

Confrontational: Tattoos, Agency, Authority, and U.S. Infantry



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“Soldiers go to...bars to forget, but they come to the tattoo shops to remember. The images they put on their skin are diaries they'll take to the grave”
(M. May, 2008, para. 5).

“[V]ery few civilians walk around with their company's corporate logo permanently etched on their skin”
(Army.mil/news, 2009, para. 4).

““You chose to join the Army...The Army didn't choose to join you””
(Sgt. Maj. of the Army R. Chandler, as cited in L. M. Bacon, 2012, para. 4).

Image on previous page: <http://iraqslogger.powweb.com/index.php/subcategory/6///032007/>. Chris Hondros/Getty Images. “Marine Forward Recon in Nasiriyah.”

Tattoos have a history at least as long as that of war. Ancient Maori warriors in what is present-day New Zealand were inked with extensive and intricate tattoos, for example. Whether inked on charging warriors' bodies or not, tattoos have also always been confrontational images in their own right. Tattoos exist in a zone between the markers of public and private, internal and external. They are bold invitations to their witnesses – selves and others alike – to reflect. Tattoos, especially in the military context, are personal and public incitements to confront mortality, morality, love, patriotism, faith, politics, sacrifice – the human condition, in short. This research examines these confrontational images of military tattoos and gives voices to the participants in this world: the types of military tattoos, their anthropological meanings, and the tension they create in infantry military culture are explored.

In this exploration, I rely on a number of sources. Secondary research and accounts from newspaper and magazine pieces, medical studies, anthropological books and articles, internal military documents, and soldiers are most prevalent. However, I am most excited about my firsthand communication with tattoo artists and shop staff operating near major Army and Marine Corps infantry installations, and while the restrictions of space and time limited the number of my conversations with these people, I believe their insights merit much research in the future. Utilizing all these primary and secondary sources, I explore military tattoos in this paper in three sections. In section one, I detail the different types of military tattoo: Americana, uniform, faith and ideology, and memorials. In section two, I frame these tattoos in an anthropological context of personal agency. Lastly, in section three, I study the tension created in the military culture of U.S. infantry – the Army and Marine Corps – by the personal agency reflected by tattoos. I conclude that tattooed soldiers in U.S. infantry forces represent a symbolic military within a military: while they will never mutiny or otherwise drastically impact military

effectiveness solely because of their tattoos, the existence of soldiers with tattoos, in the face of the heavy regulation of personal appearance, indicate the (largely non-problematic, perhaps even beneficial) failure of an institution to ever completely eliminate individuality in its ranks.

Pin-Up Girls, Meat Tags, Crosses, and Kevlar: Prevalence and Types of Military Tattoos

Before going any further, it is beneficial to understand the prevalence of tattoos in the general population of the U.S., and within the military specifically. According to a study by A. E. Laumann, MBChB, MRCP(UK) and A. J. Derick, MD (2006), 24% of the U.S. population, ages 18 to 50, have one or more tattoos (p. 413). They also found that 10% of the U.S. population has some military experience, and within this 10%, 37% have one or more tattoos (p. 414). Assuming all percentages have remained constant, to put this in perspective, out of the 2.4 million U.S. soldiers who have served in or around Afghanistan and Iraq over the past decade (estimated by M. Thompson, 2011, p. 35), around 881, 633 have tattoos. Another medical study by M. Armstrong, K. Murphy, A. Sallee, and M. Watson (2000) found that “of 1, 835 questioned “[b]asic recruits and advanced individual training students at one mid-western military installation...[a]lmost half (48%)...were serious/very serious about getting a tattoo...More than one-third (36%) were tattooed, with 22% possessing three or more tattoos” (Abstract).

