporal's job to deal with it, which would be enforced through a series of conversations up and through the chain of command, leading to a warning or ultimately services no longer required. However, in practice it is not unknown for another marine to correct another marine's wrongs. If a marine is not fulfilling what is expected of him then it is up to his fellow marines to help him out. It was not unknown for violence to be used in such situations, although in my experience we never had to deal with such issues due to the personal self-pride and respect of the marines I worked with.

### **Aversion**

Q. How would you describe the Marines relation to the surrounding social environment?

If you look at a town where the marines are based you will find a lot of animosity towards the marines. A lot of the local people do not like marines being there, due to little incidents such as fights, which have left a lot of bad feeling between the marines and the locals. Because marines can be rather boisterous and in a group on the piss there is potential there for fallouts with the local people. I don't think that local people appreciate or understand what the marines do... Marines are professional and full of pride and it can be looked at that civvies haven't got all that. Marines sometimes get an elitist attitude towards civvies and consider them second-class and for whatever reason think less of them. I think that that is quite a common attribute and you will get marines who hate civvies, just because there civilians.

I think I would define the marines as a clique, I mean if a group of marines were out on the town, they would not wish to mingle with others. They'd see themselves as above everybody else or rather set apart from others. I'd also say there is potential for conflict between the two groups, especially if civilians were to try and mix with the marines or if the marines were to feel threatened in any way... I think marines generally view civilians as lazy, dirty, and thieving just not as worthy or honourable as a marine... I think if marines see themselves as above everybody else it gives them a certain confidence in themselves and as a group... I also think there is potential for conflict in the home, especially if a marine changes after joining up and the corps becomes the most important thing in their lives. I mean the corps is

described as a family, which in some cases can take over from their real families. I think a lot of families fear a change of identity when their sons join up and that they will become arrogant, and look down on them almost.

That would depend; traditionally armed forces garrison towns would have a volatile relationship, especially with the local male population aged between 16–40yrs of age. Among royal marine establishments there does exist some friction with the male population, which is natural, though this generally depends on the town in question. For example within the town of Lympstone in Devon there exists very little friction due to the large number of former royal marines and their families living within close proximity of the base. However, Arbroath in Scotland was an anomaly because it was an area experiencing economic hardship and the potential for trouble was high.

### **Alienation**

Q. How are the marines geographically organised and how does this effect, the individual, and the team, if at all?

There are two commando units to the south of England and one up in Scotland, Arbroath. Due to the location of my parent's house it was very difficult for me to get home whilst on leave, so generally speaking I stayed on campus in Arbroath. As a result you become detached and loose contact with your friends back home and you do not see your family very often. In a way the Corps becomes your second home and adopted family. There are a small proportion of married marines that choose to live in the local town but generally speaking everybody lives on camp. We do everything together and live in each other pockets really. You become very dependent upon that sort of structure/ routine, not having to fend for yourself. You are looked after and form very strong bonds with people and learn to become very tolerant of one another. This becomes the norm so you don't really like to, going home at a weekend takes you away from that normality. This enforces the bond between the lads and because you spend less time with civvies, this divide increases.

Marines can live anywhere within the British Isles though when they are working they all live together in a camp with other marines. The hierarchy prefers this arrangement though not the individual marine and I am of the opinion that most marines would prefer to live on the outside. However, the majority do live on camp, as it is far more practical to do so... I think this serves to indoctrinate marines more into the ethos of the corps, whereas living outside

would allow one to better integrate into society. Living on camp isolates you from society making it harder for both groups (civilians/marines) to understand one another. Living together also serves to strengthen the bonds between marines at work.

