

Seafarers UK

Understanding the Needs of Older Merchant Navy Veterans

Interim Report

August 2018

Seafarers UK: Understanding the Needs of Older Merchant Navy Veterans

Interim Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015 recognised the role played by members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy in armed conflict, and therefore their place as veterans:¹

The Institute of Public Care was commissioned by Seafarers UK to undertake a research project spanning two years which overall aims to:

- Better define and understand the size, location, health and social care needs of Merchant Navy (MN) veterans (born before 1st January 1950) and their dependants.
- Raise the profile of UK MN veterans with ex-Service welfare providers and with local authorities and their Community Covenant teams;
- Establish and evaluate two approaches to the provision of specialist support to this group of veterans to inform future service development;
- Establish a set of strategic priorities arising from the research to inform the development of specialist services for MN veterans (if proven to be needed) and/or ensure that they can access services which meet their needs.

This interim report provides the findings from the first research activity - **Research to understand the numbers, location and needs of MN Veterans, and their access to services**. The research has involved three linked activities, which together have been designed to develop a better understanding of older MN veterans. They were all carried out over a 12-month period between May 2017 and May 2018. They were:

- Initial rapid research review.
- Electronic and postal survey of veterans.
- Face-to-face interviews with veterans.

¹ The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015, Ministry of Defence UK, 2015

Key findings

The Merchant Navy population

- Although there are no authoritative records, it is likely that there are more than 245,000 former seafarers from the Merchant Navy and fishing fleets, of whom around 11,500 are over 85 years in age in the UK. The number of veterans over 85 is likely to almost triple over the next 15-20 years.
- There are a wide range of job roles within the industries, and seafarers have a wide range of seafaring experiences. There is movement across the seafaring industries by individuals and this further complicates developing an understanding of the size of this population.
- There have been many conflicts around the world involving the Armed Forces where it is known that support was provided by MN or fishing or RFA vessels.
- Whilst seafarers and ex-seafarers of course live in a hugely diverse range of places in the UK and abroad, there are known to be concentrations of numbers in UK ports.

Characteristics of our cohort of research respondents

- Overall, we think the range of people we surveyed and spoke to gives a good cross-section of Merchant Navy veterans, and as a result we think that our findings about their experience and situation is broadly representative of Merchant Navy veterans as a whole.
- Interviewees provided a complex picture of seafaring careers. Some interviewees had worked across seafaring industries; there was a variety of career experience including length of service, different types of roles filled and in which industry; whilst some had experience of land-based jobs, others had worked at sea all their working lives.
- Whilst a number had served in the Falklands, there was otherwise a wide range of experience of supporting the Forces in terms of geographical location and type of support provided.

Our cohort's experience of conflict and its impact on their lives

- The type of experience of conflict of our survey respondents varied between those exposed directly to conflict, and others who had a less direct experience.
- Many interviewees also had experience of conflict where it was not related to the Armed Forces, and this was sometimes seen as having as much impact as their formal veteran experience.
- When asked to describe the impact of supporting the Armed Forces in conflict zones there were more examples of impact on mental health and wellbeing than on physical health. These often related to ongoing behaviour impact and flashbacks over a long period. There were also examples where there was no impact described.
- Many of the examples echo previous research on the impact of conflict on service personnel. A larger proportion of people in our interviews reported mental health issues than are generally thought to occur in the wider population,

and these seemed to be related in particular to experience of conflict rather than the seafaring life overall.

- The impact of the seafaring life on survey respondents centred in particular on physical health and wellbeing. Half of interviewees reported experiencing physical health problems because of their seafaring career (a larger proportion it appears than in the population as a whole), while alcohol abuse and dependency is also significant compared to the wider population.

Current circumstances and challenges faced

- In terms of veterans' current situation, financial problems loomed large as challenges for interviewees, as did housing and other practical support issues.
- Survey respondents across all age groups rated their current mental and emotional wellbeing positively, with only about 10% rating it as bad or very bad. Similarly, only 8% of interviewees described their mental health as an existing challenge, despite 46% saying it was adversely affected in the past by their experience of being in conflict. Physical wellbeing was rated more negatively generally and particularly amongst the older survey respondents.
- Most of the interviewees belonged to seafaring organisations or networks, as would be expected given their recruitment through these organisations. Whilst many had Veterans Badges and were aware of their veteran status, there was a sense that they identified more strongly with the seafaring than veteran communities.
- In terms of the provision of care and support (not mutually exclusive in the survey), the greatest number would prefer a seafarer service (56%), followed by family and friends (49%) and the NHS (40%). Veterans services were mentioned by 22% survey respondents as a preference.
- Perhaps most striking is that more than half of survey respondents (55%) said they did not know where to go to access additional practical or emotional support. Accessibility of services is a common challenge across the country and current government policy is to encourage local authorities and partners to improve the quality of information, assistance and advice. Given the life experiences and networks of MN veterans this suggests they may be particularly vulnerable in this area.

Next Steps

The next stage of the project will seek to explore further the following questions in more detail. The approach will be tested and refined with the project team to ensure they are within the resources available to the project, and are the most appropriate approach:

1. Can we develop further our understanding of the numbers and location of MN Veterans?
2. What services are needed by this group, and what are the barriers and enablers to them accessing existing mainstream/veteran/seafarer services?
3. What is the most appropriate way to meet the needs of MN Veterans given the relatively small population size, the range of services already in existence, and financial pressures on all sectors?

Seafarers UK: Understanding the Needs of Older Merchant Navy Veterans

Interim Report

1 Introduction and purpose of the research

The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015 recognised the role played by members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy in armed conflict, and therefore their place as veterans:²

“We would like to be absolutely clear that Members of The Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy deserve recognition for their service to this country in successive conflicts. All those who have served on a civilian vessel whilst it was supporting the Armed Forces are recognised as Veterans. It is therefore appropriate that this group is recognised and supported by the Armed Forces Covenant. This is a sign of the nation’s gratitude.”

Although there has been some research on the numbers and needs of former Merchant Navy seafarers and their dependants^{3 4}, relatively little is known about the needs of Merchant Navy veterans or the effectiveness of any services specifically developed to meet their needs. This interim report provides the findings from the first stage of a research project which aims to:

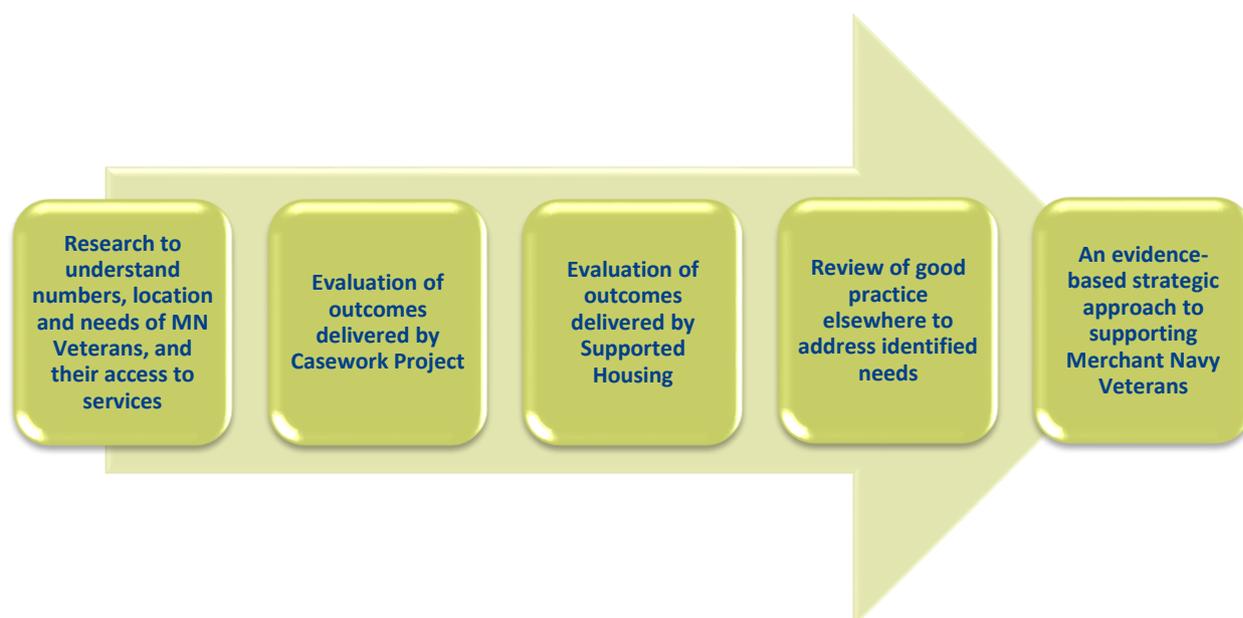
- Better define and understand the size, location, health and social care needs of Merchant Navy (MN) veterans (born before 1st January 1950) and their dependants.
- Raise the profile of UK MN veterans with ex-Service welfare providers and with local authorities and their Community Covenant teams;
- Establish and evaluate two approaches to the provision of specialist support to this group of veterans to inform future service development;
- Establish a set of strategic priorities arising from the research to inform the development of specialist services for MN veterans (if proven to be needed) and/or ensure they are able to access services which meet their needs.

There are five research activities to support the aims of the project:

² The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2015, Ministry of Defence UK, 2015

³ Institute of Public Care (2015) *UK Seafarers’ Demographic Profile*, Maritime Charities Funding Group.

⁴ Opinion Research Services (2016) *Older Seafarers’ Needs*, Maritime Charities Group.