While my sample size is far too small to draw any general conclusions, the two individuals who were able to answer my question of “Out of the veterans and service-members you know personally, would you say it is common for them to have one or more military service-related tattoos?” – Matt, age 35, former Army Corporal E-4, owner of Syndicate Tattoo in Manhattan, Kansas near Fort Riley, and Pattie, age 23, former Navy E-4, shop girl at Bombs Away Tattoo in Midway Park, North Carolina near Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune – both

answered yes (personal communications, May 8 and 5, 2012). Matt added “many of them have [a tattoo] for each duty station they have been at” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). It is unclear from the primary and secondary data I have to determine how many of those in the military with tattoos were inked before deciding to join versus after their decision or during their training or service, although the M. Armstrong, K. Murphy, A. Sallee, and M. Watson study did cite that “[m]any soldiers (64%) entered the military with the tattoos” (Abstract). Neither Matt nor Pattie had any tattoos related to their military service (personal communications, May 8 and 5, 2012).

In terms of men versus women in the military getting inked, estimates by tattoo artists and shop staff interviewed by me varied, but most reported men having strong majorities. Three said 10 to 1, one 70/30, one 60/40, two 50/50, and one broke it down as 65/25 and 10 gay/lesbian (personal communications, May 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8, 2012). Given that women are excluded from combat infantry positions, these figures will be highly variable from one infantry installation to another, depending on the type of units stationed at each facility, among other factors. In terms of the customer base military personnel provide to the tattoo shops I contacted, while I expected percentages to be high given proximity to major installations, all respondents who explicitly answered the question (6 out of 7) gave percentages above 60%, with 4 reporting 80% or higher (personal communications, May 3, 4, 5, and 8, 2012). It is not clear what mixture these percentages reflect of military personnel visiting the shops and civilians *not* visiting. Within the military clientele of tattoo shops, no matter how large of a customer base it is and how it is composed, there are generally four types of tattoos asked for and inked.

The first of these four categories can be classified as Americana. This is defined by M. May (2008), in a piece for *The Texas Observer*, as “a style perfected during the World War II era

by Sailor Jerry, a Honolulu-based tattoo artist whose stock images of eagles, weapons, and pinup girls evoke a more innocent, patriotic era,” typically favoured by “[s]oldiers headed off to war” (para. 6; see Appendix 3: Fig.-1). The second type can be called “uniform,” which are “for soldiers who want to make their uniform permanent” (M. May, 2008, para. 9). This type of military tattoo can come in one of two sub-types: “meat tags” or what I call “culture.”

Meat tags (see Appendix 3: Fig.-2) are “dog tags complete with military ID and Social Security numbers,” asked for by soldiers to be tattooed “onto their torsos in case they become separated from their heads during combat” (M. May, 2008, para. 9). These tattoos make dog tags permanent additions to a soldier’s body, making it easier for their corpse to be identified, if necessary. A less gruesome sub-type of “uniform” tattoos is “culture,” signifying pieces of clothing, articles (stars, stripes, etc.) thereon, and branch mottos and symbols (see Appendix 3: Fig.-4). In this sub-type, I also include “pride in service” tattoos (see Appendix 3: Fig.-3). These “culture” tattoos, according to my interviewees, are especially popular.

Katie, age 22, artist at Anarchy and Ink Tattoo in Twentynine Palms, California near MCAGCC Twentynine Palms, described these “culture tattoos” as being viewed as things “deserved” and “worked up to” by soldiers who get them (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Liz, age 31, artist at Smokin’ Guns Tattoo in Fayetteville, North Carolina near Fort Bragg expressed similar attitudes by her military customers there: “feel like they’ve earned it,” and “did my time,” were phrases she used (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Glen, age 39, artist at The Electric Krayon in St. Robert, Missouri near Fort Leonard Wood, said soldiers with these tattoos view themselves as “carrying on tradition” (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Matt of Syndicate Tattoo near Fort Riley described “culture” tattoos as “proving of loyalty” (personal communication, May 8, 2012), and Pattie of Bombs Away near MCB Camp

Lejeune told me that “motto tats [are popular] for [the] young” (personal communication, May 5, 2012).

The third category of military tattoos I call “faith and ideology.” These tattoos are representations of the divine, family, and emotions or states of mind (guilt, loneliness, stoicism, peace, violence, etc.) (see Appendix 3: Figs.-5 and -6). Katie of Anarchy and Ink near MCAGCC Twentynine Palms described these tattoos as fulfilling a need for soldiers of “permanence, [being the] last thing to take with [them on a deployment]” (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Matt of Syndicate Tattoo near Fort Riley told me, in terms of tattoos asked for just prior to deployment, “it’s usually kids names, wives names and wedding bands before the fellas take off” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). The fourth and final category of military tattoos is memorials.

