

Inside the British Army's Secret Information Warfare Machine. Disinformation and Deception

They are soldiers, but the 77th Brigade edit videos, record podcasts and write viral posts. Welcome to the age of information warfare

By [Carl Miller](#)

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Abarbed-wire fence stretched off far to either side. A Union flag twisted in a gust of wind, and soldiers strode in and out of a squat guard's hut in the middle of the road. Through the hut, and under a row of floodlights, I walked towards a long line of drab, low-rise brick buildings. It was the summer of 2017, and on this military base nestled among the hills of Berkshire, I was visiting a part of the British Army unlike any other. They call it the 77th Brigade. They are the troops fighting Britain's information wars.

"If everybody is thinking alike then somebody isn't thinking," was written in foot-high letters across a whiteboard in one of the main atriums of the base. Over to one side, there was a suite full of large, electronic sketch pads and multi-screened desktops loaded with digital editing software. The men and women of the 77th knew how to set up cameras, record sound, edit videos. Plucked from across the military, they were proficient in graphic design, social media advertising, and data analytics. Some may have taken the army's course in [Defence Media Operations](#), and almost [half](#) were reservists from civvy street, with full time jobs in marketing or consumer research.

From office to office, I found a different part of the Brigade busy at work. One room was focussed on understanding audiences: the makeup, demographics and habits of the people they wanted to reach. Another was more analytical, focussing on creating "attitude and sentiment awareness" from large sets of social media data. Another was full of officers producing video and audio content. Elsewhere, teams of intelligence specialists were closely analysing how messages were being received and discussing how to make them more resonant.

Explaining their work, the soldiers used phrases I had heard countless times from digital marketers: "key influencers", "reach", "traction". You normally hear such words at viral advertising studios and digital research labs. But the skinny jeans and wax moustaches were here replaced by the crisply ironed shirts and light patterned camouflage of the British Army. Their surroundings were equally incongruous - the 77th's headquarters were a mix of linoleum flooring, long corridors and swinging fire doors. More Grange Hill than Menlo Park. Next to a digital design studio, soldiers were having a tea break, a packet of digestives lying open on top of a green metallic ammo box. Another sign on the wall declared, "Behavioural change is our USP [unique selling point]". What on Earth was happening?

"If you track where UK manpower is deployed, you can take a good guess at

where this kind of 'influence' activity happens," an information warfare officer (not affiliated with the 77th) told me later, under condition of anonymity. "A document will come from the Ministry of Defence that will have broad guidance and themes to follow."

He explains that each military campaign now also has - or rather is - a marketing campaign too.

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Carl Miller** is Research Director at the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media, and the author of **The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab.

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