

Homecoming Heroes: An account of the reassimilation of British Military personnel into civilian life

Peter Reese

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It is a sad and shaming but indisputable fact that the reception according to British soldiers on returning to civilian life has for centuries been little short of disgraceful, and even in this more enlightened age compares unfavourably with that of many other countries. In Homecoming Heroes Peter Reese ex-amines the lot of British "veteran" (often still quite a young man) on leaving the Armed Forces and assesses the chances of finding suitable employment after his discharge. His survey covers a wide canvas, going back to the earliest days of the British Army and reveals a sorry tale in which neglect was often the only alternative to downright hostility. It is not a story to swell the British breast with pride. The efforts of Charles II, founder of Chelsea Royal Hospital, and later those of the benevolent Marquis of Granby notwithstanding, it was not until the later part of the 19th century that an awakening of social conscience stirred certain philanthropic individuals into action. Ironically Government reaction was not to the veteran's advantage: 'If the matter is now in private hands' they argues, 'why should we interfere?' Mass conscription in two world wars has helped considerable to help break down this uncaring viewpoint, but much, as Peter Reese forcefully points out, remains to be done. Let us hope that this timely book will help ameliorate the lot of those about to be cast upon a shrinking job market as a result of the recently announced defence cuts.

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