These tattoos are permanent reminders of fallen comrades (killed in combat or not), and the “most common is the iconic image of boots, machine gun, and Kevlar helmet” (M. May, 2008, para. 14) (See Appendix 3: Fig.-8). Staff Sergeant J. Campbell, “a tattooed infantryman and platoon sergeant with Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 10th Combat Aviation Brigade” (as described in Army.mil/news, 2009, para. 3), describes his own memorial tattoos: ““It takes a lot to get somebody's name or initials tattooed; that's forever, it's not going anywhere. But that's exactly why it's there - because I want to remember him, forever,”” (as cited in Army.mil/news, 2009, para. 18). Specialist S. Baker, “a Fox Company infantryman,” (Army.mil/news, 2009, para. 24) says of his ““three Soldier's crosses on my back with the names of three Soldiers I lost on my last deployment,”” ““every time I want to reflect and think back on them, I can look in the mirror and remember”” (as cited in Army.mil/news, 2009, para. 24). All of this testimony – from soldiers and tattoo artists and shop staff on soldiers’ behalf – depicts all four types of military

tattoos as weapons. Americana, uniform, faith and ideology, and memorial tattoos can be used to fight against the forces of historical place, the enemy, evil, and loss of memory, and soldiers are the free agents wielding these weapons.

Skins – Independent and Implicated: Tattoos, Agency, and Authority

For my anthropological examination of tattoos, I will be ignoring discourses on tattoos involving evolutionary biology, class, gender, exoticism, and modernity. Instead, I am focusing on discourses on tattoos which highlight the tension between agency and adherence to or control of social norms. In this context, tattoos and the process of getting them are tools of individual empowerment and identity formation and ownership, in the face of normative control by authority. As Private Thomas Hair says, "It's a way to make me into a normal person...I can be me, instead of Private Thomas Hair. I'm not just another guy in a uniform. I can stand out" (as cited in M. May, 2008, para. 7). This empowerment, formation, and ownership are accomplished through three facets of tattoos: the image itself, the pain of getting tattooed, and the often social nature of getting tattoos. To understand how soldiers use tattoos to exercise their agency as social actors, one must first understand human skin as a canvas for expressing agency, and the relationship of the tattoo to that canvas.

On the one hand, tattooed human skin is the ultimate symbol of independence. K. Hewitt (1997) states, "Rather than having a community inflict marks of initiation, a self-marked person determines his or her own self-construction" p. 84. The tattoo artists and shop staff interviewed by me in the previous section that were describing uniform-type tattoos were explaining them as merit badges. Yet, these personal merit badges are completely self-generated: they are not given or forced upon an infantry soldier in the Army or Marine Corps by

the military authority. They are independent, permanent markers of personal achievement and value – personal markers of identity. The same could be said of faith and ideology-type military tattoos: markers of social identities beyond those in the military realm. At the same time, however, the complete opposite of independence – implication – is true with these tattoos.

While tattoos can be viewed as personal, skin-borne merit badges of self-earned military honor or testaments to lives outside of the military, the fact is, these same tattoos (through pride or a representations of a desire to reach beyond) indicate voluntary membership in an institution which is known for dictating the lives of its members down to minute details. As M. Fenske (2009) explains, “Metaphorically and literally, tattoos illustrate the inscription of social norms and codes upon the body...Tattoos implicate the skin” (pp. 40-1). Deciding to own identity with a tattoo is not enough then to exercise agency in the face of military institutional control. The painful process of getting inked is useful in overcoming this.

