‘School is everywhere’? British military children, ‘turbulence’ and the meanings of post-war mobility

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ABSTRACT
This article traces the emergence of the term ‘turbulence’ to describe the educational disruption experienced by military children after 1945. It asks why the term came to dominate professional discussion of military education so much from the late 1960s onwards and the wider tensions it exposed in post-war Britain: between welfare and warfare; ‘tradition’ and progressiveness; individuals and communities; families and institutions. Moreover, this article argues that childhood mobility in the late twentieth century was at times refracted through assumptions about class and rank, as well as issues such as immigration and intelligence. Finally, this article uses oral history interviews to reflect on how turbulence itself became part of the life stories of many former service children, offering ‘composure’, explanation and even a community through which to understand their sometimes-disrupted education and childhoods.

Introduction
In 1965, the Ministry of Defence produced a film entitled School Is Everywhere, designed to inform civilian teachers joining the British Families Education Service (BFES) about the children of British military personnel they would be teaching. It began:

Army schoolchildren: as much at home on a Hong Kong ferry as on a London bus. In Germany, not every road leads to Berlin. For David and Alison [children pictured on screen] this one leads straight to school. Last term, it might have been a bus ride to Bielefeld. Today it could be a drive across the desert, but assembly is always at nine, whether it be Aden or Malta. These are the children of servicemen. For them, school is everywhere. Wherever their fathers may be stationed. Children to whom the most foreign of all countries may well be Britain.¹

The children in the film moved across the constellation of post-war British military bases. From Bielefeld to Berlin, Cyprus to Singapore, their families moved every two to three years when their military parent (usually, but not always, their father) was posted. School Is Everywhere depicted life on these bases as deeply enriching to military children, helping them to become ‘adaptable and self-possessed’; as one teacher put it, military

¹School Is Everywhere. Sponsored by Central Office of Information and Ministry of Defence (Army) (London: World Wide Pictures, 1965). BFI identifier: 70,652. It should be noted that children of some British civilians working for the military often also attended BFES/SCEA schools and a small proportion of children of other nationalities in some locations.
children had ‘a broader perspective, a more open disposition, easier relationships, a greater maturity and independence of approach’.² But beyond their personal and emotional development, the film argued that, through their international mobility, the children had ‘a greater understanding of the world and its people, [as] future citizens of the whole world of tomorrow’. They would bring these experiences back to Britain when they ‘take their place in the country that will, one day, be home’.³ So not only were military children responsible, ‘future citizens’ of the British state, as post-war children were frequently characterised, but by 1965 they were global ones too, whose new, dynamic international outlook could again make them valuable assets to Britain in the years to come.⁴ Of course, as one teacher later expressed in an oral history interview, moving schools and curricula meant ‘they [military children] might have done the Romans a bit more often’ than civilian children, but that did not detract from the ‘really good education’ they received overall.⁵

Yet this positive vision of the education of service children obscured a more complicated history. In the same year as School Is Everywhere imagined British military school-children as ‘future citizens of the whole world’, a Ministry of Education report highlighted the severe problems that regularly moving schools could create for teachers and pupils, when home, neighbourhood and school could all change overnight.⁶ Two years later, the famous 1967 Plowden Report – Children and Their Primary Schools – highlighted service children specifically as a ‘special group’ that was hard to support in schools, suggesting that there was ‘evidence of serious backwardness among them’.⁷ From the late 1960s, educators increasingly used the term ‘turbulence’ to describe a whole host of problems associated with moving schools frequently.⁸ Rather than ‘adaptable and self-possessed’, some educationalists argued that military children could develop real problems through such mobility, ranging all the way from poor mathematical skill to longer-term psychological imbalance.⁹ J. M. B. Duckett, who taught British children in Dortmund, painted a particularly doleful image of the hardened military child moving to a new posting: ‘Unlike their counterparts in mainstream education, they troop dry-eyed and resigned from their former halls of learning to whatever school has been ordained for them’.¹⁰ Some former military children identified with these descriptions when reflecting on their childhoods later in life: as a civil servant’s child who spent

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² G. E. Bettsworth, ‘Turbulence’, SCEA Bulletin 8 (Autumn 1974): 19, British Families Education Service Archive, Institute of Education Archive, UCL (hereafter IoE), BFE/A/3/1/8.
³ School Is Everywhere.
⁴ Laura King, ‘Future Citizens: Cultural and Political Conceptions of Children in Britain, 1930s-1950s’, Twentieth Century British History 27, no. 3 (2016): 389–411; Jennifer Crane, ‘Gifted Children, Youth Culture, and Popular Individualism in 1970s and 1980s Britain’, Historical Journal (advanced access, 2022): 1–24.
⁵ Interview with Ollie W. with Grace Huxford, October 4, 2018, BAOR/GH/22, British Military Bases in Germany project, University of Bristol Research Data Storage Facility (hereafter UoB RDSF). Data available on formal request.
⁶ Ministry of Education (External Relations and Central Branch), Memorandum of Teaching Appointments in Army Children’s Schools Overseas, January 2, 1965, IoE, BFE/B/3/27.
⁷ Central Advisory Council for Education (England), Children and their Primary Schools (London: HMSO, 1967), 60.
⁸ Dudley Blane argued the term was first used by Wing Commander J. V. Firth in 1969; see Dudley Blane, ‘The Education of Children from Military Families’, SCEA Bulletin 21 (Autumn 1982): 5, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/21. First mentioned in SCEA Bulletin in its first issue, see J. V. Firth, ‘Service Organization and the Service Child’, SCEA Bulletin 1 (December 1970): 10–11, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/1.
⁹ D. C. Blane, ‘Turbulence and Attainment in Mathematics’, SCEA Bulletin 3 (January 1972): 24, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/3; Pamela Coleman, ‘Do Children Suffer from a Nomadic Way of Life?’, The Times, May 22, 1968, 8; H. J. F. Taylor, ‘Report on a Visit of Six Senior Educational Psychologists to Germany’, SCEA Bulletin 6 (September 1973): 20–2, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/6.
¹⁰ J. M. B. Duckett, ‘Turbulence and Self-Concepts in a Service School’, SCEA Bulletin 6 (September 1973): 12, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/6.
many years on military bases, Michael wondered whether moving on too quickly had impacted on his ability to make friends, worried he would just have to leave them at some point.\textsuperscript{11}

From the early 1970s ‘turbulence’, its effects and its very existence became popular and contentious subjects in education journals, doctoral theses and newspaper commentary. So great was the interest that one headteacher at a school in Cyprus in fact complained that ‘we are bombarded with requests for information and facilities for allowing pupils to fill in fatuous questionnaires’.\textsuperscript{12} Military children were popular subjects for UK researchers interested in mobility and education, being both a statistically significant community of learners and relatively accessible and familiar.\textsuperscript{13} But some educationalists firmly rejected the term, what they felt it implied about military schools and the effect of such ‘jargon’ on education more broadly. Yet whilst the existence and effects of turbulence have been routinely debated ever since, the emergence of the term itself and the issues it raised have rarely been placed in their historical context beyond the military setting. Nor have historians shown what turbulence can reveal about wider histories of education, childhood, mobility and even the tensions of the post-war welfare state after 1945, nor its significance to individuals and the narratives they give to their mobile childhoods.

Turbulence, this article argues, tells a far broader post-war history than simply that of military children. In the shadow of both the 1944 Education Act and Britain’s changing foreign and military policy, the education of service children exposed the convergence – and at times collision – of the fundamental forces and values that shaped post-war British politics and society: welfare and warfare; ‘tradition’ and progressiveness; individuals and communities; families and institutions.\textsuperscript{14} As this article shows, by the 1970s when the turbulence debate reached its height, these at-times uneasy relationships were under real strain, exposing deep divisions not only over education, but also over what British education and society should look like in the wake of significant social changes and the emergence of a new ‘permissive society’. For instance, it was UK ‘inner city’ secondary schools, the harshest critics of turbulence argued, that displayed the worst consequences of ‘this “turbulence” affliction’, rather than military schools. They condemned ‘frequent domestic mobility’ that resulted from changes in employment patterns, but they also offered ill-defined critiques of the influence of immigration on British education too.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11}Interview with Michael C. with Joel Morley, October 21, 2019, BAOR/JM/04, UoB RSDF.
\textsuperscript{12}Bettsworth, ‘Turbulence’, 19.
\textsuperscript{13}Academic research into the existence of turbulence included Ronald Dutton’s research into mobility and education; see Ron Dutton, ‘Mobility and Geographic Learning’, SCEA Bulletin 16 (Autumn 1978): 32–6, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/16; Ron Dutton, ‘Geographic Learning and Mobility: A Study of Service Children’ (PhD diss., University of Bath, 1978); Norman Black, ‘Turbulence and Schooling: An Investigation into the Effects of Service Life on the Personality and Attitudes to School of Primary School Children from Army and RAF Families’ (PhD diss., University of Reading, 1984); and, more recently, Ceri Lindsay Brown, ‘Exploring the Schooling Experiences of Turbulent Children from Low Income Families’ (PhD diss., University of Bath, 2011).
\textsuperscript{14}Many of these themes are explored in depth in histories of childhood and children in the post-war period; see Michal Shapira, The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War and the Making of the Democratic Self in Post-War Britain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 203; Sally Alexander, ‘Primary Maternal Preoccupation: D.W. Winnicott and Social Democracy in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain’, in History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis and the Past, ed. Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 149–172; Laura Tisdall, A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); and Mathew Thomson, Lost Freedom: the Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
\textsuperscript{15}P. R. Martin, ‘Letters’, SCEA Bulletin 9 (Spring 1975): 25–6, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/9.
Some military educators felt that they, by contrast, offered children ‘a stable disciplined community, whose traditions and standards reflect at least as well as the civilian world the best aspirations of society’.  