Unlike the majority of brigade units based in the south, affording marines the ability to set up a home in close proximity to their place of work... Arbroath, based in Scotland is an anomaly in that marines drafted to this unit tend to leave their families and children behind, which can cause obvious problems at times. I think that marines are fairly level headed and reserve a quality of individualism. However, living within a commune, the reality is that most marines regard the core as their family or at least extended family and gain a lot of comfort from that. Certainly marines that have spent more than two or three years out of training, see themselves as distinctive from the rest of society due to the formative training received as a royal marine... I have always been able to trust my fellow royal marines, whereas on the outside one experiences a role reversal whereby you learn to find that you cannot trust others, but rather that trust has to be earned. In some respects you are disadvantaged when leaving the royal marines, having lived in a paradise of strength and bond, community and shared hardship, which I feel creates a surreal, over emotional, nostalgic attachment to the marines. It's the realisation that a brilliant chapter of your life, working with brilliant, like-minded people, which will never again be regained.

### **Voluntary organisation**

How does one become a marine?

There is an initial selection course and subsequent commando training lasting 9 months. On successful completion you receive your Green Beret and then join a fighting unit, which sees you as an official part of the family.

Having decided to join one begins selection and if successful continues on to commando training, this involves a long process of commitment starting long before you join. You can't simply just decide to become a marine.

The first step is to acquire the correct mind set, which is 'can do'. Then one applies to the royal marines and on successful completion of the potential recruit course, you will be given a date to start commando training, though the correct mind set is essential for successful completion of the course... It's a voluntary organisation. Any able-bodied male between the ages of 16-32 can become a royal marine. However, you must have the correct attitude and

mind set and the fact is that 99.9% of the civilian population do not have that mind set.

### **Selective**

Is there a doctrine you are expected to abide to? What is the consequence, if any, for not following these norms?

When in training there is a lot of physical punishment dished out such as *beastings*, to enforce ideals, such as teamwork, discipline & trust. The training team tend to single out any weak candidates in order to make or break them. They also try and make you turn on the weaker ones to sort of test that teamwork ethic. If somebody does something wrong, they'll punish everyone while that person sits and watches, which makes you turn on the weaker ones. This singles out the candidates that really want to be there from those that don't. The consequence of not adapting, ultimately, is being booted out.

I think we are expected to abide by certain ideals, such as to train harder than anyone else, especially other comparable units in the armed forces, pushing yourself further and harder than anyone else. Selflessness, courage and cheerfulness under adversity are all considered good attributes to abide by. Failure to adhere to this ethos may see an individual being shunned, or even having formal disciplinary charges brought against them resulting in a fine, imprisonment or discharged.

The royal marines doctrine is taught throughout training, though maintained by the individual through self-discipline rather than other external forces. However, the ultimate consequence for not abiding to these norms would be removal, services no longer required.

### **Elite**

How do marines view themselves in relation to others? Could anyone become a marine?

I would say that marines consider themselves to be the best and better than others, because of what they've been through. We are proud of our high standards and professionalism and marines might look down upon civvies that are not particularly clean or act in a way that would be frowned upon within the corps. Stuff that would be frowned upon by other marines

would be appearance, long hair, piercing, scruffy clothes, overweight, poor attitude, people with no pride... No, I don't think so. The proof is in the pudding, only a small percentage of recruits complete the course and in the press they make a point of stressing that 99% need not apply.

Marines can obviously have normal relationships with others, though they do see themselves as different and special in some way, especially if they are in groups. Marines tend to believe that they have stronger personal attributes such as strength, discipline, courage and determination and as a result believe themselves to be worthier members of society... No, I do not think anyone can become a marine.

I don't feel as though we regard ourselves as an elite, because an elitist attitude breeds complacency. However, the reality is, is that the royal marines are extremely special and is an elite. This is due to a number of factors such as the exceptional quality of manpower, higher levels of intelligence, high standard of officers, exceptional quality of training and our ability to operate self sufficiently in all corners of the globe.

## **Equality**

How do marines view themselves in relation to other marines? Does a hierarchy exist?

I would say everyone has achieved that level, that cut-off point where you have either passed your training or you haven't. And regardless of where you end up in the marines you have always got to that level. And because of that you regard other marines as equal to you... There does exist a level of respect, which is basically based upon time served. When you first start for example you don't really know what it is all about and have no experience, where as the older lads that have been around longer command more respect because they have more experience.