Military tattoos marking individual achievement are superfluous, because the image on the skin, while an example of an exercise of agency in the face of protocol, still signifies strict adherence and a relative lack of agency as a member of a powerful, controlling institution. However, when pain is brought in as a context, the pain becomes something which adds an institutionally-untouchable personal meaning to the tattoo. S. Benson describes the pain of getting a tattoo as “something that cannot be appropriated; it is yours alone; it stands outside the system of signification and exchange that threatens the autonomy of the self” (as cited in Caplan, 2000, p. 251). K. Hewitt also expresses that “self-inflicted pain can bestow dignity and sense of self, and also provoke a feeling of connection with something beyond one’s self boundaries” (p. 32). A military tattoo represents a choice to experience something greater than one’s self, and the pain associated becomes a personal qualifier to that experience: the Army or Marine Corps

may tell an infantry soldier what to do, but the military institution cannot change to what degree a soldier *likes* or *is tougher than* that experience. The pain of getting a tattoo is something a soldier can use to demonstrate the *degree* of their loyalty, a mark of individual identity that goes beyond the baseline submission demanded by military authority. While more subversive than of demonstrating degree of loyalty, the social nature of getting a tattoo can be used by a soldier as an exercise of agency, too.

Picking or designing a tattoo often involves a collaborative, even personal, relationship between a customer and an artist – a relationship that, in the case of a soldier, exists with a civilian and completely outside of military authority. K. Hewitt describes the process: “Customers often custom design their own tattoos and the tattooer-customer relationship is changing from one of service provider and buyer to a collaborative effort. The relationship between a piercer and his or her client may be even more intricate and personal” (pp. 73-4). Interviewed tattoo artists and shop staff can attest to these statements. When I asked them “How do you think about the service you provide to veterans and service-members: proud, a way to give back, just other customers, or somewhere in between?,” all responded positively.

Several went so far as to state they viewed their relationships with military clients in terms of pride, honor, or familial bonds. Liz of Smokin’ Guns Tattoo near Fort Bragg said she had developed “extended families through tattooing,” had been “touched by [the] stories [she] heard,” and that “clients [had become] friends” (personal communication, May 3, 2012). She told me she had even gone to funeral services for clients, indicative to me of a relationship far deeper than a mere professional one (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Tony, age 34, owner of Tom Foolerie’s Tattoo in El Paso, Texas near Fort Bliss, likewise told me “all my customers are treated like friends and family” (personal communication, May4, 2012). Matt of

Syndicate Tattoo near Fort Riley revealed of his shop, located within a “community [that] has a general negative feeling towards soldiers,” that “soldiers love the fact that they are treated like people in here” (personal communication, May 8, 2012). The relationship with tattoo artists and shop staff is only one half of the social nature of infantry soldiers getting tattoos, however, the other half involving fellow military personnel.

Katie of Anarchy and Ink Tattoo near MCAGCC Twentynine Palms described getting tattooed as “something else [for a soldier] to do with friends” in an otherwise quiet city (personal communication, May 3, 2012). Tattoo shops are a social environment with business reputations (sometimes, as Liz of Smokin’ Guns Tattoo near Fort Bragg told me of her shop, totally reliant upon word-of-mouth advertising) and sometimes heavily decorated (in the case of Anarchy and Ink Tattoo, with “bullets, camouflage, [and] diamond plates”) (personal communications, May 3, 2012). Within this social environment, a military customer becomes a kind of commanding officer for a brief time, as C. Sanders details “manipulat[ing] and assert[ing] identity within a specific social milieu. Getting a tattoo is often ‘a social event experienced with close associates,’ who provide moral support, offer advice, and help pass the ‘anxiety-filled waiting time’” (as cited in Hewitt, 1997, p. 74). Being serviced at a tattoo shop is a way for an infantry soldier to assert their own form of military command, over their friends and close associates – guiding their social interactions in a socially active setting. The idea of a soldier exercising any kind of agency, especially over and among fellow soldiers, outside of the formal command structure, is not something which the military institution takes kindly too, however.