This interim report provides the findings from the first research activity and, based on these, recommends the focus for the remaining activities. In the first research activity we wanted to understand as much as we could about:

- What the available evidence tells us about the current and future number, location and needs of MN Veterans born before 1 January 1950.
- The number of MN Veterans and dependants there are now, and how is this likely to change in the future.
- Where MN Veterans currently live.
- What health, care, support and other needs they and their dependants have; and whether these are specific to their MN veteran experience, their MN experience, or are they more generic/age related.
- What services they currently access (including both mainstream and specialist MN/veteran services).
- How MN Veterans find out about the services they access.
- What the barriers are currently to accessing services; what would they like to see that is different and which would help them to address any needs/live independently.
- Whether the needs of MN Veterans born before 1st January 1950, and their dependants, are changing, and how they are likely to change in the future.

2 Research methods

The scope of the research has been defined by the Aged Veterans Fund criteria as including members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) and Merchant Navy who served on a civilian vessel whilst it supported the Armed Forces and were born before 1st January 1950. It has also included seafarers who were working in the fishing industry and provided similar support. For ease of references the target group are referred to as “MN veterans” except where a distinction needs to be made between the different industries.

Whilst there were clear original age criteria for the project, a pragmatic decision was taken to broaden this to include some veterans who are younger as this will help inform

strategy for the future provision of services (one of the objectives for the project); this also had the result of including more Falklands veterans, many of whom are younger.

The research has involved three linked activities, which together have been designed to develop a better understanding of older MN veterans. They were all carried out over a 12-month period between May 2017 and May 2018. They were:

- Initial rapid research review.
- Electronic and postal survey of veterans.
- Face-to-face interviews with veterans.

The rapid research review was undertaken to set the context for the project, and establish the current level of evidence which could inform the analysis. This review will be built upon during the rest of the project, and we will extend its scope to consider good practice in addressing the needs of this population group.

We then undertook a survey of, in total, 387 veterans. The survey was completed by a wide range of survey respondents in terms of age, seafaring experience and current location and included a small number of MN veterans currently living abroad, as well as a small number of partners. We think this gives us a good overview of the situation and needs of older MN veterans.

The purpose of the interviews was to give us more in-depth understanding through specific examples of the experiences shared by MN veterans. Veterans were asked as part of the survey whether they would be prepared to take part in an interview, and this was followed up by an email or letter providing more information about the process. A total of 48 people from around the UK were interviewed during the period October 2017 – February 2018.

Interviews were either face-to-face or by telephone, and all were recorded and then transcribed and analysed. All interviewees were provided with information about the project and the interview process and asked to provide formal consent⁵. They were all given the opportunity to withdraw at any point. The report draws together data from all of the 3 sources, and consists of the following four parts:

- **Part A:** Who are Merchant Navy veterans?
- **Part B:** Who were our respondents?
- **Part C:** What experience of conflict did our respondents have?
- **Part D:** What are the current circumstances of veterans?

Note that with regard to the data presented in the tables in each of these sections, several interviewees had worked across several industries (for example fishing and merchant navy) so the numbers and proportions reported are not always directly comparable with each other.

⁵ See Appendix B

3 Part A: Who are Merchant Navy veterans?

The Armed Forces Covenant⁶ states:

“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”

In the case of civilian groups (including but not limited to the Merchant Navy and RFA), it states:

“..when members of these groups are deployed alongside members of the Armed Forces, they are entitled to increased levels of care and support, including in the event of injury or death, and often on a comparable basis to their Armed Forces colleagues.”

3.1 Numbers

There are no precise records of the numbers⁷ of merchant navy veterans but there is some relevant information available about numbers of the populations from which this group is drawn.

From the available data⁸, the Royal Navy appear to comprise the largest group of serving seafarers (33,000), followed by the Merchant Navy (30,000) and the fishing fleet (12,000). The RFA is a small reserve force of approximately 3,600⁹. Thus, the total serving seafaring population is estimated to be almost 80,000.

Previous research by IPC¹⁰ suggests the numbers of former seafarers (including the whole Royal Navy) and their adult dependants in 2015 as shown in the table below:

Table 1

	Merchant Navy	Fishing	Royal Navy
Former	150,850	95,570	367,790
Former 85+	7,080	4,550	55,170
All adult dependants	124,270	75,470	271,560

So, combining the Merchant Navy and Fishing fleet former seafarers in this table gives a total of over 245,000 former seafarers, not including the RFA. The same research projected the change in the size of these populations through to the year 2050. Although a decline in total numbers is projected, there is a more variable picture amongst the different age bands and industries. So, for example, overall, further rises

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-explanation-of-the-armed-forces-covenant>

⁷ The abbreviation “MN Veterans” is used in this report to apply to all seafaring veterans within the target population unless clearly distinguished as only being applicable to the Merchant Navy.

⁸ IPC (2015) Maritime Charities Funding Group: UK Seafarers' Demographic Profile, Oxford

⁹ <http://www.armedforces.co.uk/mod/listings/I0003.html>

¹⁰ IPC (2015) Maritime Charities Funding Group: UK Seafarers' Demographic Profile, Oxford.

in the numbers aged 65 and over, aged 75 and over, and particularly 85 and above are projected. Numbers of former merchant navy and fishing fleet seafarers aged 85 and over are projected to increase by more than 275% between now and the 2030s, while in the Royal Navy, the number of former seafarers aged 85 and above has already peaked.

The oldest former-seafarers are the group most likely to need help and support from maritime charities. They are key drivers of demand for care and support services. The projected increase in numbers in terms of the over-75s and over-85s among the merchant navy and fishing fleet groups highlights the need for providers to understand how they can meet the needs of frailer seafarers whether through the provision of services themselves, or by working in partnership with commissioners or other providers.

Finally, we have considered whether veterans badges might offer some clues about overall numbers, but limited data is available for the numbers of veteran badges issued. According to the Merchant Navy Association, nearly 12,000 Merchant Seafarer Veteran badges have been issued as of June 2016. However, these numbers are from one organisation only; other organisations, such as The Federation of Merchant Mariners also issues badges, but these numbers do not appear to be readily available.

3.2 Location

Given the lack of accurate records about who is a Merchant Navy veteran, it is also unclear where they currently live. The information that is available in this area is about the whereabouts of ALL current or former seafarers rather than specifically veterans, and is drawn from a variety of research and other sources¹¹. Nevertheless, it gives us a good initial indication, supported by professionals we spoke to in the field, of the main centres around which veterans might be based. For example:

- The Merchant Navy Welfare Board identified the location of beneficiaries of merchant navy charities' grants between 2008 and 2013. The main postal town areas were: Hull, Aberdeen, Doncaster, Liverpool, Newcastle and Norwich.
- The key ports in terms of serving fishermen numbers are: Plymouth, Poole, Newlyn, Milford Haven, Fraserburgh, Ayr, Lerwick and Belfast.
- The highest concentrations of members of the RNA Shipmates Campaign (open to former Royal Navy personnel) are: Portsmouth, Plymouth, Glasgow, Bath, Exeter, Kirkcaldy, Southampton, Newcastle, Nottingham, Liverpool, Cardiff, and Dorchester.

3.3 Seafaring experience

The project seeks to better understand people working in three seafaring industries which are known to have supported the British Armed Forces in conflict zones: the Merchant Navy, the Fishing Fleet, and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The experience of the people in each of these industries might include the following:

- **The Merchant Navy:** The Merchant Navy Welfare Board¹² in the UK has provided some internal guidelines, for others to use, to define a British Merchant Navy

¹¹ IPC (2015) Maritime Charities Funding Group: UK Seafarers' Demographic Profile, Oxford.

¹² IPC (2015) Maritime Charities Funding Group: UK Seafarers' Demographic Profile, Oxford.

seafarer as any person, of UK nationality (which includes Crown Dependencies - the Channel Isles and Isle of Man - and British Overseas Territories (e.g. Gibraltar, Falkland Islands), or living in the UK and who is serving, or has served, at sea in any capacity aboard a merchant vessel irrespective of the country of registry or ownership. This includes, but is not limited to, passenger liners, ferries, container ships, tankers, bulk carriers, and refrigerated cargo ships, Royal Fleet Auxiliaries (or their equivalent), coasters, specialist ships (e.g. deep sea tugs, salvage vessels, oil support vessels, lighthouse tenders etc.), plus large charter yachts with paid crew members.

- **The Royal Fleet Auxiliary**¹³ (RFA) is an integral part of the Royal Navy. It supplies fuel, equipment, ammunition and rations to Royal Navy warships during deployment. In addition, the RFA provides aviation support for the Royal Navy and amphibious and secure sea transport for Royal Marine and Army units. The RFA fleet includes tankers, stores ships, landing ships, a forward repair ship and an aviation support ship with a casualty reception facility.
- **The UK Fishing Fleet**¹⁴: The UK fishing fleet number of registered UK fishing vessels has fallen by 29 per cent since 1996. The number of fishermen on UK registered vessels has decreased by 9 per cent since 2006 from 12,934 to 11,757 in 2016. The number of regular fishermen has decreased by 9 per cent and the number of part-time fishermen, which comprise around a fifth of all fishermen, has decreased by 11 per cent over this period (see Chart 2.9). The decrease in fishermen numbers may be associated with reductions in fleet size as well as decreased fishing opportunities^{15, 16}.

