

mental health staff whilst deployed", the statement said, adding that soldiers being demobilised receive a medical examination which includes questions about mental health.

About 10% of UK troops airlifted out of the war zone between January and October 2003 suffered primarily from psychological problems, according to a study published in the British Journal of Psychiatry. Dr Anne Braidwood, a medical adviser to the UK Veterans' Agency, says British troops may show lower levels of psychological trauma than their US counterparts because their situations are different.

US soldiers "consistently have been subjected to very high levels of combat and insurgency. In addition they are less used to peacekeeping than we are." Another small scale-study suggests a successful deployment can actually be good for a soldier's mental health. But its author, Jamie Hacker-Hughes of the King's Centre, says the troops he studied were professional soldiers on successful, short-term missions.

"If you're not doing what you're trained to do, or you're a reservist, or Territorial Army (TA), it is more difficult," he says. Toby Elliott of Combat Stress says TA soldiers are seeking help in disproportionately high numbers - although only 10% of the troops deployed to Iraq have been from the TA, 50% of those in treatment at Combat Stress are.

That could be partly because TA veterans do not have access to Ministry of Defence medical services, he says. They may also have more difficult readjustment problems than regular army soldiers, who tend to remain in a military environment - often among the same group of people they served with - after Iraq. TA troops return to their civilian lives.

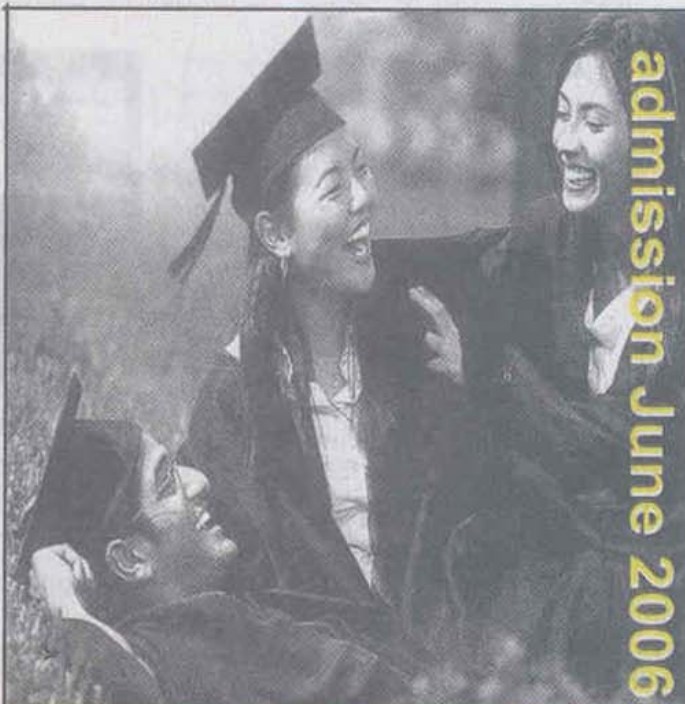
Changed man

Peter Mahoney was one such TA soldier. He served with the Royal Logistic Corps, and found the transition back to civilian life unbearably difficult. Before going to Iraq in 2003, he was "a party animal, a happy-go-lucky bloke," his wife Donna says.

When he returned, he "became like a recluse", she says. He was argumentative and racist, and would disappear for hours alone on his motorcycle. A year after his return, he killed himself.

"His enthusiasm for life had dwindled," Donna says. "He wasn't nice at the end. He wasn't the same man."

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