I think because all marines have gone through the same experience, they all have this common respect for each other, because they've all suffered the same. Which I think gives you a common purpose. Also age, being approximately the same age rather than different age groups and walks of life, races even, it's mainly young, white males, they're recruiting from the same pool really, so there's a common bond in that respect. A group of marines will have a certain look, which will stand out against other civilian groups... There does however exist a hierarchal system and the blokes that have been in longer often attain greater status.

Marines have to be naturally humble, self-effacing and will generally disregard themselves as being the remarkable individuals that they actually are. This is the result of internal dumbing down of their attributes and abilities. Furthermore due to the fact that marines as well as officers train together, which is unique within the armed forces, a unique bond and levelling among individuals is created. However, there does exist a hierarchy among the lower ranks dependant upon the amount of time served and experience gained.

### **Strong ethical values**

What is a typical day for a marine?

There is generally a set routine. Normally begins with breakfast followed by some physical exercise, such as a run. You would then do some sort of training, which may be continued after lunch, then the day is done. Although you're paid 24hrs a day and your life is dictated wholly by your officers, so you just do as you're told really. You make the most of your downtime and just accept whatever is asked of you.

When not on exercise or operations there is usually a set routine comprising of a briefing, fitness training, and lectures before and after lunch and then sport... You have very little influence over your free time.

A general day on camp would consist of physical exercise in the morning, shower and change in preparation for lectures, followed by lunch and time spent down at the range in the afternoon. All in all it would consist of a mixture of physical training, military training and weapon training.

### **Absolute loyalty**

Would you describe a marine as loyal? What influence if any does one have over matters concerning oneself and the organisation?

Yes, I think that marines are loyal bunch... I'd say I have no influence over the organisation and not a lot over myself. You've always got rules and regulations that determine how you live your life. Even during your down time or while away from your unit you are still expected to behave... as you are representing the corps.

I wouldn't say you have any influence over yourself or the marines as an organisation. I would however say that the majority of marines are very loyal to the corps.

I'd say that marines do have an influence over their day and are actively given tasks of responsibility in relation to their training programme, however this often depends on the schedule and available time. With regards to the organisation as a whole, marines and officers have zero influence over matters concerning the Her Majesty's Royal Marines... I would consider both marines and officers extremely loyal. Most officers are very loyal to their marines and the marines I worked with are very loyal to me. This is a phenomenon that continues long after one has left the royal marines.

#### **4. Analysis**

In the analytical chapter of this essay I discuss my interpretation of the empirical data from within the boundaries of the theoretical information presented. The analysis is compiled under the following nine main headings, aggression, aversion, alienation, voluntary organisation, selective, elite, equality, strong ethical values and absolute loyalty.

##### **Aggression**

Considering Nylund's definition of a manipulative sect from the standpoint of what Nylund terms aggression, I feel as though certain parallels may be drawn with the empirical data. Nylund notes that internal criticism may not occur and that dissenting voices are not tolerated. This would seem to be reflected among the findings of the empirical data. Although there does seem to exist a slight difference of opinion dependant upon the subjects status and rank. That is to say that the former royal marines officer did feel as though he and his fellow marines were encouraged to offer their opinion and critic. However, I am of the opinion that this solely depended upon to whom and from whom the opinion or critic was given.

The other subjects did express an ability to speak freely among themselves, but less so, if at all, with their command. This would certainly suggest to me that a hierarchal system exists within a manipulative sect as within HM royal marines. It would also suggest that the freedom of speech is restricted to some varying degree.

Furthermore, although the royal marines teaches its recruits the importance of self-discipline and self-pride in relation to maintaining the high standards expected of all individuals, and despite the fact that there exists policies and routines to aid those individuals who fall short of these high expectations, it became apparent that the use of fear, violence or humiliation, albeit uncommon, was used to affirm these ideals.

Although this cannot be considered the norm, it does happen, affirming Nylund's suspicion that violence has been known to be used to coerce members of a manipulative sect into accepting an organisation's doctrine.