3.4 Type of support to the Armed Forces

The people in all these industries have supported the Armed Forces in a variety of ways, and in a variety of conflict zones. So, for example:

- Between late September 1939 and late May 1945, a total of 25,343 merchant ships with 164,783.921 tonnes of cargo on board sailed from North America to Britain. British merchant shipping, the main target of the U-boats, lost over 1,300 vessels (some estimates are much higher) and nearly 32,076 seamen¹⁷.
- In World War 2: *“the Government recognised that trawlers and fishermen had an essential role in the maintenance of Britain's sea lanes and the Admiralty was keen to get minesweeping operations underway. The Admiralty's appetite for trawlers remained considerable throughout the war and altogether about 816 English and Welsh trawlers and in addition about 200 steam drifters were requisitioned at one time or another into the naval service”*¹⁸.
- Between 1950 and 2010, the UK MN have supported Armed Forces vessels on conflict and peacekeeping missions in:- Northern Ireland; The Gulf; The Balkans;

¹³ See for example <https://www.dynama.global/case-studies/%E2%80%8Broyal-fleet-auxiliary/>

¹⁴ House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 2788 (2017) UK Sea Fisheries Statistics

¹⁵ Marine Management Organisation UK Sea Fisheries Statistics 2015

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Carr, G.J., 1945. Health problems in the merchant navy. British journal of industrial medicine, 2(2), p.65.

¹⁸ <http://www.scarboroughsmaritimeheritage.org.uk/article.php?article=352>

The Falkland Islands; Iraq; Cyprus; Aden; Afghanistan; Malaya; Korea; Sierra Leone; Kenya; Palestine; Suez; Burma; Borneo; Rwanda and India and more¹⁹.

- In the Falklands *‘Up to the surrender in mid-June, 40 merchantmen totalling over 500,000 grt reached the South Atlantic. Without them, the war would not have been won as the Royal Fleet Auxiliary lacked the ships to transport the land forces and then support them and the warships 8,000 miles from home’*.²⁰

3.5 Key messages

Overall then, despite the relatively limited data available to date on the MN veteran population, from the evidence from elsewhere we can say that:

- Although there are no authoritative records, based on Table 1 above, it is likely that there are more than 245,000 former seafarers, of whom around 11,500 are over 85 years in age in the UK. The number of veterans over 85 is likely to almost triple over the next 15-20 years.
- There are a wide range of job roles within the industries, and seafarers have a wide range of seafaring experiences. There is movement across the seafaring industries by individuals and this further complicates developing an understanding of the size of this population.
- There have been many conflicts around the world involving the Armed Forces where it is known that support was provided by MN or fishing or RFA vessels.
- Whilst seafarers and ex-seafarers of course live in a hugely diverse range of places in the UK and abroad, there are known to be concentrations of numbers in UK ports.

¹⁹ Fear, N., Wood, D. and Wessely, S., 2009. Health and social outcomes and health service experiences of UK military veterans. ACDMH/KCMHR, King's College, London for the Department of Health.

²⁰ http://www.naval-history.net/F22-Falklands_War-Merchant_Navy.htm

4 Part B: Who were our respondents?

This part of the report summarises who responded to the survey and who we spoke to in interviews, including age, gender and where they currently live. It should be noted that when analysing responses by seafaring career there is some duplication as many respondents served across different industries – this means that the totals by industry can be greater than the total of all responses. We have also rounded responses so some percentages may not equal exactly 100%.

4.1 Age and gender

Although this research project is targeting veterans over the age of 65 in particular, it was felt important to widen the age of those surveyed to ensure we understood veterans approaching the target age, as well as those already within it. This was particularly important given the numbers of Merchant Navy veterans who had served in the Falklands.

Veterans across both research activities included a range of ages and experience in different industries. The largest age band to respond to the survey was aged 75-84 (34%) compared with the age band of 65-74 (50%) being the highest responders of those who were interviewed. The age range was generally distributed more evenly across the targeted age range for survey respondents than interviewees. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was a distinct difference in the percentage of those veterans who were aged 85+; 20.2% for survey respondents compared with 8.3% for interviewees.

Table 2 Age of survey respondents

	All responses		Area(s) worked in		
			MN	Fishing	RFA
85 +	20.2%	77	55	21	10
75 - 84 years	34%	130	79	35	21
65 - 74 years	30.9%	118	72	17	42
Less than 65	14.9%	57	32	0	32
Totals	100%	382	238	73	105

Table 3 Age of interviewees

	All responses		Area(s) worked in		
			RFA	Fishing	MN
85+	8.3%	4	0	2	4
75 – 84	29.2%	14	2	1	9
65 – 74	50%	24	7	3	24
Less than 65	10.4%	5	1	0	4
Unknown	2.1%	1	0	1	1
Totals	100%	48	10	7	42

We interviewed 48 people, 45 men and 3 women; of the three women, one was a widow, two were seafarers; all of the men were seafarers. Male respondents formed the largest group to complete the survey (77.51%). Female survey respondents included spouses and partners as well as female seafarer veterans.

4.2 Marital status

Whilst approximately 77% of survey respondents were married or had been widowed, more than half were now living alone (including a high number of female respondents). Similarly, 68.7% of interviewees were married or had been widowed with 48% now living alone. This is not uncommon given the age profile. According to the Office for National Statistics, in 2016, the percentage of people over 60 years of age who were single and never married was around 7-10% for different cohorts on the over-60 population, so similar levels to the MN Veterans.²¹

Table 4 Marital status of survey respondents

Answer Choices	All Responses		M	F
Single (never married)	9.2%	34	32	2
Married	46.1%	174	163	5
Separated	2.7%	10	9	1
Widowed	31.8%	120	44	71
Divorced	10.3%	39	34	4
Totals	100%	377	282	83

Table 5 Marital status of interviewees

Single	20.8%	10
Married/in a relationship	52.1%	25
Widowed	16.7%	8
Divorced	10.4%	5
		48

4.3 Current location

The survey sought responses from across the UK, and to reflect where it was thought there was likely to be concentrations of seafarers. This was largely achieved as detailed below:

²¹ Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2002 to 2016. ONS July 2017 Figure2.

Table 6 Where survey respondents currently live

Answer Choices	Responses		MN	Fishing	RFA
Northern Ireland	1.8%	7	1	4	2
Scotland	15.1%	59	23	27	14
Wales	5.9%	23	19	1	6
North East England	11.9%	47	26	16	11
North West England	14.8%	59	46	8	4
South East England	13.5%	54	32	1	23
South West England	9.4%	37	28	0	14
Greater London	4.2%	16	8	0	7
East of England	5.5%	21	16	3	1
East Midlands	1.0%	4	3	0	1
West Midlands	1.3%	5	4	0	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	9.1%	35	20	13	9
Other (please provide your postcode)	4.4%	17	-	-	-
Totals	100%	384	226	73	93

So, overall in terms of where the survey respondents currently live the biggest concentration come from Scotland 15.10%, followed by North West England 14.84% and South East England 13.54%. Amongst 'other' 2 people (0.52%) live in the Channel Islands, 5 people (1.3%) live in Australia/New Zealand, and 6 people (1.56%) live in Canada/USA.

The current locations of interviewees were also spread across the UK, and included Australia and Canada. The spread in terms of location was dependent on those veterans who were willing and able to be interviewed which limited representation in some areas.

Table 7 Where interviewees currently live

Location	Number of interviewees
Scotland	3
Wales	6
NE England	1
NW England	5
Yorkshire & the Humber	8
Midlands	3
E England	3
SE England (incl London)	12
SW England	3
Channel Islands	1
Australia	1
USA	1

4.4 Seafaring career

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked whether they were serving in the Merchant Navy, RFA or in the fishing fleet when supporting The Armed Forces. The majority of all those veterans who took part in both research activities were from the Merchant Navy – 65.05% of survey respondents and 87.5% of interviewees. It should be noted that the highest group of responses excluded from the survey analysis (as they had not identified a theatre of operation) comprised those working in the fishing industry.

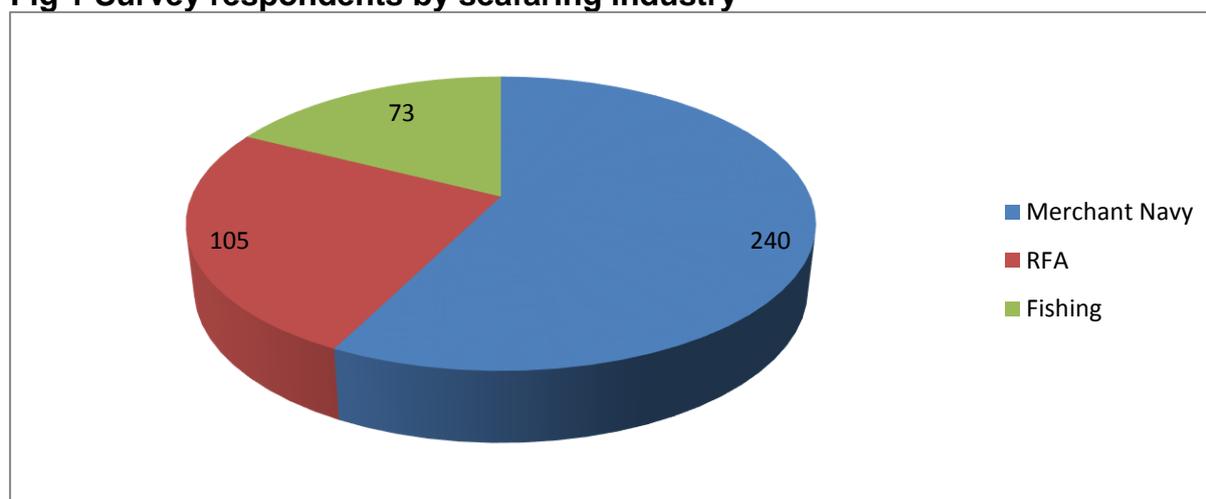
Fig 1 Survey respondents by seafaring industry

Table 8 Interviewees by seafaring industry

Industry experience	Number of interviewees
RFA	10
MN	42
Fishing	7

Veterans had experience across the range of industries, with a number having moved between them over the course of their careers.