The Politics of Ink: Tattoos and Tension within the Cultures of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps

As symbols of individual agency, tattoos on soldiers have frequently been a source of tension within the cultures of the U.S. infantry military institutions of the Army and Marine Corps, reflective of what M. Fenske calls “the power of these...images to destabilize, disrupt, and potentially resist ideological discourses that seek to control and contain what they mean” (p. 1). It is important for the military institution to maintain normative control over soldiers’ bodies. As P. Achter (2010) explains, because the “bodies [of military personnel] are in a sense borrowed by the state for warfare, they are central to definitions of national identity – their [images and integrity] serve as metonyms for both the nation’s health and for the condition of [military operations]” (p. 49). Furthermore, “images of veterans [and other military personnel] interpellate viewers as citizens and create the possibility for audiences to cultivate an emotional attachment to the nation-state” (p. 63). Tattoos, even ones reflective of extreme, voluntary loyalty to the military institution, are subversive to these strictly maintained images of identity, if nothing else, because they represent the voluntary nature of it all – the agency of soldiers in a volunteer military’s culture which demands strict and swift obedience to orders in order to function at all, let alone effectively.

The Army’s own policy document on uniforms and insignia, Army Regulation 670-1 (2005), states that a “neat and well-groomed appearance by all soldiers is fundamental to the Army and contributes to building the pride and esprit essential to an effective military force... Soldiers must take pride in their appearance at all times, in or out of uniform, on and off duty” (p. 2). To this end, the document states, “Tattoos or brands anywhere on the head, face, and neck above the class A uniform collar are prohibited,” the class A uniform being formal wear (p. 5). Recently, however, the Army has considered updating its standards and placing more restrictions on tattoos among its ranks. These new standards, conveyed in L.M. Bacon (2012) would include

the regulations, “Tattoos will not be visible above the neck line when the *physical fitness uniform* is worn. Tattoos will not extend below the wrist line and not be visible on the hands. Sleeve tattoos will be prohibited (This rule may be grandfathered.)” (para. 2, emphasis added by author). The physical fitness uniform – essentially a t-shirt and shorts – exposes much more skin than class A formal wear, and the implication is that to be in compliance with the new proposed policies, soldiers would have to have fewer or less extensive tattoos.

The man leading the policy review out of which these changes may come is Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond Chandler, who has stated:

“The appearance of tattoos detracts from a uniformed service... The uniformed services, we all generally look the same. Now, if you have a tattoo that draws attention to yourself, you have to ask the question, are you a person who is committed to the Army? Because the Army says you are part of the same organization... we do not want you to stand out from the rest of the Army. Yes, we want you to set yourself apart and do great things and so on, but that does not mean tattooing yourself or doing other extreme things that draw attention to you, the individual. You are part of something larger” (as cited in L. M. Bacon, 2012, Tattoos in the Spotlight Section, para. 5).

To reiterate, he is expressing concern over the subversive nature of agency against normative image control. This is also an institutional trend taking place in the Marine Corps. Corporal P. Sneden (2010) relates:

“Marine Administrative Message 029/10, released Jan. 15 [2010, presumably]... prohibits tattoos on the head, neck, hands, fingers and wrists as well as full, half and quarter sleeves visible in the standard physical training uniform. Individual tattoos visible in the PT uniform will be no larger than the wearer’s hand, and officers will be limited to a maximum of four tattoos visible in the PT uniform. Marines with grandfathered sleeves have no restrictions for reenlistment or promotion. However, they are no longer eligible for any enlisted-to-officer program, recruiting duty or Marine Security Guard duty” (paras. 8-11).

These proposed or passed new restrictions on tattoos among U.S. infantry forces have not gone without controversy in their respective cultural communities.

Skimming through the online comments to these notices was telling. Comments on the Marine Corps policy change led to a discussion about the internal culture of the Corps, and what the value of tattoos are within it. “Sgt Billy Ray” (2011) responded, ““You don't need tattoos to prove that your a badass. Just the title "U S Marine" should be enough”” [sic]. Others commented, ““Tattoos are as part of the Corps lifestyle as M16s,”” (“Crystal,” 2011, a Marine wife) and, ““Tattoo's are as much a part of our culture as the clean-cut image we project to the public when in garrison and the cold-eyed killer image we present to the enemy on the battlefield”” [sic] (“Cpl of Marines,” 2011). There were similar comments on the proposed policy changes in the Army.