### **Aversion**

Nylund notes that a manipulative sect often directs criticism towards the outside world in an attempt to distance the relationship between sect members and outsiders. The empirical data shows that there does in fact exist an obvious disinclination towards certain elements of the local surrounding population, which would indeed confirm Nylund's suspicion. However, on reflection there seems to exist a difference of opinion within the theoretical and empirical data as to the reasons for this criticism.

Nylund assumes that a sect simply aims to distance the relationship between sect members and the outside world in order to increase an individual's dependency upon the sect in question. In contrast, it is my understanding that the empirical data proves that this disinclination towards elements of the outside world does not serve to distance and diminish one's independence, but rather promote the marines own mind set and self-perception of oneself, which has the effect of affirming the understanding that one is special or better in some way in comparison to the outside world.

Although criticism towards certain elements of the local surrounding population does exist, it is my understanding that the reasons for doing so are quite different.

### **Alienation**

Nylund notes that a manipulative sect will often establish a commune where members are expected to settle, in an effort to isolate itself from society. Members may also be organised into an ideological commune so as to affirm the sect's doctrine and discourage interaction with the outside world.

Dissimilarly to a manipulative sect royal marines are free to reside wherever they please. However, due to a variety of individual factors the empirical data shows that marines generally tend to reside within very close proximity to their place of work. This would according to Nylund seem to reflect the physical attributes of a physical commune. However, considering the fact that the royal marines do not dictate an individual's place of residence, I am unable to suggest that the two organisations are similar in this respect.

However, what is interesting to me is the result of living within a physical commune. As illustrated within the empirical data living within a geographical boundary can have the effect of affirming certain ideologies, strengthening bonds, and distancing one from ones former friends and family. And as later conveyed by all subjects interviewed, the royal marines tend to become your adopted/extended family. Although I noted this tendency and increasing dependency upon the royal marines, one subject best described this phenomenon with the following statement.

“In some respects you are disadvantaged when leaving the royal marines, having lived in a paradise of strength and bond, community and shared hardship, which I feel creates a surreal, over emotional, nostalgic attachment to the marines. It is the realisation that a brilliant chapter of your life, working with brilliant, like-minded people, which will never again be regained”.

To summarise, it is my belief that the effect of living within a commune evokes very similar results, regardless of an individual's affiliation to a manipulative sect or military elite. However, due to the fact that HM royal marines do not dictate an individual's place of residence, I am unable to suggest that this organisation conforms to Nylund's definition of alienation.

### **Absolute truth**

As a result of fulfilling the first three criteria above, Nylund notes that the truth or accepted way of life can only exist within the sect. However, due to the inconclusive data relating to the motivation of these two very different organisations I am reluctant to affirm this attribute to HM royal marines.

## **Voluntary organisation**

It became apparent within the empirical data that membership into the royal marines is in fact acquired by way of self commitment, mind set and arduous training which continues throughout ones career. With the all encompassing fear of failure and ultimately discharge, services no longer required, I am in no doubt that the royal marines can be defined a voluntary organisation.

## **Selective**

Wallis notes that certain ethical and ideological ideals are to be adhered to if one is to define a religious movement as selective. The empirical data shows that similarly to a manipulative sect the royal marines are also expected to abide to certain ethical and ideological ideals. This according to Wallis defines the sect as excluding and as one subject interviewed noted, weaker individuals who for whatever reason do not fulfil this obligation can be singled out. Likewise, the ultimate consequence for not conforming to these high demands may result in disciplinary charges, imprisonment or even discharge. Considering the evidence illustrated within the empirical data, I feel it fair to define HM royal marines as selective, in accordance with Wallis' definition.