4.5 Length of career

For many of the interviewees their seafaring careers had been lengthy (over 20 years) and they had little, if any, experience of land-based work. However, there were also examples of people who had shorter careers, typically starting with, or returning to, a civilian trade (for example, hairdresser, nurse or GP):

“I came back to England and after that I didn’t fancy going back to sea again, so I got involved in building.”

In some cases, but not all, this followed service in conflict zones. Alternatively, deciding for personal reasons, such as having a family that they did not want to continue with a seafaring career:

“I thought it was hard on my wife having to bring up a family on her own, and so I made the decision to finish.”

Table 9 Interviewees length of seafaring career

	All*	MN	Fishing	RFA
20+ years	30	29 (70%)	5 (71%)	4 (40%)
11-20 years	9	7 (17%)	1 (14%)	2 (20%)
6-10 years	4	4 (10%)	0	1 (10%)
5 years or less	3	3 (7%)	0	2 (20%)
Unknown	2	0	1	1
	48	43	7	9

*As some served in more than one industry the breakdown does not equal the total column.

4.6 Theatres of operation

Survey respondents were also asked to identify which theatres of operation they had been involved in as a merchant seaman, fisherman or whilst in the RFA. While the total number of respondents to this question was 339 (with 50 who did not respond), the totals against each theatre of operation exceed this number due to respondents having served in more than one theatre of operations, and more than one service. A list of

theatres of operation was provided with the option to choose “other” and then specify an alternative theatre.

The results provide an important snapshot of the significant spread and variety of involvement these seafarers had in supporting the Armed Forces. It shows that in terms of respondents to the survey, the greatest number had served in the Falklands, however the “older” theatres were also represented, notably World War II.

Table 10 Survey respondents’ theatres of operation

Theatre	Percentage	Number
Falklands	21.79%	153
Gulf	10.11%	71
Northern Ireland	7.12%	50
Aden	6.98%	49
Suez	5.70%	40
WWII	5.27%	37
Cyprus	4.84%	34
Malaya	4.84%	34
Iraq	3.42%	24
Balkans	2.99%	21
Borneo	2.85%	20
Korea	2.71%	19
Sierra Leone	2.71%	19
India	2.42%	17
Palestine	1.57%	11
Kenya	1.42%	10
Afghanistan	1.00%	7
Burma	0.57%	4
Rwanda	0.14%	1
Other (please specify)	11.54%	81
All		702

“Other” included the following: Not known (37, often widows responses), Vietnam (11), Iceland (15), Israel (5), Nigeria (5), Somali (3), Germany (3), Japan (2), Hong Kong (2), South Africa (2) plus 13 other countries with single responses including Nigeria, Chile, Suez, Cyprus, India, Iran, Vietnam, Somalia, Aden, Northern Ireland, Kuwait, Borneo.

It is noticeable that a higher proportion of those who were interviewed had served in the Falklands than survey respondents – 37.5% and 21.79% respectively.

4.7 Seafaring roles

Interviewees carried out different roles at sea which can be broadly categorised as follows:

Table 11 Interviewees seafaring roles

Role	Examples	Numbers
Trade	Electrician, radio officer, hairdressing, engineer	8
Seaman	Deck hand, ordinary seaman, midshipman, navigating officer, captain	21
Medical	Doctor, nurse	2
Fisherman		4
Catering & Hospitality	Purser, steward, catering officer, petty officer, cook, storekeeper, chef	15

In summary, the majority of veterans interviewed had worked either as seamen (43.7%) or in catering and hospitality (31.2%).

4.8 Key messages

- Overall, we think the range of people we surveyed and spoke to gives a good cross-section of Merchant Navy veterans, and as a result we think that our findings about their experience and situation is broadly representative of Merchant Navy veterans as a whole.
- Interviewees provided a complex picture of seafaring careers. Some interviewees had worked across seafaring industries; there was a variety of career experience including length of service, different types of roles filled and in which industry; whilst some had experience of land based jobs, others had worked at sea all their working lives.
- Whilst a number had served in the Falklands, there was otherwise a wide range of experience of supporting the Forces in terms of geographical location and type of support provided.

5 Part C: What experience of conflict did our respondents have?

In this section we explore the actual conflict experience of Merchant Navy veterans, drawing on both the survey and the interviews. Statistical data from the survey offers an overview of experience, and quotations from the interviews illustrate people's experience and the impact that it had on them. Quotations have had individual names removed.

5.1 Supporting British Armed Forces

Interviewees were asked to provide details of how they were involved in supporting British Armed Forces:

Table 12 Interviewees type of support to Armed Forces

Type of support	All*	RFA	Fishing	MN
Minesweeping	2	1	1	0
Medical support	5	0	0	5
Firefighting and towing	1	0	0	1
Evacuating civilians	3	1	0	2
Carrying troops	20	2	3	17
Carrying supplies	13	3	1	11
Carrying fuel	11	2	1	11
Carrying arms	7	1	1	7

*As some provided more than one type of support the total number exceeds the number of interviews.

Interviewees elaborated on these categories and gave vivid examples of the kind of environment that people were working in, and the kind of tasks involved. These included many examples of delivering supplies:

- *“We were taking arms and foodstuffs and everything you could think of, down to toothpaste, razor blades, even 7 o'clock razor blades, they had them in the army, they were army issue 7 o'clock blades, we took all stuff like that see, coffee, dried milk, everything that we could carry for our army down in the Middle East and in Cyprus.”*
- *“We were running aviation fuel to all the marines for their choppers and fighter bases.*
- *“We were carrying military equipment.”*
- *“And in the 1970's, the Suez Canal, we were taking arms down to the British, they were having problems in Cyprus so we were taking arms.”*
- *“We were landing portable radar sets, tanks, effectively every kind of army equipment you can think of.”*

They also included transporting troops and supporting injured personnel:

- *“Basically as a supply ship. I mean we carried 130-odd troops down there. We had a very large upper deck which was very useful for landing helicopters. But basically we were just supply.”*
- *“We took on board the injured prisoners as well as a few of the people, but it was mainly the injured and we looked after them, then eventually we took all of, I think it was 4,000 prisoners of war back home at the end of the war so it was a very interesting experience.”*

5.2 Exposure to conflict

There were different types of experience within the conflict zones, with some veterans having had direct exposure to conflict (for example being fired upon), whilst for others experience was indirect (for example delivering fuel but remaining away from the fighting).

Table 13 Interviewees exposure to conflict

Direct exposure	29
Indirect exposure	17
No exposure	2

There was a similar range of exposure amongst those with RFA or fishing experience, whilst there was more direct exposure amongst those with Merchant Navy experience.

Table 14 Interviewees exposure to conflict by service

	RFA	Fishing	MN
Direct exposure	6	4	25
Indirect exposure	4	3	13

Quotations from the interviews again illustrate the range of experiences of veterans, from direct exposure...

- *“Well Northern Ireland, we used to take the troops in and out of Belfast. So we’d be fired on there going up and down.”*
- *“We were next to the Sheffield when she got sunk.”*
- *“Wasn’t directly in any conflicts as such, I went afterwards, the nearest one I can think of is in the early ‘70’s I was on the Northern Island run, taking the troops over to Northern Island which got a bit hairy at times.”*

..to more indirect (or perhaps subsequently minimised) exposure:

- *“I never felt threatened.”*
- *“We weren’t really in conflict, in 1975-76 I was on a tanker up in the Cod Wars in Iceland, but that wasn’t really a conflict, it was just a little misunderstanding.”*

5.3 Other conflict exposure

In addition to the descriptions of exposure to conflict when supporting the Armed Forces, many interviewees related stories of their exposure to conflict in other circumstances, which could clearly be just as direct and significant for those involved:

- *“Then I’d started going on a South American run. Little did we know that we were carrying armaments to the Chileans who were having problems down there in Chile but we didn’t know what we were doing, we were just carrying arms to the militias, they called it the Rivers of Blood that conflict, that was brutal, nothing to do with the British but we were taking arms to the militia down there. I can’t think of the chap’s name down in Chile at the time, he was killing everybody, you know, that was against his regime, kind of thing.”*
- *“The first one I did was Nigeria, twice pirates tried to board us but we managed to fight them off and the last one I did, she was the biggest one in the world at the time, 47,000 tonne. We carried 750 passengers.”*
- *“During the 6 day war in Israel we had just tied up and we were getting unloaded before we went up to pick oranges up for Glasgow and it was the second day and there were flying over and we were told to get straight back into the Mediterranean because we’re at war. We thought it was just a drill. So we went out to the Mediterranean straight away and as we just turned down to the Mediterranean and there was an Israeli gunboat going past us and they were throwing grenades in the water, what they were doing that for was to stop any terrorists swimming under the ship and putting a landmine on the ship to blow the ship out of the water. It was a bit nerve wracking but you just get on, we just carried on with it. You didn’t realise it.”*
- *“There was always something going on that you couldn’t go ashore, because it was too dangerous, up in the Persian Gulf and all that. The Arabs used to come on board the ship and we had to stop them boarding, because they would steal. What we were afraid of was in case any of them had guns.”*
- *“With my first brush, I suppose, was Cold War, we had, we were ranked by the gun boats, they sank gun boats, they fired over us so that was first involvement I suppose.”*

5.4 Impact of conflict exposure

This is one of the key areas we wanted to explore with our respondents and interviewees, to help us get a good picture of whether the conflict experience had led to subsequent challenges in coping or in additional health support needs for veterans. Interestingly, there is no previously published research on the impact of serving in conflict areas on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of MN veterans, although there is wider evidence on the impact on Armed Forces veterans.