Furthermore, analysing turbulence shows how childhood mobility itself was increasingly under the spotlight from the 1960s. Penny Tinkler argues that spatial mobility became ‘a new axis of social differentiation’, with some groups of young people praised for ‘going places’ and others advised to ‘stay put’.  

In the military world, some geographical mobilities were permitted and celebrated – the message of School Is Everywhere – whereas other moves were viewed in a more negative light and were sometimes influenced by judgements concerning social class, parental rank or their military role. But, as this article shows, British children’s mobility was also part of far longer histories of military schooling and child migration, often associated with empires, where generational connections and tradition shaped expectations too.

Turbulence did not just divide educational specialists though: military communities and families themselves debated its existence and consequences. In oral history interviews – which sit at the heart of the second half of this article – many former military children, now adults, recalled the disruption to their education and even used that experience to understand their later life-courses, describing their adult selves varyingly as resilient, rootless or restless. As many oral historians have observed, constructing life narratives can offer ‘composure’ and having a central theme around which to organise the inevitable complications, false starts and loose ends of any life can provide welcome coherence. For military children though, accepting turbulence became particularly important and connected them with a wider military-affiliated community who had undergone similar experiences. Composure can therefore be a social and collective process, not just one for smoothing individual life-narratives. Moreover, these narratives reveal the different, but rich, intellectual trajectory of professional concepts like turbulence amongst those typically cast as only research ‘subjects’; in other words, rather than passive case studies, military families, children and teachers were often active, highly informed and thoughtful participants in a broader dialogue regarding the meanings of mobility over time.

Much of the professional material analysed in this article comes from the BFES itself and its successor, the Service Children’s Education Authority (SCEA), as well as national and military educational publications. The professional debate in these sources is intentionally balanced with oral history interviews with over 60 former residents of British military bases in Germany, conducted between 2016 and 2020. Originally stationed in the north-west region of Germany (and the British sector in Berlin) as an occupation force, British forces in Germany rapidly became a Cold War military, ready to respond to a potential Soviet invasion. It has

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16 Bettsworth, ‘Turbulence’, 19.
17 Penny Tinkler, Going Places or Out of Place? Representations of Mobile Girls and Young Women in Late-1950s and 1960s Britain’, Twentieth Century British History 32, no. 2 (2021): 213.
18 Interview with Lorna L. with Grace Huxford, May 8, 2019, BAOR/GH/36, UoB RSDF; interview with Jennifer B. with Grace Huxford, September 12, 2017, BAOR/GH/03, UoB RSDF; interview with Linda C. with Joel Morley, December 5, 2019, BAOR/JM/06, UoB RSDF.
19 For more overarching accounts of BFES/SCEA than that provided here, see Paul A. Marcardle, The Education of Service Children in Germany, 1947–2007 (n.d., 2008), Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), LBY 08/1822; F. H. Buckley and W. W. Smith, The Origins of the British Families Education Service (n.d.), IoE, BFE/C/3/2; N.T. St John Williams, Tommy Atkins’ Children: the Story of the Education of the Army’s Children, 1675–1970 (London: HMSO, 1971), 157–234.
been estimated that over a million British people lived in Germany during the Cold War period and it was the most common military posting for a generation of service personnel and their families.\textsuperscript{20} So whilst British military children’s education did vary (especially for those in the UK), Germany was nonetheless a pivotal and representative location in the military educational world. The interviews were also used to discuss much wider issues: as Nell Musgrove points out, framing questions around \textit{place}, rather than people, can ‘unlock’ different memories.\textsuperscript{21} This focus was teamed with semi-structured life-course interviews and, importantly, the offer of group or partnership interviews, particularly where someone thought they did not have an interesting or sufficiently ‘military’ narrative to tell on their own. Though far from perfect, such approaches enabled narrators to air a range of views, or no view at all, on ‘turbulence’. Narrators thus included former military children, parents, service personnel, teachers and a range of civilians working on bases. Many were considerable experts in their own right on military education, thoughtfully reflecting on their experiences and conducting their own research.

Oral history interviews can also reveal something about the present context, and the final section shows how such concerns could shape discussions of childhood mobility. The ongoing Brexit negotiations at the time of interviews were especially pertinent to many narrators, prompting some to reflect further on their military or childhood experiences of movement, travel and international connection. But, as Carla Pascoe Leahy argues, these ‘contemporary preoccupations’ of adults reflecting on their childhoods enrich, rather than devalue, our source material, allowing narrators and researchers to reflect on changing views, and in this case to reveal the changing meaning of mobility over time.\textsuperscript{22}

The article begins with a brief history of military education, the establishment of BFES in 1946 in Germany and the military educational provision that formed the framework for the turbulence debates. It then places these developments within the broader contexts of post-war childhood, arguing that much of the heat in the turbulence debate came from earlier interpretations of the role of the family. It explores how new ideas around individualism and ‘progressive’ education shaped educationalists’ practical responses to turbulence, and also outlines the rejection of such approaches. By exploring this resistance, the article highlights how turbulence became a lightning rod for other perceived social ills, with military schools used rhetorically to represent stability and tradition in a time of change and uncertainty. Finally, using oral history interviews, it explores the experiential side of turbulence and its relevance to individuals’ subsequent life narratives, concluding that, whilst turbulence might have been most closely associated with military schools, it became a term through which teachers, parents and children reflected on education, mobility and selfhood in the modern world.

\textsuperscript{20}Estimate provided as part of the National Army Museum exhibition/season, ‘Foe to Friend: The British Army in Germany [Exhibition]’, 2020–2024, https://www.nam.ac.uk/whats-on/foe-friend-british-army-germany-1945 (accessed January 24, 2022).

\textsuperscript{21}Nell Musgrove, ‘Locating Foster Care: Place and Space in Care Leavers’ Childhood Memories’, \textit{Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth} 8, no. 1 (2015): 112.

\textsuperscript{22}Carla Pascoe, ‘Be Home by Dark: Childhood Freedoms and Adult Fears in 1950s Victoria’, \textit{Australian Historical Studies} 40, no. 2 (2009): 231.
An ‘educational experiment’: BFES and post-war education

By 1945 British military children had already been navigating global networks and welfare systems for centuries: since the seventeenth century, military children (along with other groups of young people) had lived and travelled within the spaces and structures of British colonialism and empire – establishing and cementing certain cultural traditions for overseas British families, from particular routes and modes of travel to caring arrangements and, of course, education.23 The earliest regimental schools for the children of servicemen date even back further to the sixteenth century, but such education was formalised with the establishment of boarding schools in Britain from the late eighteenth century and the (Queen’s) Army Schoolmistresses educating military children overseas since the early nineteenth century.24

But two major yet very different developments in the immediate post-war period changed the scope and scale of military education: the first was the 1944 Education Act, traditionally regarded as part of the ‘post-war settlement’ and a vital component of the new social democratic welfare state.25 Though historians have increasingly questioned this interpretation, the Act nevertheless had significant practical consequences. It raised the school leaving age for all children from 14 to 15, paved the way for a new system of secondary education and encouraged the abolition of all-age schools, as well as requiring local education authorities to provide school meals and milk.26 These changes thus expanded considerably the secondary school population, as well as the facilities they required. As Laura Tisdall points out, the 1944 Act also made chronological age a much more significant educational marker too; more so than ever before, age became the primary criterion for the organisation of schools.27