Unlike the Marine Corps comments, however, discussion was less about the place of tattoos within any kind of Army culture, but rather more about the effectiveness of Army training versus its leadership’s perceived focus on drill and ceremony, and if time and resources better spent on training was being squandered on image enforcement. C. Friesner (2012), a self-described “company commander” in the U.S. Army, responded, “For all of you who think that ...to prohibit those with certain tattoos from serving will foster better leaders and war fighters, I must offer the following which I think sums it all up: You can put a monkey in a dress, but he'll still throw \$hit at you. Focus on the quality of the person, not the physical appearance” [sic]. Similarly, A. Mishler (2012), a self-described “combat medic,” stated, “The American military is gripped in Tradition and Dogma that has no practical use in today's battlefields...[Time spent on tradition and dogma is] Time that could be spent training our forces with weaponry and training that is practical overseas” [sic]. It would seem that in the case of the U.S. Army, tattoos, and physical appearance more generally, have become a hot-button issue that gets at deeper questions soldiers have about the wise agency of their institutional leadership.

Whatever policy changes regarding tattoos emerge from either branch of U.S. infantry forces, it is unlikely that the debate over tattoos in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps will go away at any point in the near future. Military tattoos are definitely not going away, seemingly permanently intertwined with the fabric of military culture (see Appendix 3: Fig.-8). These confrontational images are assertions of agency by individual soldiers against institutional control, and this tension will always create conflict within the infantry military institutions. There are so many other unanswered questions associated with agency and military tattoos raised by this brief examination of the subject, however.

What would happen if I expanded this examination beyond the U.S. infantry branches of the Army and Marine Corps? What would inclusion of the Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and possibly even the various National Guard branches reveal? Even with staying with the Army and Marine Corps alone, there is much room for expanding the scope and focus of my survey of tattoo shops near major infantry installations, in terms of the total geographic range, and in the coverage of specific areas.

What would more detailed ethnographies of the physical and human spaces in and around tattoo shops reveal? What kind of depth could be added to the discussion on how tattoo artists and shop staff serve as vehicles for the agency of soldiers? Do tattoo artists and shop staff, through their art, conversations, and relationships, act as “diplomats” facilitating communication between the civil and military spheres for the rest of us?

How do tattoos affect the dialogue surrounding PTSD, and how veterans cope with it? What kind of public narratives do military tattoos create? If, as P. Achter suggests, they are central to the visual narrative constructed of the health of troops, particular military operations,

and the nation as a whole, certainly they must have some measurable effect. What do tattoos on veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan convey about those conflicts to the general public? How might this be affecting political and military policy?

Finally, where does the agency of military tattoos fall amid the wider tattoo industry? Does widespread inking of commercial characters, logos, and styles devalue military tattoos, and their agency-enabling? Do military tattoos make other non-military tattoos more value, and more agency-enabling for their civilian bearers? These are all but some of the unanswered questions.

What is clear, however, is that the agency provided to soldiers by tattoos builds loyalty towards their respective military institutions, contrary to the leadership culture's fears. Tattoos are outlets of social power and personal creativity. They are pathways to ownership of one's identity in the military, and some are de-militarized zones between the military identity and other social identities, like family and faith. They smooth integration of the separate spheres of a soldier's life, but the integration is only as complete as a soldier wants it to be. Perhaps, this is deeper fear of military institutional leadership toward tattoos. Tattoos allow infantrymen and women to express all the loyalty *they want* – no longer is it solely about what the *military needs*. Tattooed soldiers are ready and willing to provide what the military and the nation need – obedience, leadership, professionalism, and sacrifice. But, in return, tattooed soldiers want to be able to express themselves and their own power as social actors. In the end, maybe the confrontation posed by tattoos is less about the agency expressed by soldiers against the military institution, and more about the institution being able and willing to accept personal agency, and incorporating it into a stronger U.S. infantry force.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Contacted Tattoo Shops

My name is Phillip Sitter, and I'm a student at the University of Notre Dame. I am in an anthropology class on war and the U.S., and I'm writing a term paper on tattoos and the military.

I'm collecting information from people in the tattoo industry, and from veterans too if I can. Would you or anyone else on your staff be interested in participating?

[If done over the phone, the rest follows if the respondent said yes.]

I have a series of questions I would like to ask. I can ask my questions via phone or email, now or we can set up an appointment. I expect to take between 15 and 20 minutes – it all depends on how much you want to say.