IPC has previously identified well-known wider occupational and other factors which impact on the health and wellbeing of current and former seafarers²²:

“...commercial fishing is Britain’s most hazardous occupation, whilst merchant seafaring is regarded by some as second only to this”.

²² IPC (2015) Maritime Charities Funding Group: UK Seafarers' Demographic Profile, Oxford.

The same report identifies a number of lifestyle issues including smoking, alcohol consumption, and a relatively sedentary lifestyle.

“This can affect fitness and high death rates for accidents at work in the merchant fleet (between seven and 20 times greater than for shore-based workers even in the safest national fleets)”²³.

Indeed a recent study of the impact of piracy on seafarers found that there was a lasting impact, however...

“..it is only one traumatic experience that seafarers face, and the ongoing exposure to maritime trauma has an independent effect on post-traumatic stress symptoms linked to poorer wellbeing”²⁴.

There is also wider evidence about the impact of working in conflict situations. Some of the findings from these studies are, we think, potentially relevant to Merchant Navy veterans. For example, it is clear from a number of studies of people in conflict situations such as the Armed Forces and their support services that a higher incidence of mental health and physical health problems than for the general population can arise^{25,26} and that this can be for a number of reasons, including:

- Direct experience of trauma or injury.
- Death, injury, trauma of colleagues, wider public or indeed enemies.
- Being away for long periods from family and friends.
- Pre-service vulnerabilities – so for example people may join to escape a difficult life situation including for example abuse or previous trauma.
- Earlier onset of physical disorders related to a rigorous physical and sometimes hazardous life – including for example orthopaedic including chronic pain/ENT problems; physical disorders associated with mental health illness.
- Trauma when leaving a service and adjusting to civilian life and very different lifestyles.
- Reluctance to seek help – including for example many men’s tendencies to be less likely to seek help, and the potential lack of understanding of and by civilians, as well as possible shame, stigma or guilt about their experience, role and responsibilities.

Certainly, we found from our survey and interviews that there are both physical and mental consequences of being involved in conflict situations, and seafarers are affected in both physical and mental ways by their seafaring experiences due to the nature of the occupation. This can compound any physical or mental issues related to the ageing

²³ Roberts, S. (2000) ‘Occupational mortality among British merchant seafarers (1986-1995)’, *Maritime Policy & Management*, 27: 3: 253-265.

²⁴ Seyle, D et al (2018) The long-term impact of maritime piracy on seafarers’ behavioural health and work decisions. *Marine Policy* Vol 87 pp23-28

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X17303925>

²⁵ Busuttil, W., 2010. Management of Mental Health in Veterans: The role of the Third Sector Charity Combat Stress.

²⁶ Busuttil, W., 2010. Combat-related stress. Promoting men's mental health. Oxford: Ratcliffe, pp.125-41. - purchase

process. We explore this in this section in terms of the impact of conflict, and in the next section which focuses on the overall impact of the seafaring life.

Survey respondents were asked about the impact of their experience on their physical and mental health. Only a small number reported an injury – 13 respondents (3.6% of all respondents) – with the nature of the injuries as set out in the table below. Interviewees described relatively few examples of physical impact, although a little higher than survey respondents – 7 respondents (15% of all interviewees) and even fewer directly related to the conflict.

Table 15 Survey respondents' injury in theatre of operation

Type of injury	Number of injuries reported
Lower limb	8
General/non-specific physical injury	7
Neck or back	6
Upper limb	5
Unknown	5
Mental health/stress/anxiety	2
Other musculoskeletal	2
Hearing	2
Frostbite	1
Eyes	1
Rope related	1
Total number of injuries	40

Descriptions ranged from the nonchalant to the graphic...

- *“I caught a couple of ricochets in Falklands but nothing to stop me or anything.”*
- *“When we did the first run I was ok, but when we came back I got something called the Argentinean bug, with them having dysentery and what have you, they were malnourished, I got this bug off them, I was really, really ill. We had a medic on board who said I'd have to go to Stanley hospital, as quick as possible, to get some fluids in me. I was in there for about 4 days.”*

However, one of the most striking differences between the responses of those who completed the survey and those who were interviewed was the number who reported an impact of their experience on their mental health. Only 4.4% of survey respondents (17 of 387 veterans) identified an impact compared with 46% (22 of 48 veterans) of interviewees. We think that the reason for this is likely to be veterans' understandable initial reluctance to discuss such a sensitive and often painful aspect of their life – until assured of an interviewees understanding and confidence.

Table 16 Type of impact of conflict on interviewees

Mental health	22 (46%)
Alcohol	2 (4%)
Isolation	0 (0%)
Physical health	7 (15%)

A similar proportion (approximately half) experienced a physical or mental impact across each of the industries. We think this level of mental health impact is possibly still under-reported even in the interviews, but nevertheless represents a significant proportion of veterans who have experienced mental health problems – and significantly higher than the generally reported proportion of 25% in the population as a whole²⁷. Once again the quotations illustrate this well, and perhaps suggest that the impact on alcohol consumption is also under reported...

- *“The only thing I would say probably, that when we got back from the Falklands maybe we did drink a little bit more than we did before. But that seemed to pass after about 6 months and then went back to normal. You miss, sometimes, the difference and the situations like that, it was the same after [me mate finished as well?] there was excitement there all the time. You come back to the normal hum drum everyday life.”*
- *“I’m legally classed with spinal disabilities, problems with my legs, I’ve got cirrhosis of the liver, so basically I’m just falling to pieces really, but that’s all through drinking and abuse of alcohol, which was my fault, I can’t blame anyone for that, it’s just one of those things and like I say, now I don’t drink like I used to but one time I was drinking 3 bottles of spirits a day. And that was solely and purely because after the ship sunk, if you can imagine, I’d be lying in my bunk after working 12/14 hours, I’m beat and I’m on a ferry boat and the next thing I’m looking at a train coming through the wall, makes you wonder what they hell is going on, I thought, am I dreaming, I can see this train and then the next thing all the water was in. within 6 minutes that ship sunk and I was trying to put the passengers together and the ship’s turning over, trying to get people to the other side.”*

Table 17 Type of impact of conflict on interviewees across industries

Type of impact	RFA	Fishing	MN
Mental health	5	3	20
Alcohol	0	0	2
Isolation	0	0	0
Physical health	2	2	5

Some veterans or their spouses described the impact experienced at the time of the conflict for their spouses and not just themselves:

²⁷ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems>

- *“My husband worked in the MN all our life; I was like a single parent and have been depressed and anxious”*
- *“I was a widow with five children in school”*

Many interviewees vividly described the subsequent and ongoing impact of their experience, some specifically referring to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), others describing flashbacks, anxiety and depression. Clearly for many people their experience of conflict continues to echo across their daily lives many years after the events themselves:

- *“I still bear the mental scars of the Falklands”*
- *“The horror of seeing thousands of holocaust survivors attempting to reach Palestine through the port of Haifa while being prevented from doing so by the Forces is an experience not to be forgotten. “*
- *“I am less capable of handling stressful situations”*
- *“I become very angry even years after the event to the point where I could not discuss the campaign without being angry....if I talk about it I will be depressed for a day or two...I don't talk about it much.”*
- *“After returning from the Falklands my menstrual cycle was totally changed and chaotic which my GP told me was due to stress, although I did not know I was stressed.”*
- *“I turned into an introvert and started drinking heavily, my marriage ended a few years after, my drinking is lighter now but I have flashbacks and start again.”*
- *“I've been getting counselling for me depression and me anxiety because I had anxiety attacks and with me being this low, I just feel helpless, you know, and insecure. And disappointed as well.”*
- *“I'm just so angry and I get a migraine and I've just got to hide from my own family because the tension and the stress, and you do feel helpless and you feel disappointed, you know, and it makes you anxious.”*
- *“Everybody thought I was different when I came back from there, I couldn't see it but they could. Distant. Within myself, more emotional but colder to other people. More aloof. That sort of thing.”*
- *“I suffered with the silence. Because when the paras went off, after being hyped up for all these months making sure they were alright, and all the responsibility, once all the paras had gone off, the whole ship went flat and I believe I suffered a bit from post-traumatic stress where it's silent. When I'm at home now, if my wife is out I have the radio on, I can't bear silence. I think that affected me a little bit.”*

Clearly, for many Merchant Navy veterans the physical and mental health impact of their conflict experience has been significant, and had a major influence, for some, on their subsequent life choices and on their wellbeing.

5.5 Impact of seafaring career

As well as the impact of conflict, interviewees were also asked about the impact that their seafaring career overall had, if any, on their physical or mental health. Half described a physical impact relating to their seafaring career (compared to 15% relating it to conflict experience, and a prevalence of around 20% in the population as a whole

with long-standing issues ²⁸), perhaps not surprising given the potential impact of long-term exposure to physically demanding activities for many in the Merchant Navy. Around 23% described a mental health impact (compared to 46% relating it to conflict experience) – which matches figures for the prevalence of mental health issues in the population. Clearly most veterans with alcohol issues relate this to the overall career circumstances than to the impact of conflict experiences. This is high compared to UK population estimates of around 3.1% as harmful or dependent drinkers in the population²⁹.