But as discussions of turbulence later illustrated, these changes to the educational system were contingent on broader shifts in how childhood was understood, shaped especially by the dislocation and separation families and individuals had experienced during the Second World War. Mathew Thomson argues how psychological ideas about the necessity of attachment between children and their mothers (based in a social democratic argument about the need for loving social relations, but also tolerance and freedom within this setting) helped to justify . . . what was in a reality a limited welfare state.28

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23Geoffrey Sherington, “Suffer the Little Children”: British Child Migration as a Study of Journeys between Centre and Periphery, History of Education 32, no. 5 (September 2003): 461–76; Ellen Boucher, Empire’s Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline of the British Worlds, 1869–1967 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Annabel Venning, Following the Drum: the Lives of Army Wives and Daughters (London: Headline, 2005); Grace Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”: Reuniting British Military Families in Cold War Germany, Contemporary European History (forthcoming, 2023).
24It became the Queen’s Army Schoolmistresses in 1928. For more detail, see Claire Gibson, Army Childhood: British Army Children’s Lives and Times (Oxford: Shire, 2012); and Sarah Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union: Setting up the Initial Infrastructure for British Families in Germany, 1946–9’ in Briten in Westfalen: Besatzer, Verbindete, Freunde?, ed. Peter E. Fässler, Andreas Neuwöhner and Florian Staffel (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2019), 203–4.
25Tisdall points out that the Act established a largely bipartite (rather than tripartite) system in practice; see Tisdall, A Progressive Education, 6; Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 204, 206–7. On free meals, though, by the end of 1947 only 75% of British children in Germany could take a midday meal; see Agnes S. Miller, Report on the School Meals Arrangements for British Families Education in the British Zone of Germany, 1948, 1, IWM, Docs. 13,730.
26Thomson, Lost Freedom, 11.
27Tisdall, A Progressive Education, 10.
28Thomson, Lost Freedom, 13.
In other words, these educational changes were underpinned not only by social and economic policy but by ‘powerful structures of feeling’ that had emerged during the physical and emotional upheavals of the Second World War, and to some extent hid the gaps in state provision. Both these legislative developments and their guiding emotional/psychological assumptions would substantially influence military children’s education after 1945.

The other major development that affected the education of military children originated in Britain’s post-war foreign and military policy. In 1945, the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), along with Royal Air Force and civilian personnel, became part of the post-war allied force occupying western zones of defeated Germany. Their purpose shifted quickly though, as the relationship between the Soviet Union and western powers deteriorated and Germany became the frontline of a new Cold War in Europe. At the same time decolonisation was also changing Britain’s military and imperial footprint, meaning north-west Germany became home to one of the largest and most significant British overseas military communities (and would remain so until the 1990s). Families first joined military personnel under ‘Operation Union’ in 1946 and by the end of the summer term in 1947 there were 4000 pupils in over 70 locations across the north-west area of Germany, the British Zone of occupation.29 Their presence, as Sarah Paterson has observed, posed a massive challenge on an unprecedented scale: to provide education in accordance with the 1944 Education Act across an area of 20,000 square miles.30 Though she expressed reservations at the scheme, Education Secretary Ellen Wilkinson stated that military children must receive ‘a proper education’ under the terms of the new Act and agreed to send the necessary 150–200 teachers.31 The British Families Education Service (BFES) was thus established, with John Trevelyan appointed its first director in July 1946.32 The role of BFES was to ‘translate the provisions of the Act into a military context’ and to ‘give John and Jane the same educational chances as they would have in the UK’.33 Its headquarters were based at Herford from 1 September 1946, with a network of Regional Education Offices in Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover and Düsseldorf.34 BFES’s early work included the recruitment of teachers back in Britain (for three-year postings) but also the considerable task of finding suitable buildings in war-damaged Germany, which was suffering from acute shortages, population displacement and, of course, major political change.

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29Williams, Tommy Atkins’ Children, 159.
30Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 204; Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”.
31Cabinet Minutes 56 (1946), June 6, 1946, 113–114, CAB 128/5/56, The UK National Archives (hereafter TNA); and Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”.
32Marcardle, The Education of Service Children in Germany, 5; Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 204; Anon., ‘Obituary: Mr John Trevelyan’, The Times, August 18, 1986, 12.
33Williams, Tommy Atkins’ Children, 160; British Families Education Service, Parents’ Guide to The British Families Education Service in Germany (1956), 3; National Army Museum (hereafter NAM), 2008–04-118; Ministry of Education, Memorandum to Local Education Authorities on the arrangements of Education of British Children in Germany, memorandum no. 177, August 21, 1946, FO 371/55,479, TNA.
34Marcardle, The Education of Service Children in Germany, 5; Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 204. BFES was initially overseen by the Foreign Office until 1952, when it was transferred to the War Office and from there to the Ministry of Defence; see British Families Education Service, Parents’ Guide to The British Families Education Service in Germany (1956), 3.
Despite these difficulties, in the first BFES Gazette Trevelyan hailed BFES a ‘great educational experiment’; indeed, their educational provision could build bridges and spread reconciliation in the post-war world. Trevelyan called on his teachers to draw on their wartime experiences of evacuation, to bring ‘the wealth of material that lies outside the school’ into their teaching and to focus on the individual child. As Tisdall points out, this child-centred learning is closely associated with ‘progressive’ education, though it is unclear whether Trevelyan formally aligned himself with this approach. Yet he certainly saw BFES’s work as educationally pioneering and the chance to do something different and exciting. Some even felt that BFES schools embodied the egalitarian spirit of the age more than civilian schools: one military journalist asked ‘In how many schools in England … will you find the son of a high-ranking Civil Servant sitting next to the son of Corporal Jones, who has on his other hand the son of Lieutenant Colonel Brown?’ Their schools also chimed with the widespread post-war emphasis on family reunion.

One senior officer argued that day schools for military children overseas ‘make family life overseas a possibility’, enabling the military man to ‘increase his stability of outlook’ and providing a ‘family spirit unmatched in the civilian world’. BFES in Germany grew steadily over time: by 1958, there were over 12,000 British pupils in Germany, no longer housed in makeshift classrooms but in purpose-built schools on military bases, just as the British military increasingly geared itself up to fight the Soviet Union in a potentially nuclear conflict. By spring 1969, over 24,000 children were in BAOR, constituting 66.5% of children in British Amy schools worldwide.

Yet from its earliest days, BFES faced problems that were hard to resolve; some were practical, others symptomatic of wider post-war tensions. Trevelyan had been appointed as it was hoped that his past experiences as Director of Education for the rural county of Westmorland and his management of wartime evacuees would put him in good stead to deal with the issues of a dispersed school-age population. The British Zone was roughly the size of England and Wales, later with large bases at Rheindahlen and Bergen-Hohne, but also smaller, more geographically scattered bases closer to the inner-German border with East Germany (and where BAOR’s tactical nuclear weaponry was later installed). The distances families had to travel for day schooling proved hard to overcome. With secondary schools, the need for specialist subject teachers and the discouragement of

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35 For more on the widespread usage of ‘experimental’ language at this time, see Laura Carter, “Experimental” Secondary Modern Education in Britain, 1948–1958, Cultural and Social History 13, no. 1 (2016): 23–41.
36 J. M. Trevelyan, ‘An Educational Experiment’, BFES Gazette 1 (August 6, 1947): 1, IoE, BF/B/3/5.
37 Trevelyan’s later career as secretary of the British Board of Film Censors (1958–1971) was more extensively documented and gained him the reputation of championing liberal values; see Anon., ‘Obituary’, 12.
38 Special Correspondent, ‘British Children in Germany: Day and Boarding Schools’, BFES Gazette, 7 (February 1948): 1.
39 Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”; Tara Zahra, The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
40 G. T. Salisbury, Address to British Teachers in Egypt: First Teachers’ Convention, September 22–23, 1950, 2, NAM, 2008–04-118; cited in Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”.
41 T. R. Weaver et al., Report of the Working Party on the British Families Education Service (BFES), 1959, AIR 2/15,038, TNA.
42 Loose Minute, Spring Term 1969 Army Children’s Schools and Other Service Schools, NAM, 2008–04-120. This statistic does not include, of course, military children in British day schools, such as Royal Navy children, who were potentially invisible in some figures.
43 Marcardle, The Education of Service Children in Germany, 5; Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 204; Anon., ‘Obituary’, 12.
‘senior top ups’ to primary schools (as were also common in rural areas in Britain prior to the 1944 Education Act) further limited the feasibility of local provision everywhere in the Zone. BFES thus opened several boarding schools in Germany for military children of secondary age stationed in Germany who were unable to travel daily to school. The first, Prince Rupert School, opened on 1 July 1947 in a former naval barracks at Wilhelmshaven, followed by King Alfred School at Plön on 7 May 1948. A further BFES boarding school, Windsor School, opened in 1953. The needs of children under the new welfare state could therefore be met without compromising, in principle at least, BAOR’s military role and responsibilities in the new Cold War world.