## **Elite**

Wallis also notes that members of a manipulative sect often regard themselves as religious perfectionists, a handpicked elite in possession of special knowledge. Similarly to the definition above the empirical data illustrated that marines also regard themselves as different or special in relation to the outside world. Furthermore, recent recruitment campaigns within the media noted that 99.9% of the population need not apply, suggesting that this was in fact a very special elite. However, unlike a manipulative sect the empirical data did not support the fact that this was due to the possession of some special knowledge, but rather ones physical and emotional attributes. Despite this obvious divergence the evidence would seem to suggest that both the marines and members of a manipulative sect do in fact regard themselves as somewhat special or different in relation to other members of society.

## **In conflict with society**

As a consequence of the above Wallis contests that manipulative sects are usually in conflict with their social environment. However, the empirical data has shown that although a conflict does exist, it tends to be targeted towards a specific element of society, namely young

males. For this reason alone I am unable to confirm that the royal marines as an organisation are in conflict with their surrounding environment as suggested by Wallis.

### **Equality**

According to Wallis all members of a sect are considered equal, although a hierarchal system does exist. Likewise the empirical data illustrated that despite official rank there was strong evidence of equality and respect for ones fellow marines, solidified by their common hardships and experiences. Similarly, despite the official hierarchal system there existed a further hierarchy dependant upon the time served and experience gained by individual marines. Considering the evidence I feel that Wallis' definition of equality also applies to HM royal marines.

### **Strong ethical values**

The empirical data clearly illustrates that the British royal marines compartmentalise their day, accepting whatever is required of them even at the expense of their free time. As previously illustrated the marines also adhere to certain ethical ideals, no not ascetic as their exists no common religious belief or doctrine. However, according to Järvå author of the book *Sektsjuka – bakgrund, uppbrott, behandling* ascetic ideals do not have any real bearing when defining manipulative organisations.<sup>31</sup> For this reason alone I feel it would be fair to say that Wallis' definition corresponds well with the empirical evidence.

### **Absolute loyalty**

Wallis noted that a sect demands absolute loyalty and that members have very little influence over themselves or the organisation. Despite the fact that the empirical data also illustrated that marines and officers alike have very little to no influence over themselves or the organisation for which they worked, they differed considerably in relation to the demands made upon individuals.

The empirical data shows that unlike the coercive forces at play within a sect, loyalty within the marines grows quite naturally with time and of ones own accord. Furthermore, and quite unlike former sect members, the loyalty to the marines continues long after an individual has left the organisation. Despite the obvious similarities, the empirical data illustrates that the royal marines do not demand but rather earn the respect and loyalty of its members. I am

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<sup>31</sup> Järvå 2009. 19

therefore unable to affirm the assumption that the royal marines demand absolute loyalty, which according to Wallis is essential if an organisation is to be termed totalitarian.

## **5. Conclusion**

The aim of this essay was to confirm my earlier suspicions and determine whether there did in fact exist certain parallels between the British royal marines and a religious sect.

Interestingly, I found that there did in fact exist many similar parallels between the two very different organisations. For example, similarly to a manipulative religious organisation members of the British royal marines tend to live within what Nylund termed a physical commune. Although the experiences of individuals living within such an environment were very similar the motivations for doing so were quite different. This phenomenon seemed to effect the whole study, and although I have determined that individual experiences such as feelings of elitism, bond, equality and loyalty amongst others are very similar, there does exist some fundamental differences. As I have highlighted, living within a commune evokes very similar feelings and experiences for the individual, regardless of ones affiliation to a manipulative sect or military elite. However, due to the fact that the British royal marines do not dictate an individual's place of residence, I was unable to suggest that this organisation conformed to the strict definitions applicable to a manipulative religious sect. Likewise, the empirical data illustrated that unlike the coercive forces at play within a sect, the royal marines do not demand but rather earn the respect and loyalty of its members. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the royal marines attempted to erase ones identity and replaces it with a pseudo-identity that could be controlled by an uncompromising dogmatic leader or ideology. On the contrary the royal marines seemed to encourage a quality of individualism among its men.

To summarise I would say that the empirical data to some extent confirms certain associations between these two very different organisations, however, there exists some fundamental differences. As a result I was unable to conclusively confirm any parallels between these two organisations, based on the strict definitions used within the scope of this essay.

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