Table 18 Type of impact of seafaring career

Type of impact	Number of interviewees (% all interviewees)
Mental health (generally)	11 (23%)
Alcohol	8 (17%)
Isolation	3 (6%)
Physical health	24 (50%)

Table 19 Type of impact of seafaring career across industries

Type of impact	RFA	Fishing	MN
Mental health (generally)	5	3	9
Alcohol	2	1	8
Isolation	1	1	2
Physical health	6	3	21

The interviews gave us more detailed insight through examples into the kind of ongoing health issues that veterans put down to a seafaring life. In terms of mental health:

- *“I’d say that being at sea is very selfish. And I think seamen are selfish. Though you’re living with blokes, and now women, all the time, you’re still in your own little thing. I don’t like crowds. I’ve said to my wife a couple of times, we’ll wait for the next bus, or if we go to Tesco on a Saturday and it’s chocka, I get annoyed. And I have noticed now that I get annoyed quickly now. Little things I can lose it. I usually have a go at her about it. she’ll tell you that I do lose me rag a lot quicker now.”*
- *“Anyway, steamed back to Singapore, the captain came and spoke to me and said they will be sending you to see a doctor when we get to Singapore. I was having panic attacks about 4 times a day. I’d never had one in my life, I didn’t know what they were. Anyway, we got to Singapore, and I was put in a hotel, because the boat was going to Australia, and I was flown home. There was nobody to meet me; I had to make my own way from my auntie’s house in Southend, the East End of London. I went down the tube station to catch the train to where my auntie lived and it was crowded and when all the people were coming off the train I thought I was back in the tank and I took very bad. It was like mud coming at me, a wall of mud. I just*

²⁸ The Office for Disability Issues updated Department for Work and Pensions estimates 201 showed 11.6 million disabled people in Great Britain, of whom 5.7 million are adults of working age, 5.1 million are over state pension age and 0.8 million are children.

²⁹ <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/data/consequences/>

dropped my luggage and tried to run up the escalators and fell over. I woke up with ambulance men with me giving me oxygen. So I eventually got home to Lowestoft, where I lived with my parents and I was put on Valium. My father took me to see a couple of psychiatrists but we couldn't get any answers. I've been trying now since 1968 but I can't get a solicitor, I've tried solicitors, SSAFA tried for me, all they could say was that Agent Orange which they used in '67/'68 and then it was banned. SSAFA told me that every single veteran from America was on a special pension if they served in that time or they were in Vietnam at that time, because of the effects of the Agent Orange."

- *"The first time I went back, fishing trip, 6 months after the episode, 1968, I went to sea on a trawler and as I was taking my cup of tea up the wheel arch, I went past the engine room and just the smell of the engine rooms, I took another bad panic attack and just ran. Got in my bed. So when we got ashore, at the end of that trip, I knew I couldn't go back on the boats and I did a year as a bus conductor."*
- *"Second go on these old tide-boats I just became unable to function, I had virtually a nervous breakdown, I was working day and night on there to keep the thing going and I just gave up eventually, got very tearful, wouldn't do anything and I was put in the Catherine Rigby hospital in South Africa, which is a sort of whites only sort of place, they'd not long had independence and they looked after me and pumped me full of vitamins and I was in there for 3 weeks or a month, put on weight again, got a lot better, I flew back to the UK and then was immediately put in Netley Hospital, which is a joint services hospital, navy and army, and they came and an army psychiatrist, and being RFA we just got lumped in with the same thing, just as well I did actually because I then had 3 or 4 months' leave after that until I was ready to go back."*
- *"They've always just put me on medication. For years they just kept upping the medication and what they don't understand is it's alright saying 'counselling' but counselling doesn't work for everybody. I've had to isolate myself; I help people out where I can, but most of the time I'm on my own. Here I've got 269 acres if I want to walk around. I'm no good at sitting in rooms of people, like therapies and that, it's not me, I just can't see the concept of that, you know."*
- *"Well, I still go down to that harbour and see what's happening down there. I still miss it. We go on the ferry and there's couple of tankers in the anchorage, because I've been in that anchorage a few times. I do miss the sea. They say it's in your blood, it was in my dad's as well, that's where I got it from. I do miss it. But when you're actually there you think what the hell am I doing here, sometimes. You go back, you go back and you go back again. I do still miss it even after all this time."*

There were examples of alcohol abuse and dependence:

- *"I went into a deep depression. I lost me job on the ship, well, I didn't lose me job, but I was drinking heavily, smoking heavily for a year. And all I could think of was 'I should be on the ship' and I had to change me lifestyle."*
- *"We were boozers, we were fighters, we were womanisers, you know, this idea of woman in every port, you couldn't do that 'cos we were too busy fighting and boozing, you know, women were the occasional every other port, the rest of the time it was boozing."*
- *"I probably went out too much with friends here, drinking too much, but then just about everybody did then in the services."*

Some people also recognised the challenges of living a relatively solitary life:

- *“Because I suppose, being at sea, you are a bit solitary.”*
- *“I’ve learnt you see, when I was at sea, I was only home for so many days, and I weren’t bothered about neighbours. Me wife did all that, when I finished, I don’t bother with it now but I don’t want people knowing my business.”*

Finally, interviewees also described some of the impact that a seafaring life had on physical health and wellbeing:

- *“I’ve got COPD. Which is not very good for me lungs and that’s down to me being at sea, being in the cargo because we didn’t have any health and safety in them days, you know, working with hazardous materials, fumes. The red lead paint, you know all the stuff that’s banned now and we just worked with it like all the cargos were loose cargos, not like now, container ships, we handled all loose cargo, dust, all stuff that’s banned now.”*
- *“Even the white finger, I wanted to know what that was caused by and they said pneumatic chipping hammers, electrical stuff, chipping the decks and stuff like that with these chipping hammers, it was all motorised mechanical stuff that we used on the ships. That’s why me hands are knackered now. They shouldn’t be really, but they are.”*
- *“I’ve had 2 new knees. And that’s vibration I think, it’s just shot me knees.”*
- *“I can’t really think, the only thing, all the years I was a radio officer using the Morse key I did get a repetitive strain injury in my right hand and I had difficulty using that, my hand would just seize up in the middle of messages. It happens to quite a lot of RO’s I think. When I was on leave, I went to see a specialist and basically all he told me was you can’t write anymore, learn to use your left hand. Well, it’s not as easy as you think, going from right to left, so basically I can’t really write letters, my wife does that now, not many. I do have difficulty writing. You got repetitive strain injury and that was it, I didn’t do anything about trying to get compensation or anything like that, can’t be bothered going down that line. I just let it go.”*
- *“He needed help with dressing and bathing, that sort of thing. He went to Canada one time, he was on the Cunard ships, the cruises and I know he fell from the deck to the lifeboat when they were doing training, he fell 40 feet and he was in hospital for a long time in Canada, but that’s all I know about that, he did a lot of damage to his back.”*
- *“I fell down the ladder. Usual business, you know. I just caught my heel and fell down to the deck and broke my leg. I guess that injury laid you off for a while? About 3 months it was actually.”*
- *“So I’d gone to check everything was stowed away properly and he rung around to go into the wind, so she just took a great big [sea?] and threw me over the side and I still had one of the weighs in my hand, I wrapped it round my wrist and I was banging on the side of the ship, and I could feel [the waves?] slipping at me, and I thought this is it, and then she rolled and poured me back on board again. The [unclear] was 300 mile an hour so I never felt anything and I made my way forward, and when I turned down, they went cor, and you can see the scars there, the bone came right through, just totally crushed hanging over the side, course I took my glove off and it was just full of blood. They took me to, I was in a place called [unclear], I was there quite a while, almost 2 months before I could go home.”*

- *“I dislocated this knee once and the skipper didn’t want to go in, he said we were going back in 2 days’ time, I couldn’t straighten it, it was locked, so it was 5 days to go home, and the 3 out so I was like that for 8 days, we got into Hull and they sent an ambulance down, they took me to the old Royal Infirmary, which is gone now, and this doctor and nurse, the old beds were metal things, and the doctor just put his foot on the end and just pulled, I nearly hit the ceiling!”*
- *“Physically, me back’s shot. I’ve had, in the last 3 years, I’ve had 4 prolapsed, slipped discs, at the last consultation, last year, consultant up at Leicester said you’re 50-odd but your back’s 80. And he’s put that down to being at sea, the work I did at sea.”*

5.6 Key messages

- The type of experience of conflict of our survey respondents varied between those exposed directly to conflict, and others who had a less direct experience.
- Many interviewees also had experience of conflict where it was not related to the Armed Forces, and this was sometimes seen as having as much impact as their formal veteran experience.
- When asked to describe the impact of supporting the Armed Forces in conflict zones there were more examples of impact on mental health and wellbeing than on physical health. These often related to ongoing behaviour impact and flashbacks over a long period. There were also examples where there was no impact described.
- Many of the examples echo previous research on the impact of conflict on service personnel. A larger proportion of people in our interviews reported mental health issues than are generally thought to occur in the wider population, and these seemed to be related in particular to experience of conflict rather than the seafaring life overall.
- The impact of the seafaring life on survey respondents centred in particular on physical health and wellbeing. Half of interviewees reported experiencing physical health problems as a result of their seafaring career (a larger proportion it appears than in the population as a whole), while alcohol abuse and dependency is also significant compared to the wider population.

6 Part D: What are the current circumstances of veterans?

In this section we summarise the current circumstances of veterans – and explore the extent to which they have good networks and support to help them in their current life.

6.1 Employment

The majority of those people we interviewed were retired from employment.

Table 20

Employment status (where known)	Number of interviewees
Employed	5
Retired	28

All 5 of those still employed were in the Merchant Navy. One still works ad hoc in the Merchant Navy, one works as a harbour master's assistant and the remaining three work in posts not directly related to seafaring. There were 15 interviewees who did not share their employment status or were unemployed.

6.2 Challenges Faced

Interviewees were asked about the challenges they were facing in their current circumstances, including health related issues unconnected to their seafaring work. As might be expected given the age profile, approximately 60% of people are currently facing challenges with their physical health. It is also striking that more than one third are facing financial challenges, and approximately 21% mentioned problems relating to their housing.