Boarding posed a deeper question too though, one that potentially unbalanced the military school community and its egalitarian post-war educational values. As Elizabeth Buettner has pointed out, from at least the nineteenth century ‘empire children’ of the officer class, especially those approaching adolescence, were routinely sent back to Britain for their education but also on supposed health grounds. Certain public schools had longstanding military connections and claimed to offer ‘educational continuity’ – as well as the comfort of tradition and family connections. Not even BFES boarding schools could always offer this, as children could only attend whilst their parents were in Germany. This longer history and tradition of military education profoundly shaped officer families’ decision-making, bolstered by the provision of an Education Allowance from 1955 to help pay for school fees. But this financial assistance potentially compounded existing disparities in who could actually attend boarding schools in the UK, as a private income was needed to supplement the allowance, meaning it was often inaccessible to lower ranks. Some suggested therefore that there was a ‘two-tier system’, where officers’ teenage children were largely missing from BFES schools and military bases in Germany. As the final section of this article shows, not everyone agreed with this assessment and argued that, certainly from an educational perspective, BFES schools were just as good as the boarding schools which military children attended in the UK. But the British boarding education nevertheless formed an ever-present social, historical and educational backdrop for military families.

Yet the major problem facing BFES schools, which teachers and educationalists acknowledged from the start, was children regularly moving schools. Some moved one-by-one, particularly Royal Air Force children or those whose parents had specialist trades (so called ‘trickle’ postings), whereas other children moved as groups when the regiment

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44Tisdall, *A Progressive Education*, 71; Williams, *Tommy Atkins’ Children*, 160; Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 210.
45Paterson, ‘The Children of Operation Union’, 210–11; Williams, *Tommy Atkins’ Children*, 160–7.
46Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7, 9–10.
47Draft Report: Army Boarding Schools Overseas and in the United Kingdom, 1967, 2, NAM, 2008–04-120. During the mid-nineteenth century, several schools in Britain established themselves as offering education suitable for the children of officers, many in the home counties (Berkshire, Hampshire, Kent), military towns (including Plymouth), spa towns (like Cheltenham); some were even specifically founded for the children of military orphans, such as Bearwood College (originally The Merchant Seamen’s Orphan Asylum) and Wellington College (for the orphan sons of army officers), and offered assistance so children could attend. The education of military sons was prioritised in most cases, though smaller schools such as the Royal Soldiers’ Daughters School in Hampstead (founded in 1855) offered some support, as did charities like the Guild of St Helena, which was run by military women for the orphaned daughters of soldiers. See Gibson, *Army Childhood*.
48Williams, *Tommy Atkins’ Children*, 177–82.
49Interview with Lorna L. with Grace Huxford, May 8, 2019, BAOR/GH/36, UoB RSDF; interview with David and Rosemary T. with Grace Huxford, March 19, 2019, BAOR/GH/44, UoB RSDF.
or unit moved. In 1965, the Royal Army Educational Corps journal *Torch* noted that a survey ‘of teacher and parent opinion confirmed the existence of a widespread conviction that changes of school had a detrimental effect upon a child’s educational progress.’ Their experiences were getting noticed at the highest levels of government too, with influential reports by not one, but two, peers called Plowden. As Sara Hiorns has explored, the 1964 Report on Representational Services Overseas, commissioned by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan into Britain’s position within the world and led by Lord Edwin Plowden, interviewed diplomatic staff at length about their lives overseas. Hiorns shows how this was the first time that families were also asked to share their experiences of diplomatic and overseas life, and they were able to discuss their children, their education and their frequent mobility.

The other Plowden report is far better known within the history of education and mentioned military children directly: the 1967 *Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) into Primary Education in England* – chaired by Lady Bridget Plowden – reviewed primary education and the transition to the ‘tripartite’ secondary school system. The report was perhaps best known for its child-centred approach and the ‘trend toward individual learning’, though Plowden herself maintained that ‘we did not invent anything new’. But the 1967 Report also explored the wider social context in which education took place, looking at the relationship between immigration and education, for instance. Though the committee never used the term turbulence directly, it nonetheless drew parallels between highly mobile groups of traveller communities, canal-boat children and military children, describing the ‘serious backwardness among them and of [the] high turnover of pupils and teachers’. The Ministry of Education had referred to turbulence by name in a report in January 1965 and, by the launch of SCEA’s new journal in 1970, turbulence was a commonly used term and featured heavily in the publication for many years, becoming part of its own ‘mythology’.

But it was always a term with a slippery definition, not helped by its frequent use. In 1973 one visitor to Germany noted that: ‘In BAOR the current vogue word is “turbulence”. When a unit moves there is “turbulence”; when a child changes school there is “turbulence”; when there are pressures on a family, of whatever nature, there is “turbulence”’. In other words, the term was used to describe not only educational issues, but emotional and social ones, and this indiscriminate usage became one of several reasons the term was later criticised. But to understand the later resistance to

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50Ruth Jolly, *Military Man, Family Man: Crown Property?* (London: Brassey’s, 1992), 66.
51R. C. R. Ritchie, ‘The Effects of School Changes on Service Children: A Review’, *Torch* (November 1965): 5–6.
52Sara Hiorns, ““Little friends of all the world?” The Experiences of British Diplomatic Service Children’ (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2017), 33, 48–50.
53Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and Their Primary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1967), 474; and Bridget Plowden, ““Plowden” Twenty Years On’, *Oxford Review of Education* 13, no. 1 (1987): 120. One major precedent was the 1931 Hadow Report, see Board of Education, *Report of The Consultative Committee on the Primary School* (London: HMSO, 1931).
54Central Advisory Council for Education (England), *Children and Their Primary Schools*, 59–60. Researchers at the time resisted this aggregation and pointed out the many specific disadvantages and cultural prejudices that traveller children faced in primary education; see T. A. Acton, *Materials for the Study of the Education of Travelling Children* (London: Institute of Contemporary Romani Research and Documentation, 1973).
55Ministry of Education (External Relations and Central Branch), *Memorandum of Teaching Appointments in Army Children’s Schools Overseas*, January 2, 1965, IoE, BFE/B/3/27; Firth, ‘Service Organization and the Service Child’, 10; J. V. Firth, ‘The Effects of Turbulence: The Evidence’, *SCEA Bulletin 3* (January 1972): 23, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/3.
56Taylor, ‘Report on a Visit of Six Senior Educational Psychologists to Germany’.
the term, we first need to explore the longer-term relationship between education, family and institutions and the ‘powerful structures of feeling’ that underpinned the post-war settlement, with lasting consequences for how childhood mobility was discussed.\(^{57}\)

**Families in flux: emotion, separation and selfhood**

From at least the early 1960s, military children’s emotional responses to constant movement, rather than just their educational outcomes, were forensically investigated by researchers. For example, Peter Dean’s much-cited 1963 article, ‘Children in a Mobile Society’, described the moment when a young military child’s friend inevitably leaves for a new posting: ‘For the child whose attachment to the other person is deep and loyal and tender, this experience is like a death: the friend was, and now, for all purposes meaningful to the child, is no more’.\(^{58}\) Dean’s article – and wider attitudes too – owed much to the climate of concern surrounding childhood that first emerged in the 1940s, where war had led to familial displacement and separation on a large scale and a corresponding professional interest in childhood development. As Thomson argues, ‘attachment theory’ (that young children needed a deep relationship with a caregiver, typically their mother) became a fundamental ‘emotional and social dimension to the post-war settlement’, underpinning the very systems of the new welfare state.\(^{59}\) Influenced by attachment theory, contemporary professional literature and advice routinely emphasised how mothers, and to some extent fathers, were responsible for providing the necessary permanence and ‘stability’ that a child needed for its development.

The family’s role was evident in advice and opinion surrounding military children too, especially the mother’s responsibility to smooth many of the difficulties that came with moving regularly, particularly for younger children.\(^{60}\) Citing psychologist John Bowlby’s famous work, Dean argued that ‘the mother, as always in matters concerning the child, is the focal point’. He explored how some military postings could exacerbate the effects of turbulence, where the family might be socially isolated (if they lived in the German community without any language skills, for example) and the mother was under ‘intolerable strain’.\(^{61}\) This attitude persisted throughout the 1960s and 1970s, even as the family itself became less culturally and politically idealised. In an article for *The Times* in 1968, Jill Betts – a former military child and then a student at teacher-training college – argued that ‘parents can alleviate some of the turbulence and instability by providing a reliable family framework and keeping home stable’.\(^{62}\) But the demands of modern military life again made these prevailing understandings of the family more complicated: educationalists recognised that when fathers were away on exercise or deployment, ‘the mother has to take on his role as well and this imposes an

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\(^{57}\)Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 13.

