

# “You Bring It, We’ll Bring It Out”

## Becoming a Soldier in the New Zealand Army

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
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## **Abstract**

The transition from civilian to soldier is a process of identity acquisition. Based on participant-observation, this thesis follows a cohort of new soldiers through the first year and a half of their careers in the New Zealand Army, from their first day of Basic Training to their first overseas deployment. Both the Army as an institution and its individual soldiers are explicitly self-reflexive, and I use not only academic theory but also soldiers' own theories of identity and identity acquisition to make sense of the experience of becoming a soldier. I show that although recruits undergo change in becoming soldiers, they simultaneously retain pre-service identities. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, I argue that civilians join the Army because of a shared "primary habitus", a pre-existing identification with action, productivity and continual self-improvement through facing challenges that forms recruits' earliest embodied understandings of themselves. The relationship between this "practical" habitus and the new soldier habitus to be acquired is key to understanding the civilian-soldier transition. While civilians draw on and thus fulfil the primary practical habitus in becoming soldiers during initial training periods, once socialised they find the Army much less challenging, and therefore may find that their need to be involved in meaningful action is not met. Although the practical habitus is behind and can make sense of the cohort's actions, it is a mode of identity that has not often been recognised as such by academics, due to the fact that they do not share it. However, I show that it is more important in generating soldiers' practice than the modes of identity that are usually employed to understand them: gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality. Therefore, I argue that anthropologists should not limit analysis to traditional axes of identity.



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For the boys







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This thesis is longer than is standard for a Massey University PhD thesis, for the following reasons. During Nina's fieldwork she was offered the opportunity to deploy to the Solomon Islands on a RAMSI mission, and thus was able to follow some of her participants from their first day in the army through to their first deployment. Taking up this unique opportunity meant that fieldwork was longer than usual, which resulted in an extra ethnographic chapter and an extra contextual chapter.

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