Table 21 Current challenges overall for interviewees

Current challenges	Number of interviewees
Financial	17
Housing	10
Mental	4
Physical	29

Table 22 Current challenges by industry for interviewees

Current challenges	RFA	Fishing	MN
Financial	5	4	15
Housing	2	2	9
Mental	0	1	3
Physical	7	4	27

6.3 Finances

In the interviews the majority of veterans from all 3 industries described financial problems. The interviews explored the extent of some of these problems including the impact now of decisions not (or lack of opportunity) to invest in pensions during the career:

- *“Well I never got a merchant navy pension, all the years I sailed in the merchant navy, I never got a pension out of it, a seaman’s pension, because it was voluntary and I couldn’t afford to pay, because we had 3 children on the floor and me wages were just covering the rent directly and gas and food money on the table while I was away at sea, you know. I get a little bit of help from Nautilus, I get a quarterly money off them to help with gas and electric because me wife’s got severe COPD.”*
- *“I’m used to getting planes, ships, boats, trains whatever, packing me bag, going away and earning a few shilling but I feel helpless now, living on a pension.”*
- *“I get frustrated, you know, that I can’t work anymore, I’m not producing money, because I’ve always produced money, I’ve never stopped just like that, you wonder what’s happening don’t you.”*
- *“Well, they gave me a grant. I get £360 twice a year, so big help. Because I lived abroad and being out of the country for many years, I’ve never had all me stamps and unbeknown to me at the time, the companies I’d been sailing for hadn’t been paying the stamp as well. There was a lot of skulduggery going on.”*
- *“I’ve never claimed anything off the government, only the bus pass and my pension, last October I started getting that. I’ve never claimed the dole or anything like that. I wouldn’t know how to do anything like that. I believe that the medical stuff is my right because I’ve paid in for it but to improve it, I would like to see a bit more recognition for this type of thing for merchant seamen and RFA and fishing people, because that fishing game is hard graft.”*
- *“The only thing I complain about is my pension is short, from seafaring.”*
- *“Well, one from Chichester used to send me every month a grant or £300 but it’s been knocked on the head, I don’t know why. Just one of those things. Otherwise I’m using my own money as it is, not that I spend a lot, I’ve enough clothes now, some of them even fit me!”*
- *“At the minute, we are struggling financially, I have to admit that, I’d like to do more but because I was in the merchant navy and never in my day can remember anybody saying ‘do you want to join a pension scheme?’ I didn’t have any pension, so and it’s the same in the catering business, you don’t, so when I retire, I only get the basic £170 odd pension. I did lose a lot of money through divorce in my first marriage, so basically I started again up this area. It’s like a new life, I came up here in 1990 and we’ve been married 25 years. I bought a house, everything a lot better than previous, but I we bought the house in ’95, I took an endowment policy out and they have crashed, so when the house was due to be paid 2 years ago, we didn’t have it, we didn’t even have half from the policy.”*

6.4 Housing

Similarly, interviewees described a range of dissatisfaction with their accommodation arrangements, often referring to ‘bad’ decisions earlier in their career:

- *“Me wife’s got severe COPD, she’s on oxygen 16 hours a day so the electric is on all the time, I’ve got to keep her warm, the house warm for her, you know. I was offered accommodation over there, I would love to move over there but I can’t with my wife being the way she is. We own our own home and I just couldn’t do it at the present time, I’d love to move there but not at the present time.”*
- *“I am thinking of going into an apartment or something.”*
- *“Well I’ve lived in London all my life, mainly about a mile from here, that’s where I was born. If I’m truthful, I would say that I would leave tomorrow.”*

6.5 Mental health

Survey respondents were also asked to rate their current health and wellbeing to help understand their current needs for care and support. In rating their overall mental and emotional wellbeing respondents were generally positive across all age groups with only between 7% and 12% rating themselves as bad or very bad. This contrasts with the less positive picture presented from interviews.

Table 23 Overall mental and emotional wellbeing of survey respondents

Rating	All ages	Under 65	Aged 65 – 74	Aged 75 – 89	Aged 90 plus
Very good	29%	34%	30%	28%	26%
Good	33%	29%	38%	38%	42%
Neither good nor bad	28%	27%	21%	27%	22%
Bad	8%	5%	10%	7%	3%
Very bad	2%	5%	2%	0%	7%

Many interviewees described the longer term impact of their seafaring career on their mental and emotional wellbeing. Many of the comments made related to veteran’s ability and willingness to socialise:

- *“I’m not very social, so I see neighbours and wave but that’s about it.”*
- *“But I’m happy on my own to be quite honest. I’m so used, sometimes I don’t move out of here for days, I go out Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, in the morning, I’m back in the afternoon. Never go out in the night-time. I’ve not been out in the night for 2 years.”*
- *“We go out socially but I wouldn’t say I go as much as I used to. One, the people aren’t here and two, there aren’t the places to go, the locals and things.”*
- *“My wife knows everybody, I don’t know anybody. I keep myself to myself.”*
- *“No, I don’t think anybody wants to know my problems. Everyone’s got their own problems and some people are worse off than I am. Especially when you see the lads who have lost limbs coming back. I’m certainly not going to go to one of these places where you all sit in a circle and see which one has got the blackest cat, but then that’ me.”*

A handful of veterans described the emotional impact of being in a caring role with their spouse:

- *“I’m stressed out a lot of the time because of what’s going on with me missus, me good lady wife.”*

6.6 Physical health

In rating their overall current physical wellbeing, there was some similarity between the 20% ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’ in our sample and the estimates across the UK for people with a significant disability. This at first glance suggests that a seafaring life does not necessarily have a negative impact in later life on physical wellbeing. However, we need to be cautious in this interpretation as, for example, it does not take account of the morbidity rates in the respective populations – we have spoken, of course, only to the survivors. Obviously also there was an expected increase in bad/very bad rating amongst older survey respondents, particularly in the oldest group.

Table 24 Overall physical wellbeing

Rating	All ages	Under 65	Aged 65 - 74	Aged 75 - 89	Aged 90 plus
Very good	10%	9%	14%	9%	0%
Good	39%	50%	37%	40%	20%
Neither good nor bad	31%	27%	30%	32%	37%
Bad	15%	11%	12%	15%	33%
Very bad	5%	4%	7%	5%	10%

Interviewees also described examples of the physical challenges they now face:

- *“I’ve got a problem with walking.”*
- *“2 years ago I ended up in hospital with bowel cancer, so that was a long operation and I was all clear, then I was in the house and I was in the bath and my wife was here, I said to her, have a look at this and my testicles were swollen up and she phoned the doctor straight away and doctor came in and the ambulance was here in 10 minutes and hospital again, so took that away, so I’m not very much man anymore.”*
- *“I’ve been diagnosed Motor Neurone Disease.”*
- *“The only thing I’ve got now is just a bit of arthritis but that’s in both hands and that’s just from getting old. It’s the only place I’ve got it, so I’m quite happy with that, as long as it stays there and doesn’t affect my golf. That’s it really.”*
- *“He wasn’t well, he was waiting for a knee operation that he couldn’t have, he had non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, he’d had a heart attack, he had all sorts of things but he continued his life.”*
- *“I’m disabled, I had a brain haemorrhage a few years ago, and I’m not allowed to drive.”*
- *“Last year I was diagnosed with diabetes 2, and I was grossly overweight.”*

- *“When I had the brain clot, I did nothing for the first time in my life, sitting around doing nothing for 2 or 3 months and I’ve got very bad angina, I had to have a bypass, as one did in those days, so I had the bypass. I had a heart attack again in ’98, another clot in ’99, a cerebral clot, still a bit weak on that side and my balance is not good, however I’ve just had an aneurism in my belly stented during the summer so I’m just getting better from that, and going to get my knee done, something I need to sort out.”*
- *“I’ve got emphysema, COPD so not working.”*

6.7 Provision of support

Survey respondents were asked about their preferences for care and support in terms of type of service provider. This was particularly designed to test out any preferences for specialist veterans or seafarers support. The greatest preference was for services for seafarers (56%), followed by family and friends (49%) and the NHS (40%).

Table 25 Survey respondents’ preferences for care and support

Sources of support	All Responses		MN	Fishing	RFA
Services for veterans	22.13%	80	56	0	34
Services for seafarers	55.74%	194	140 (27.83%)	23 (23.23%)	55 (24.22%)
Services for the general population	11.76%	42	26	5	16
Family and friends	49.02%	171	104 (20.67%)	36 (36.36%)	49 (21.58%)
Local Authority (e.g. Home Help)	24.37%	86	64	14	21
NHS (e.g. GP, District Nurse)	39.78%	141	97 (19.28%)	19 (19.19%)	43 (18.94%)
Other (please specify)	6.44%	22	16	2	9
			503	99	227

Survey respondents were then asked whether they knew where to go to access additional support should they need it, and more than half (55%) said they did not know. A relatively small number of interviewees were receiving some form of formal support (such as home care) through public or private agencies, and more people mentioned informal support from their families.

Table 26

Type of support	Number of interviewees
Formal	14
Informal	19

The table below gives examples of the types of organisations which were providing some kind of support to interviewees. This included: financial support, medical treatment, counselling, holiday respite and provision of technology or household items:

Table 27

Type of formal support	Number of interviewees
Nautilus	2
Merchant Navy Association	1
NHS	5
Fishermen or Seafarer missions	4
SSAFA	1
RN Patrol Service	1
Blind Veterans Association	1
Council (including home care)	3
Fisherman's Union (sic)	1
Shipwrecked Mariner's Society	2

The table below gives examples of the types of informal support which interviewees mentioned. This included social activities and help with: shopping, household chores, odd jobs and transport:

Table 28

Type of informal support	Number of interviewees
Friendships and networks	7
Family	10
Neighbours / the community	10
Domestic cleaner	1

6.8 Seafaring support networks

Interviewees were asked to describe their personal support networks. 40 belonged to formal seafaring organisations and networks; 24 described the support received from their friendships. As the original contact made with interviewees was through stakeholder organisations and networks it is unsurprising that so many mention these organisations and networks. It is unclear to what extent this reflects the whole MN Veteran community.