\(^{58}\)P. Dean, ‘Children in a Mobile Community’, *Cambridge Institute of Education Bulletin* 2, no. 10 (December 1963): 2–7; and cited by Firth, ‘The Effects of Turbulence’, 23.

\(^{59}\)Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, 13.

\(^{60}\)Firth, ‘The Effects of Turbulence’, 22–3; P. H. Gibson, ‘The Education of Service Children: A Parent’s View’, *SCEA Bulletin* 13 (Spring 1977): 9, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/13.

\(^{61}\)Dean, ‘Children in a Mobile Community’, 3.

\(^{62}\)Pamela Coleman, ‘Do Children Suffer from a Nomadic Way of Life?’, *The Times*, May 22, 1968, 8.
additional strain on her and her children, quite often when she is very young herself. By the 1970s, educationalists again highlighted the ‘strain’ on ‘younger mothers’ (often used as a shorthand for wives of lower-ranked soldiers and sometimes also underpinned by class assumptions), particularly as the father could be deployed from Germany to Troubles-era Northern Ireland. Military mothers thus continued to shoulder the burden of easing frequent moves, despite changing social and military contexts, owing in part to the long afterlife of the emotional structures that had underpinned the post-war settlement.

However, by the 1970s, though attachment theory persisted, the emotional impact of turbulence was also inflected with the growing language of selfhood, as well as ‘progressive’ educational ideas. A group of educational psychologists visiting Germany in 1973 suggested that the constant change of teachers, friends and neighbours meant that ‘the highly mobile boy would be handicapped in the development of concepts necessary for the assessment of self and others’, what they referred to elsewhere as the ‘self-concept’. Another military educational specialist described movement in terms of setting and peer relationships: ‘Turbulence translates the pupil from a known, stable, and usually secure environment to a new and different milieu in which he has no recognised status.’ Like other interested educators, J. M. B. Duckett of Cornwall School, Dortmund, took matters into his own hands and devised a questionnaire to gauge ‘self-concept’ among his students, responding to the claim that the children of Service families display a measure of self-confidence greatly in excess of that shown by children of more conventional backgrounds. In his small sample he concluded that ‘high self-regard is invariably and significantly weighted in favour of those students who have not been subjected to recent turbulence’.

Many of the solutions put forward centred on the individual child. As early as 1956 a parents’ guide to BFES schools in Germany noted that, whilst there was not a lot schools could do about the movement associated with military postings, ‘what we can do is to provide small classes so that teacher can get to know John better and give him as much individual attention as possible’. BFES placed special emphasis on individual learning and monitoring; one teacher described how

the teacher knows and acts upon the fact that each pupil must of absolute necessity be seen as an individual; at least ten of the children in a typical class of twenty-eight will have left before July; others will have replaced them. There must be a never-ending check on whether new arrivals have missed an essential stage in any subject.

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63 British service communities were often disproportionately young, with 60% of rank-and-file soldiers younger than 24 in 1966; see Anon. ‘Providing for the Children of Servicemen’, Education, September 23, 1966, NAM, 2008–04-120; and British Forces in Germany [undated], NAM, 1993–02-211/3.
64 K. Robinson, ‘Letters’, SCEA Bulletin 10 (Autumn 1975): 23, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/10.
65 Taylor, ‘Report on a Visit of Six Senior Educational Psychologists to Germany’, 20–2; Taylor cites the work of Wooster and Harris, which took British boys in an Army School in Germany as their case study; see A. D. Wooster and G. Harris, ‘Concepts of Self and Others in Highly Mobile Service Boys’, Educational Research 14, no. 3 (1972): 195–9.
66Firth, ‘The Effects of Turbulence’, 22.
67 Duckett, ‘Turbulence and Self-Concepts in a Service School’, 13. Other projects are outlined by C. Buckley, ‘Education and the Mobile Society’, SCEA Bulletin 2 (June 1974): 3–5, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/2; and J. D. Edwards, ‘And the Children of Israel’, SCEA Bulletin 5 (March 1973): 26, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/5.
68 British Families Education Service, Parents’ Guide to The British Families Education Service in Germany (1956), 3.
69 Buckley, ‘Education and the Mobile Society’, 4.
Wing Commander J. V. Firth, who wrote several times on turbulence in the SCEA Bulletin, felt that the organisation of classes and schools themselves might help this too, particularly vertical groupings of peers or a ‘family grouping’, or even the very organisation and layout of the building.  

On the surface, such focus on individual children also chimed with broader changes taking place at this time. As Robinson, Schofield, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Thomlinson highlight, the language of individualism both pre-dates and exceeds the narrow definitions that tie it to late 1970s ‘ Thatcherism’ alone: though collective identities still played a role in shaping subjectivities, the growing language of self-hood placed the individual firmly at the centre of their own life-course. But the emphasis on the individual also came from within education. As Thomson shows, important shifts in environmental psychology, urban planning, social science and planning in the late 1960s led to an explosion of interest in children’s perspectives of the world. The radical children’s rights movement and progressive educationalists both emphasised the importance of child subjectivity, but so too did other specialists and even systems of governance. These ideas recognised the child as a ‘subject with a voice that needed to be listened to and acted upon even when it clashed with adult interests’. Another factor was the popularity of developmental psychology in education in the post-war period, leading again to a focus on the individual child (theoretically at least) and their view of the world. In the case of adolescents in particular, developmental psychology amplified longstanding ideas regarding the difficulties of this age group, combining these concerns with newly expressed worries about emotional and social development. However, some of these new ideas (or ideas perceived as new) met with considerable resistance: in fact, turbulence became one way in which educationalists and others expressed their disquiet concerning such developments and 1970s British society at large.

**Rejecting turbulence: social values and mobility in modern Britain**

Just as Tisdall traces some teachers’ growing aversion to the ‘ jargon’ of progressive education, some military educationalists criticised turbulence as over-used, over-theorised or simply misplaced. A headmaster of a SCEA school in Singapore felt that ‘our pupils possess an unusual degree of maturity, capability and confidence’; none of them signs of turbulence. In one particularly provocative article, a former BFES headmaster, G. E. Bettsworth, expressed his distaste at this ‘ fashionable’ concept in the SCEA Bulletin:

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70 J. V. Firth, ‘School Organisation and the Service Child’, SCEA Bulletin 1 (December 1970): 10, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/1; A. R. Coward, ‘Letters’, SCEA Bulletin 7 (Spring 1974): 16, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/7. See also W. K. Leighton, ‘Duties and Dilemmas: Some Aspects of Life in an Expatriate Boarding School’, SCEA Bulletin 12 (Autumn 1976): 13, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/12.

71 Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Tell Stories about Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the “Crisis” of the 1970s’, Twentieth Century British History 28, no. 2 (June 2017): 268–304. Though whether military children’s schools expressed the ‘popular individualism’ outlined by Robinson et al., as opposed to perhaps more socially conservative public-school concepts of leadership and independence, is perhaps debatable (and I thank the anonymous reviewer for raising this point).