Your responses to the questions can be as short or as detailed as you want to them to be. In terms of privacy, in my paper I will only use first names and public information about your shop (name, location, no contact information) unless you would like more confidentiality, in which case I will use false names for people.

For Tattoo Artists and Tattoo Shop Staff:

1. Could you please give me your name, age, and relationship with the shop?
2. Why did you decide to pursue being involved with tattoo artistry?
3. How long have you been involved with tattoo artistry?
4. How many of your customers would you say are veterans or service-members (out of every 10, let's say)?
5. Out of the customers who are veterans or service-members, how many would you say are men, and how many are women?
6. What do you think attracts veterans and service-members to your shop?
7. What kinds of tattoos do veterans and service-members who come to the shop usually ask for and get?
8. What do you feel these tattoos mean to veterans and service-members?
9. How do you think about the service you provide to veterans and service-members: proud, a way to give back, just other customers, or somewhere in between?
10. Are you yourself a veteran or service-member? If you answer yes, please answer the questions labeled "For Veterans and Service-members".

For Veterans and Service-members:

1. Could you please state your service branch and rank?
2. Do you have any tattoos related to your military-service? (If no, you may skip questions 5,6, 9 and 10.) ["If no" was only included in email versions: if the respondent answered no to number 2 over the phone, I simply omitted numbers 5, 6, 9, and 10.]
3. Did you think about getting or get tattoos before knowing you were joining the military?
4. Could you please describe your experience in the military: where you were trained, and if you have been deployed, where and for how long?

5. For military service-related tattoo(s) you got during or after your military experience, where did you get them: at home, at your training camp, on deployment, or somewhere else?
6. Why did you get your tattoo(s) at this particular location or particular shop?
7. Is the experience of getting a tattoo important to you, or just having the tattoo itself?
8. Out of the veterans and service-members you know personally, would you say it is common for them to have one or more military service-related tattoos?
9. Where did you get the designs for your military service-related tattoo(s): did you design them yourself or did someone else do it?
10. Why did you get the tattoo(s) you did?

Question 9 under “For Tattoo Artists and Tattoo Shop Staff” was not asked of Capitol Tattoo Inc. & Body Piercing of Silver Spring, MD (see Appendix 2), as this was an earlier version not including this question.

Appendix 2: Tattoo Shops Surveyed

	Location	Nearby Infantry Facility	DECLINE?
About Face Tattoo	Oceanside, CA	MCB Camp Pendleton	X
Addictive Arts Tattoo	Barstow, CA	Fort Irwin	X
All American Custom Tattoo	Lakewood, WA	Fort Lewis	X
All American Tattoo Co	Clarksville, TN	Fort Campbell	X
American Heritage Tattoo	Killeen, TX	Fort Hood	X
Anarchy and Ink Tattoo	Twentynine Palms, CA	MCAGCC Twentynine Palms	
AwesomeInkExoticBodyModifications	Colorado Springs, CO	Fort Carson	X
A-Z Masters Tattooing-Piercing	Colorado Springs, CO	Fort Carson	X
Bethesda Tattoo Company	Bethesda, MD	WalterReedNatMilMedCntr	X
Blood Brothers Inc.	St. Robert, MO	Fort Leonard Wood	X
Bombs Away Tattoo	Midway Park, NC	MCB Camp Lejeune	
Capitol Tattoo Inc. & Body Piercing	Silver Spring, MD	Walter Reed Army Med Cntr	
Dancing Dragon Tattoo Studio	Oak Grove, KY	Fort Campbell	X
Dragon Lady Tattoos	Harker Heights, TX	Fort Hood	X
The Electric Krayon	St. Robert, MO	Fort Leonard Wood	
Fast Freddie's Tattooing	Columbus, GA	Fort Benning	X
Frontline Tattoos	Oceanside, CA	MCB Camp Pendleton	X
High Rank Tattoo	Barstow, CA	Fort Irwin	X
Pride & Glory Tattoo Company	Watertown, NY	Fort Drum	X
Pumping Ink Tattoos	El Paso, TX	Fort Bliss	X
Realistic Tattoo	Twentynine Palms, CA	MCAGCC Twentynine Palms	X
Shooting Star Tattoo	Fayetteville, NC	Fort Bragg	X
Skin Circus Tattoos	Watertown, NY	Fort Drum	X
skintastic art	Columbus, GA	Fort Benning	X
Smokin' Guns Tattoo	Fayetteville, NC	Fort Bragg	
Syndicate Tattoo	Manhattan, KS	Fort Riley	
Tattoos Forever	Evans Mills, NY	Fort Drum	X
Tattoo X	Security, CO	Fort Carson	X
Tom Foolerie's Tattoo	El Paso, TX	Fort Bliss	
Union Ave Tattoo	Lakewood, WA	Fort Lewis	X
Unique Ink Tattoo	Jacksonville, NC	MCB Camp Lejeune	X