Table 29

Formal seafaring organisations and networks	40
Friendships	24

6.9 Key messages

- In terms of veterans' current situation, financial problems loomed large as challenges for interviewees, as did housing and other practical support issues.
- Survey respondents across all age groups actually rated their current mental and emotional wellbeing positively, with only about 10% rating it as bad or very bad. Similarly, only 8% of interviewees described their mental health as a current challenge, despite 46% of them describing the impact of conflict on their mental health in the past. Physical wellbeing was rated more negatively generally and particularly amongst the older survey respondents.
- Most of the interviewees belonged to seafaring organisations or networks, as would be expected given their recruitment through these organisations. Whilst many had Veterans Badges and were aware of their veteran status, there was a sense that they identified more strongly with the seafaring than veteran communities.
- In terms of the provision of care and support (not mutually exclusive in the survey), the greatest number would prefer a seafarer service (56%), followed by family and friends (49%) and the NHS (40%). Veterans services were mentioned by 22% survey respondents as a preference.
- Perhaps most striking is that more than half of survey respondents (55%) said they did not know where to go to access additional practical or emotional support. Accessibility of services is a common challenge across the country and current government policy is to encourage local authorities and partners to improve the quality of information, assistance and advice. Given the life experiences and networks of MN veterans this suggests they may be particularly vulnerable in this area.

7 Conclusion and next steps

This first stage of the research project has provided good evidence of the experience of being a MN veteran and the impact that conflict and seafaring careers have had on individuals, and has provided some further information to support supposition about the numbers and location of these veterans.

We propose that the next stage of the project should seek to explore further the following questions in more detail. The ideas for how these questions could be explored will need to be tested and refined with the project team to ensure they are within the resources available to the project, and are the most appropriate approach.

7.1 Can we develop further our understanding of the numbers and location of MN Veterans?

- We suggest that each stakeholder organisation (and potentially other large service providers in key seafarer locations) is asked to provide information about the numbers of MN Veterans they are aware of and/or have provided services to, and their location.
- In addition, we should update the 2016 information about the number of Veterans Badges issued and the locations of recipients.
- We should interview covenant team managers in four key seafarer locations to test their understanding and awareness of this group of veterans.

7.2 What services are needed by this group, and what are the barriers and enablers to them accessing existing mainstream/veteran/seafarer services?

- The evaluation of the caseworker and supported housing services will contribute to our understanding of this question.
- In addition, we should explore the barriers/enablers for MN Veterans in accessing veteran services. This should include the profile/image of veteran services, the focus for their offer to veterans, and their own awareness of this population group. We suggest that this involves interviews with a small number of veteran service providers in key seafarer locations.
- The interviews with covenant team managers as described above will also assist in understanding this question.
- The final element is whether there are barriers/enablers around accessing mainstream services such as those designed to meet the needs of older people more generally. We suggest a similar approach could be taken.

7.3 What is the most appropriate way to meet the needs of MN Veterans given the relatively small population size, the range of services already in existence, and financial pressures on all sectors?

- The answer to this question will be, in part, dependent on the responses to the question above about enablers and barriers. In addition, the proposed good practice review will need to identify the types of approaches which work for the older population.

We look forward to exploring how to engage further with Merchant Navy veterans, and investigating these important questions in more depth in the rest of the project.

Institute of Public Care
August 2018

Appendix A: Stakeholder Group

The following individuals and organisations have supported the research activity through being interviewed themselves, promoting and distributing surveys, and through participation in the stakeholder group.

Organisation	Contact person
Merchant Navy Association	Captain John Sail
Federation of merchant Mariners	Derek Bristow
Nautilus UK	Mick Howarth Cathy Wilson
Seafarers UK	Barry Bryant John Hood
Merchant Navy Welfare Board	David Parsons Peter Tomlin
Shipwrecked Mariners Society	Malcolm Williams
Merchant Navy Association of Northern Ireland	Ian Jones John Coulter Ivan Tennant
RFA Association	Ray Bennett
Poppy Scotland	Gary Gray
South Atlantic Medal Association	Alan Burgess
RMT	Mark Carden
Fishermen's Mission	David Dickens
The Watch Ashore	Susan Williams
Seafarers Link	Christine Rankin



“Our Forgotten War Heroes” Veterans from the Merchant Navy, Fishing Fleet and RFA

Why take part?

The Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University is carrying out research funded by the Aged Veterans Fund on behalf of Seafarers UK and Nautilus Welfare Fund. The study is looking at the health and social care needs of all who served on a civilian vessel whilst it was supporting HM



Armed Forces and who are now recognised as Veterans. Improving our understanding will help us plan support services better in the future.

Who should complete the survey?

We are particularly interested in people born before 1st January 1950, however we would also like to hear from younger veterans who were members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the Merchant Navy or the fishing fleet and served on a civilian vessel whilst it was supporting the Armed Forces.



How to complete the survey?

The survey will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and your details will remain confidential and will not be used for anything apart from the purposes of this research.

Either you, your spouse, partner or case worker can complete the survey.

You can complete the survey online at

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ZFSQHG D>

or complete and return a hard copy using the self-addressed envelope.

For more information contact Dr Miguel Sharpe at msharpe@brookes.ac.uk

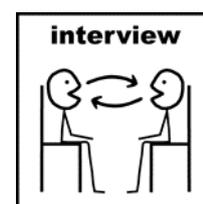
Appendix B

Aged Veterans Fund – Understand the needs of older Merchant Navy veterans

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Our invitation

We are looking for 30 people (or their partners) from the Merchant Navy, RFA and Fishing communities who supported the Armed Forces in conflict zones and who would be willing to take part in discussions to explore their experiences, and their current health and care needs in more detail. It is likely you will have completed our recent survey, and have given us your contact details and this is why we are getting in touch.



What is this project about?

We have been awarded a grant by the Aged Veterans Fund to carry out a research project to improve our understanding of the Merchant Navy, Fishing and RFA Veterans communities, and to evaluate two specialist services designed to support this specific group of seafarers. This project will be delivered by Seafarers UK and Nautilus with the support of a wider group of organisations with an interest in understanding and meeting the needs of this group, and our academic research partner, the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University.

The project will deliver the following aims:

- To better define and understand the size, location, health and social care needs of the Veterans from the Merchant Navy, RFA and Fishing communities and their spouses/partners.
- To raise the public profile of UK Veterans from these communities.
- To establish and evaluate two approaches to providing specialist support:
- The provision of four new homes for veteran merchant mariners at Mariners' Park in Wallasey.
- The provision of a caseworker service in Hull, Merseyside, Southampton and Glasgow to support veteran mariners in their own homes.
- To establish a set of strategic priorities arising from this research to inform future service development.

A report summarising findings from the research work will provide conclusions and recommendations for responding to the health and care needs of these seafaring veterans.

What will the discussion be about?

We would like to talk to you about your experiences in conflict zones and what this meant for you, and what your care and support needs are now. The interview will last about one-and-a-half hours and includes time to gain your consent. The rest of the time will be spent talking with you and will take place at your home, or by telephone. With your permission the interview will be tape recorded.

If you are interested in participating: please tell the member of our research team who contacts you or if you do not want to go ahead, please tell them. Please do ask any questions you may have about this too.

If you do agree to take part, you retain the right to withdraw from the study at any stage for any reason. You just need to tell the researcher of your decision. You will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

If you agree to participate in the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form and return it to the researcher.

If you become distressed or upset at any point during the course of the interview you can stop at any time without giving an explanation or the researcher might decide to stop the interview and double check that you are fine to continue. The researcher will bring with them information and contact details for the Seafarer Support helpline where you will be signposted to specific local and national support services.

What will happen to any information/data that is collected from you:

The recordings and transcripts of the interviews will be kept in a secure place to ensure confidentiality and will not be passed on to any third parties. Before sharing results of the study, data will be anonymized in order to protect your identity.

Who is organising the research: The research team is based at Oxford Brookes University and is working in partnership with Seafarers UK and Nautilus. The team consists of Juliet Bligh, Dr Miguel Sharpe and Julia Whyard.

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the project in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Institute of Public Care
Oxford Brookes University
Harcourt Hill Campus
Oxford
OX2 9AT
UK



Tel: +44 (0)1865 790312

ipc@brookes.ac.uk

Participant Consent Form

Title of the project: Aged Veterans Fund – Understanding the needs of older merchant navy veterans

Main investigator and contact details: Juliet Bligh (Principal Consultant)

Institute of Public Care
Oxford Brookes University
Harcourt Hill Campus
Oxford
OX2 9AT
UK
Tel: +44 (0)1865 790312

Email: jbligh@brookes.ac.uk

Members of the research team: Dr Miguel Sharpe (Senior Consultant) and Julia Whyard (Senior Consultant)

Please **initial** the following statements before signing this consent form:

I agree to take part in the interview. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in the project, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the interview at any stage, for any reason and without prejudice.

I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

I agree to be tape recorded in the interview and to use direct/anonymised quotations (if required).

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant

(print).....Signed.....Date.....

Participant consent form

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: Aged Veterans Fund – Understanding the needs of older merchant navy veterans

- **I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY**

Signed: _____

Date: _____