72 Thomson, Lost Freedom, 190, 14.

73 Ibid., 20.

74 Buckley, ‘Education and the Mobile Society’, 4.
‘Turbulence’ continues to rear its ugly head – almost as frequently as ‘sex education’. Over the past twelve years I have gone into print or proclaimed from platforms, that education – real education – of children would be best served if the words were expunged from the educational theorists’ vocabulary. For it is they and the researchers who keep looking for bogeymen in the two fields.75

The timing of this critique as well as Bettsworth’s reference to sex education is potentially significant. As James Hampshire, Jane Lewis and Mara Gregory all point out, from the late 1960s, sex education – once regarded as an imperfect solution to public health concerns – became the battleground for moral traditionalists to criticise the new ‘permissive society’.76 Whilst Bettsworth did not expand further in this source on his views on sex education, he did use the ‘traditional’ setting provided by service schools to rebuff the more ‘negative’ connotations of turbulence: ‘Materially the Service child lives as well or better than his peers’, living in ‘a community where Christian ethics, while not militantly proclaimed, are at least acknowledged as worthy of public support’. He argued that, like sex education, turbulence missed the point of ‘real education’ and failed to acknowledge military children’s considerable advantages in the area of outdoor activities, ‘easier relationships, a greater maturity and independence of approach’.77

Moreover, Bettsworth also pointed out that ‘these days family mobility is not confined to service families’ but applied to other families in Britain. This flipping of the turbulence issue back onto British education became another important way in which educators resisted the term. Bettsworth, for instance, stated that: ’Turbulence is caused by all sorts of factors – itinerant staff for instance, poor buildings, over hasty reorganisations, massive schools, large immigrant population, weakness of discipline, lack of faith, political dogma or plain bad teachers, feckless training and so on’. Similarly, in 1975 P. R. Martin, the deputy headmaster of a school on an RAF base in Malta, claimed he had not heard the term ‘turbulence’ outside of SCEA schools and that anyway he felt that only a ‘minute percentage’ of services children were ever ‘unsettled’. By contrast,

while I was teaching a class of never less than forty-two children for three years in Inner London, these were the children who were suffering from this ‘turbulence’ affliction. A significant minority of children suffered from frequent domestic mobility, either in terms of moving house or of parents moving house without them; most lacked sufficient opportunities for recreation of a stimulating type; many were part of communities that were unstable for social, political or ethnic reasons; most importantly, a majority of the children suffered from teacher turbulence – not just leaving after a three-year stint, but after anything from two weeks to two terms. In the part of London where I taught, the annual turnover of staff was thirty per cent.78

In these sources, turbulence ceased to mean just the movement of children, but was also used to describe what they saw as much broader educational and social ills. Martin, like Bettsworth, seemed to dislike the widespread discussion of turbulence in military

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75Bettsworth, ‘Turbulence’, 19.
76James Hampshire and Jane Lewis, ‘The Ravages of Permissiveness: Sex Education and the Permissive Society’, Twentieth Century British History 15, no. 3 (2004): 290–312; Mara Gregory, “Beamed Directly to the Children”: School Broadcasting and Sex Education in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 25 (2015): 190.
77Bettsworth, ‘Turbulence’, 19.
78P. R. Martin, ‘Letter’, SCEA Bulletin 9 (Spring 1975): 25, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/9.
children’s education, as it cast a negative light that they felt was unfair and should be levelled instead at some British schools, with their significant ‘domestic mobility’ and instability due to ‘social, political or ethnic reasons’.

This characterisation of British schools echoed some of the concerns and misconceptions held about ‘inner city’ schools since the 1950s, reaching a crescendo in the mid-1970s. Amid a series of converging ‘moral panics’ regarding progressive education, child safety, immigration and city life, unflattering media depictions of such schools abounded and were inflected at times with social or racial assumptions concerning Britain’s urban populations.79 For example, in exploring the ‘bussing’ of South Asian children in London, Brett Bebber and Olivier Esteves both highlight how government and local authorities viewed high numbers of migrants in certain boroughs as detrimental to providing good education and embarked on ‘assimilationist’ and ‘integration’ policies to remedy this perceived problem.80 The ‘inner city’ was regularly stigmatised and some responses to turbulence reflected this broader attitude they were not necessarily about military children themselves, but instead criticised wider social and educational change in Britain and used military schools as a contrast to what they saw as the ‘decline’ of schooling or society in the UK itself at the time.

Moreover, the way spatial mobility – moving from one place to another – was viewed again depended on particular social assumptions. The 1950s and 1960s saw many people, especially the young, on the move: Penny Tinkler argues that much of this movement resulted from the first-wave ‘baby boomer’ generation leaving school and finding new employment opportunities in the newly expanded public and services sectors, or studying at one of the growing number of ‘plate-glass’ universities, mostly away from home, in the wake of the 1963 Robbins Report. Spatial mobility, she argues, even became part of modern post-war selfhood – how people viewed themselves – as such movement and travel could mean ‘self-discovery, self-realization and growth and fulfilment’.81 These attitudes were evident even in the earliest days of BFES, as shown by Trevelyan’s language when describing the BFES’s mission; by 1965 and the release of School Is Everywhere, military children were described as ‘adaptable and self-possessed’. Some children, according to their teachers, even wore their travel experience with ‘a certain amount of panache’ and an ‘air of sophistication’.82 Once again highlighting that turbulence was not simply a problem for the military child, one headmaster argued that ‘never . . . has the father of the family changed his job so frequently in search of better opportunities’, across the social classes, in this new ‘Age of Mobility’.83 According to such views, the opportunities of the post-war world therefore presented families and children – military and civilian – with a unique chance to develop and learn about the world around them and themselves.

79Peter Mandler, The Crisis of Meritocracy: Britain’s Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 101; N. Rao, ‘Labour and Education: Secondary Reorganisation and the Neighbourhood School’, Contemporary British History 16, no. 2 (2002): 115–16. One particularly notable incident was the furor surrounding William Tyndale Junior School in London: see John Davis, ‘The Inner London Education Authority and the William Tyndale Junior School Affair, 1974–1976’, Oxford Review of Education 28, no. 2/3 (2002): 275–98.
80Brett Bebber, “‘We were Just Unwanted’: Bussing, Migrant Dispersal and South Asians in London’, Journal of Social History 48, no. 3 (2015): 635–61; Olivier Esteves, ‘Babylon by Bus? The Dispersal of Immigrant Children in England, Race and Urban Space (1960s–1980s)’, Paedagogica Historica 54, no. 6 (2018): 750–65.
81Tinkler, ‘Going Places or Out of Place’, 216–17, 236.
82E. R. R. Williams, ‘Oh, No – Not Another School’, SCA Bulletin 14 (Autumn 1977): 7, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/14.
83Buckley, ‘Education and the Mobile Society’, 3.
But, as Tinkler notes, spatial mobility in its turn could become a new form of social differentiation, with some movement valued more than other types. In military communities, discussions of mobility were bound up with rank but also with discussion of ‘intelligence’. Ron Dutton’s research into military families in the 1970s, which proved popular among military educationalists, argued that ‘intelligence’ was the single most important factor in smoothing regular educational moves.\(^ {84} \) But intelligence itself was often a loaded term in military settings, at times informed by social assumptions about parents: for example, the idea that Royal Air Force children were more intelligent because their parents generally had advanced technical training was common among the military community.\(^ {85} \) Despite often moving individually via ‘trickle’ postings, some felt such children’s ‘intelligence’, conferred by their parents’ own educational background, could ease frequent moves. Intelligence, rank and educational and social background were conflated in other complex ways, as with the language surrounding the common decision of officers to send their teenage children back to British boarding schools. C. Buckley, a headmaster at an SCEA school in Singapore, argued that there was a ‘tendency for some of the more academic children to be sent back to boarding schools at home to ensure continuity prior to ‘O’ Levels’ and thus ‘some of the cream is skimmed off between the ages of eleven and fourteen.’\(^ {86} \) In 1977, one teacher in Hohne, Germany, wrote, in a fairly incendiary piece in the SCEA Bulletin, that ‘the officer class is missing. Whilst this fact is not necessarily synonymous with missing brain power, it is a contributory factor to my idea that BFES Secondary Schools are in fact glorified Secondary Moderns.’\(^ {87} \) The author used this point to call for more standardised curricula, thus negating the need for boarding school, but the tone of the critique implied, like others, that those who stayed overseas for their secondary education were less academic. But, as seen earlier in this article, the decision to send children to boarding schools was largely informed by a mix of economic factors, social class and longer-term educational traditions in families, not ‘intelligence’.\(^ {88} \) All the same, this conflation compounded the assumptions made about who should attend what school and how they coped with turbulence.

Much more than simply military children’s education was thus under the spotlight in these complicated and at times heated professional debates: they show not only the push-back against progressive, child-centred education, but a wider malaise with British education and society, as well as the varying meanings attached to mobility. The decisions made regarding adolescents’ secondary education, as in earlier periods, were sometimes especially fraught. But was turbulence a concept that parents, children and teachers engaged with on a personal level? How did former base residents recollect educational disruption in subsequent narratives and what conclusions can we draw about the wider impact of turbulence as an individual or shared term?

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\(^ {84} \)Dutton ‘Mobility and Geographic Learning’, 35.

\(^ {85} \)Interview with anonymous teacher with Grace Huxford, BAOR/GH/19, July 18, 2018, UoB RSDF; interview with Ann S. with Grace Huxford, May 31, 2018, BAOR/GH/13.

\(^ {86} \)Buckley, ‘Education and the Mobile Society’, 3.

\(^ {87} \)G. Pratt, ‘A Call to RAPE’, SCEA Bulletin 13 (Spring 1977): 13–14, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/13. Pratt’s justification for the title of this piece was: ‘May I conclude by apologising for the inane title. I was trying to attract the attention of all readers.’