“Decline” indicates that someone at the shop verbally said they did not wish to participate in the questionnaire or were never available for questioning, the shop never responded to emails, or the phone at the shop was never answered.

I believe face to face interactions would have greatly improved the response rate: when called, several shops expressed interest, but wanted to meet personally, and never responded to later emails. Also, the person who answered the phone could be friendly one day, but when I called back at a later date as requested, another person at the same shop answering the phone was

unaware of my previous communication or apathetic to further communication. Faced between the demands of paying customers and a stranger on the phone or email asking research questions, it is not surprising to me that most shops opted not to participate, either through denial or omission of a response.

“WalterReedNatMilMedCntr” refers to the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD. “Walter Reed Army Med Cntr” refers to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., now closed after a consolidation which created the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

“MCB” is the acronym for “Marine Corps Base.” “MCAGCC” of “MCAGCC Twentynine Palms” is the acronym for “Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center.”

Appendix 3: Tattoo Gallery



Figure-1: Example of an Americana Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/1072/>.



Figure-2: Example of a Meat Tag
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/9404/>.



Figure-3: Example of a Pride in Service Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/8799/>.

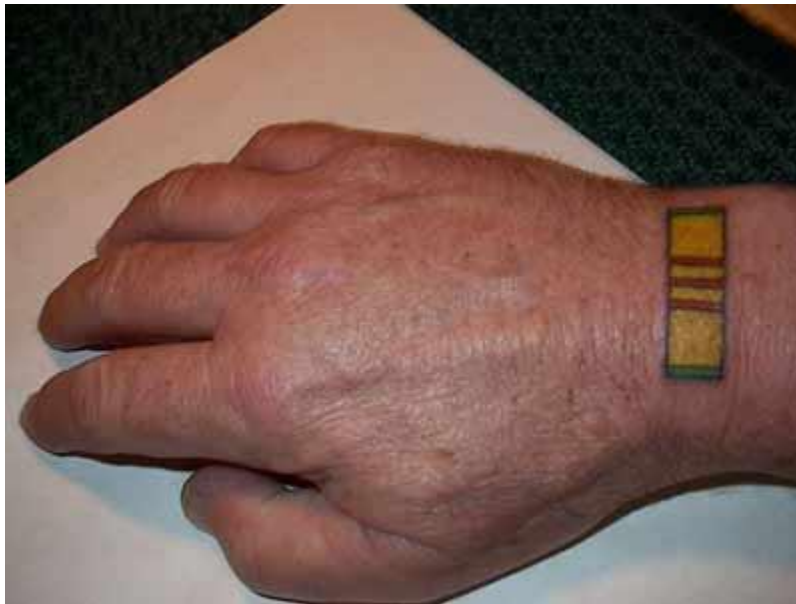


Figure-4: An Example of Permanent Uniform-Culture Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/995/>.



Figure-5: Example of a Faith and Ideology Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/7917/>.



Figure-6: Example of an Faith and Ideology Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/8849/>.



Figure-7: Example of a Memorial Tattoo
Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/1165/>.



Figure-8: Example of a Memorial Tattoo

Source: <http://www.grunt.com/corps/tattoos/details/1179/>.

For more U.S. infantry tattoo galleries:

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/Afghanistan/slideshow/photos-tattoos-military-9269824>

<http://content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2011302,00.html>.