\(^ {88} \)K. Abnett, ‘RAPE is not Inevitable’, SCEA Bulletin 14 (Autumn 1977): 35–6, IoE, BFE/A/3/1/14; Abnett was responding directly to Pratt’s article, referring to the title of the original piece.
Turbulent lives: composing military childhoods

Ken H., the son of a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in BAOR, attended 13 different schools as a young person.\textsuperscript{89} In an oral history interview many years later, he summarised the process of arriving at a new school:

I had no other frame of reference because what happened to me was, was, from my perspective, pretty normal. It was pretty normal to get in, suddenly, into a group of new people, to know no one, to try and make a good impression, um, to bluff the teachers into thinking you were better than you were, so they put me into the A stream – I’m not A stream, I’m B stream – I’d[sic] take six months for them to find out I was B stream, not understanding a thing – to this day I feel physically ill when someone mentions a simultaneous equation – um, and to be put down. And then Dad would get posted again. The children were really good, probably because they had to learn a set of social skills because they were always being introduced to new situations.\textsuperscript{90}

Ken highlighted the ‘social skills’ military children gained in moving schools, adapting to ‘new situations’, and even convincing teachers that ‘you were better than you were’. As a result of his many moves, he also now felt confident in classifying himself as ‘B stream’ and used this self-knowledge to understand his adult self too – even his queasiness over complex mathematics. He also learnt that ‘You have to be nice to people, ’cause if you land in a new school and you’re not six foot three and built like a rugby player, you’d better be nice to people, or someone is going to “fill you in”’. Ken was deeply thoughtful about turbulence: not only did he use the term itself throughout the interview, but when he himself became a military officer he became concerned with his own children’s education and the education of his soldiers’ children too, remaining engaged with the issue to the present day.

But whilst Ken’s level of reflection was perhaps unusual, he was certainly not alone in mentioning educational disruption and pondering its longer-term impact. Lorna L. felt that, as a result of moving around with her RAF father and mixing with ‘properly posh’ people, her background became ‘so fluid’ and she lacked an ‘identifiable class background’ as an adult – she also struggled to answer, ‘the question “where are you from?”’, because, I’m not really’. She pointed out that she had this experience in common with lots of service children and how she partially identified with the American term ‘military brat’ as a result, even though her connection with the military ended when her family returned to England while she was still at school.\textsuperscript{91} Andy W. described the inverse process from Ken, starting at the bottom of the class and gradually working his way up until it was time to move again, a process that became demoralising over time: ‘I felt I was left behind, shall we say’ by the educational system, something he wanted to address as an adult, attending night school to get a university degree.\textsuperscript{92} Andy M., too, used the interview to reflect on his wider education, recalling how at the time he had wanted to move around with his parents but that thinking about it as an adult he might have had a more ‘stable’ education at boarding school.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{89}An NCO is a senior non-commissioned officer who has usually been promoted through the ranks.
\textsuperscript{90}Interview with Ken H. with Grace Huxford, March 12, 2019, BAOR/GH/26, UoB RSDF.
\textsuperscript{91}Interview with Lorna L. with Grace Huxford, May 8, 2019, BAOR/GH/36, UoB RSDF.
\textsuperscript{92}Interview with Andy W. with Joel Morley, November 2019, BAOR/JM/02, UoB RSDF.
\textsuperscript{93}Interview with Andy M., June 6, 2019 with Grace Huxford, BAOR/GH/42, UoB RSDF.
As in the professional debate, Andy M. pitched turbulence against boarding school, seeing the latter as the solution to the former but generally something only open to officers’ children. Yet again, some felt that who stayed put and who moved was influenced by rank and/or social class. In some interviews, parents, teachers and former children recalled a ‘two-tier system’, with officers’ children going to boarding school and other ranks staying with their parents. But, much like the professional debate, there was little consensus on the effect of these two educational routes. One teacher, whose own children went to various SCEA schools like military children, said that ‘we got what’s left as an intake … [but] nothing wrong with that, they were good!’ There was also a middle route that complicated attitudes – the boarding schools in Germany itself. Another former teacher recalled how children sent there were often ‘reluctant boarders … and that gave rise to various problems’, and he disagreed with his partner, also present at the interview, that ‘a look would be enough’ to discipline such children.

Former children and teachers did highlight specific aspects of military children’s education. Ollie, a young teacher in Germany in 1979, felt that the children ‘settled far better than their mums did’ and that the small classes, ‘integrated day’ and open-plan design of the school helped a great deal. Jan, a military child in Germany in the immediate post-war period and then a BFES teacher and parent herself, was one of many narrators to commend the written records that followed children from school to school, with teachers writing up notes either in ‘dribbles and drabs’ or en masse if the whole regiment was moving. When asked directly about prevalence of the term turbulence, Jan responded that it was not a common point of discussion in her school, but that maybe ‘if it had been a bit of a more mixed social intake, it might have been different’. She nevertheless reflected, like others, that ‘the children were on the whole I think, pretty resilient…. In fact, I think, you know, they had a broader outlook and were probably more capable than a lot of their peers in England.’ As with professional debates, the comparison with British schools and the idea that children were able to cope with moves were common, though the term ‘resilience’ used here was perhaps informed by the language of mental health more common at the time of the interview.

However, ‘normality’ had a narrative role too in stories of military childhood. When attending a civilian school briefly, Jenny, an NCO’s daughter and later a military spouse, recalled how amazed she was to meet a girl who had lived in one house her whole life. She said how she and her contemporaries, but also later her own children, accepted moving as ‘normal’, helped by parents who smoothed the transition. As seen in the professional debates, some felt that parental attitudes could be a decisive factor in the effects of turbulence on young people. Children’s behaviour was in many cases seen as directly

94 Interview with David and Rosemary T. with Grace Huxford, March 19, 2019, BAOR/GH/44, UoB RSDF; interview with Derek and Viv E. with Grace Huxford, April 13, 2018, BAOR/GH/11, UoB RSDF; interview with Denis and Josephine T. with Grace Huxford, July 13, 2018, BAOR/GH/18, UoB RSDF.
95 Interview with Derek and Viv E. with Grace Huxford, April 13, 2018, BAOR/GH/11, UoB RSDF.
96 Interview with Anon. with Grace Huxford, 4 July 2018, BAOR/GH/16, UoB RSDF.
97 Interview with Jan and Ron H. with Grace Huxford, May 2, 2019, BAOR/GH/35, UoB RSDF; interview with Ollie W. with Grace Huxford, October 4, 2018, BAOR/GH/22, UoB RSDF; interview with Sue A. with Grace Huxford, May 25, 2018, BAOR/GH/12, UoB RSDF.
98 Interview with Jan and Ron H. with Grace Huxford, May 2, 2019, BAOR/GH/35, UoB RSDF; interview with Fiona H. with Grace Huxford, October 30, 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF.
99 Interview with Jennifer B. with Grace Huxford, September 12, 2017, BAOR/GH/03, UoB RSDF.
reflecting parents’ capabilities not just as caregivers but even, in the case of fathers, as soldiers; Andy W. recalled the saying that ‘If you can’t control your children how do you expect to control your soldiers’.  

Acceptance became the hallmark of many military childhoods in other ways: ‘You just accepted it’, one former military child said of the day in the early 1970s when her British school in Germany was used as the setting for a hostage simulation and training exercise, with soldiers ‘skidding across the desk . . . like in the films’.  

It was only later, when she had grown up, that she realised through recounting the incident to others that this was far from a normal event. By the time she was interviewed, the day had become a stand-out experience, exciting and emblematic of her life as a military child. Similarly, officers’ families expressed how going to boarding school to mitigate the effects of turbulence was ‘normal’. A senior officer’s wife living in Germany in the 1960s said that officers’ children going to boarding school was ‘absolutely completely accepted by everybody . . . it worked very well. It never occurred to any of us that this wasn’t how it was going to be.’ She later asked her children as adults about their attitudes towards boarding school and said they thought it was the right decision and enjoyed themselves.

Throughout these narratives, then, a service child’s education and mobility provided an organising principle around which to narrate childhood. For some, their experience as children and a commonly accessible narrative about ‘military brats’ allowed them to build narratives and even adult selfhood around their itinerant childhood, reflecting on how they now ‘take things as they come’. Many mused on the place of turbulence and constantly moving in their life narratives, though seldom with any consensus as to whether it was positive or negative. Acceptance and flexibility were a source of intense pride for some, which distinguished them from ‘civilians’. It was more complex for others though: when asked directly if she ‘still felt like a service child’, Lorna recalled recently driving to a local UK Army base that she had never visited before,

and going ‘Oh yeah, this feels like home’ and – just such a sort of ridiculous thing to [do], but I think it’s always going to feel familiar in that sort of Proust early memories sort of way. I don’t feel particularly [pause] – actually I feel very uncomfortable with a lot of militarism . . . I feel I have quite a complicated [relationship] with the military now in my head, not that I have any real relationship with it. On one hand, you get this tendency to sort of fetishize the military and service personnel and I’m very uncomfortable with that and also to see sort of absolutes like ‘Them and Us’ and ‘Good guys and Bad guys’ . . . [but] I’m also aware that these are just people who are families like us. . .

Narrators like Lorna used interviews to figure out their attitudes not just towards their own childhood mobility, but to military life more generally.

Others drew on their contemporary context to reflect specifically on mobility, just as educationalists had done when turbulence was first discussed. But that context – both domestic and international – had become profoundly different by the time of these interviews. The prominent issue for many was now the Brexit negotiations (2016–2018),

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101 Interview with Andy W. with Joel Morley, November 2019, BAOR/JM/02, UoB RSDF; interview with Anon. with Grace Huxford, July 4, 2018, BAOR/GH/16, UoB RSDF.
102 Interview with Debbie G. with Grace Huxford, August 29, 2017, BAOR/GH/02, UoB RSDF.
103 Interview with Fiona H. with Grace Huxford, October 30, 2017, BAOR/GH/05, UoB RSDF.
104 Interview with Michael C. with Joel Morley, October 21, 2019, BAOR/JM/04, UoB RSDF.
105 Huxford, “There is no icebreaker like a tiny child”.
106 Interview with Lorna L. with Grace Huxford, May 8, 2019, BAOR/GH/36, UoB RSDF.
where mobility and society remained at the heart of discussion: Roger, who served in Germany in the 1970s, argued that his decision to send his children to a German kindergarten came from his belief in the power of mobility – ‘you want them to be able to travel and meet other people’ – but also his love for Europe. He saw this love for the idea of Europe as closely connected to his decision, perhaps conversely to some outside observers, to vote to leave the European Union in 2016.\textsuperscript{107} When asked if her time at different bases in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s was still significant to who she is today, Pauline answered that it was ‘hugely significant, which is why I’m so devastated about bloody Brexit. You know, I feel European, erm, I feel really at home in Germany.’\textsuperscript{108} These references to Britain’s exit from the European Union were perhaps unsurprising, given that narrators were being asked – during a time of intense political negotiation – to recount the history of a British community in mainland Europe. But questions about life in Germany prompted narrators to reflect on their experiences and outlook much more broadly and on the place that mobility played in their ideas of themselves now.

As Graham Dawson, Penny Summerfield and many others argue, constructing narratives around particular themes can offer ‘composure’ to oral history narrators.\textsuperscript{109} Framing life’s difficulties and disruptions as collective helps too, as Rebecca Clifford observed with interviews with child Holocaust survivors, where individuals found comfort and meaning from telling their individual stories within a ‘communal spirit’.\textsuperscript{110} Such compositional techniques had real-life implications, as former military children and educators became active members of vibrant alumni groups associated with BFES/SCEA schools. Karen Cachevki Williams and LisaMarie Liebenow Mariglia have observed an increased frequency in the age of social media of US military children seeking out alumni groups or continuing to identify with other ‘military brats’.\textsuperscript{111} Although the US military family experience differed from British experiences in several important ways (not least the size of the community), this project did unearth and even benefit from such self-identification and strong online associational cultures, as members shared news of our project on their social media fora.\textsuperscript{112} As Musgrove argues, the destruction of the places themselves does not seem to quash such identification. In this case, the closure of the last bases in 2019–2020 even seemed to sharpen interest for, as one narrator observed, ‘the place of my childhood doesn’t exist anymore’.\textsuperscript{113} Williams and Mariglia argue that trying to connect to other military children could even be seen as

\textsuperscript{107}Interview with Roger W. with Grace Huxford, May 17, 2019, BAOR/GH/38, UoB RSDF.

\textsuperscript{108}Interview with Pauline A. with Grace Huxford, November 14, 2019, BAOR/JM/05, UoB RSDF.

\textsuperscript{109}Graham Dawson, Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, Cultural and Social History 1, no. 1 (2004): 65–93; Juliette Pattinson, ‘‘The thing that made me hesitate . . .’: Re-Examing Gendered Inter-subjectivities in Interviews with British Secret War Veterans’, Women’s History Review 20, no. 2 (2011): 245–63; Alistair Thomson, Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Much ‘composure’ work rests on ideas developed by the Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University.

\textsuperscript{110}Rebecca Clifford, Survivors: Children’s Lives after the Holocaust (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 265.

\textsuperscript{111}Karen Cachevki Williams and LisaMarie Liebenow Mariglia, ‘Military Brats: Issues and Associations in Adulthood’, in Military Brats and Other Global Nomads: Growing up in Organization Families, ed. M. G. Ender (London and Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 73.

\textsuperscript{112}The project team took the conscious decision not to use these platforms ourselves, going through stakeholder organisations only, but our project was certainly discussed by others in these spaces.

\textsuperscript{113}Muscrove, ‘Locating Foster Care’, 112; interview with Michael C. with Joel Morley, October 21, 2019, BAOR/JM/04, UoB RSDF.
a quest for stability among former military children, ‘an unconscious desire to reconnect to a known, structured system’.\textsuperscript{114} That this system was often patriarchal, based on rank, class and social capital, is acknowledged by narrators, especially when discussing the differences and divisions in educational provision and the meanings of mobility, but it bound them to others and continued to do so. Composure can in this way be a collective as well as an individual experience.

This is not to argue that all former military children viewed their lives through the prism of childhood movement; a fully articulated sense of self is seldom evident in an oral history interview, nor is composure ever complete.\textsuperscript{115} As Alistair Thomson argues, whilst ‘an explanatory life narrative can be useful and comforting it will not, by itself, cure life’s ills’.\textsuperscript{116} However helpful the term turbulence might be, it can never fully encapsulate the difficulties – or joys – of living such a life.

**Conclusion**

This article has not set out to ask whether turbulence existed or to test its validity as an educational concept; the sheer range of views expressed by researchers, educators, parents and children suggests that these are potentially unanswerable questions or, at the very least, heavily influenced by subjective experience. Instead, this article has examined the contours of the turbulence debate in the wider historical context of the late 1960s and 1970s, but also drawn on longer histories of education, childhood and the post-war British state. It has traced the deeper roots of turbulence back, not only to the older traditions and patterns of movement followed by children within imperial networks, but to the climate of anxiety surrounding childhood in the 1940s. As views on turbulence reveal, assumptions regarding the role that mothers (and to some extent fathers) should play in childhood development persisted, despite the emergence of new ideas about selfhood. Moreover, turbulence exposed the varied ways that childhood movement was viewed in the late twentieth century, overlain with concerns about the ‘Age of Mobility’ and spliced with assumptions concerning immigration, social class and intelligence.

There are further questions to be asked, though beyond the scope of this article, about the relevance of other factors to military children’s education: though discussed only occasionally by the professional literature, the different educational routes followed by girls and boys merit further attention, for instance. As Tinkler has shown, gender underpins assumptions regarding modern mobility, with ‘going places’ becoming ‘integral to a redefinition of young femininity’ in the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{117} In the military case, the common practice of military children later joining the services themselves or marrying a member of the armed services complicates ideas of acceptable paths and movement still further.

But turbulence also shows historians the role of mobility, education and place in life cycles themselves, even if not expressed in the same terms as educational professionals. For most former military children, turbulence was a ‘normal’ part of their childhood, but it also provided them as adults with a helpful way to organise and understand their frequent mobility. For some, mobility itself became the hallmark of their childhood and part of their

\textsuperscript{114}Williams and Mariglia, ‘Military Brats’, 75.

\textsuperscript{115}Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 35.

\textsuperscript{116}Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History’, *Oral History Review* 42, no. 1 (2015): 23.

\textsuperscript{117}Tinkler, ‘Going Places or Out of Place’, 236.
adult identity, something they had reflected on more deeply in light of events at the time of their interview. As mobility remains a key research and policy concern, it is therefore vital that we not only historicise it within specific contexts, but understand the experiences of 'mobile' individuals and communities who are often researched but whose voices are not always heard.

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Data availability

Informed consent was granted for use of oral history interview material for research purposes and publication and interview recordings are available on formal request from the University of Bristol Research Data Storage Facility. The data are not publicly available to due information that could compromise the privacy of research participants. This research project was approved by the University of Bristol Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (Ref: 78823).