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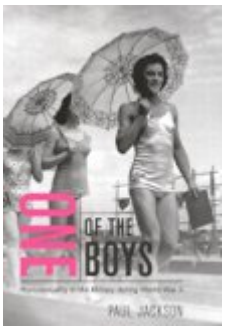
Paul Jackson. *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. x + 340 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7735-2772-0.



Reviewed by Matthew Hayday

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The history of homosexuality in Canada is a small but growing field, lagging several steps behind its counterpart in the United States. Indeed, it was fifteen years ago that American historian Allan BÃ©rubÃ© published his landmark study of the experiences of gays and lesbians who served in the U.S. military during the Second World War. [1] It was thus with great excitement that I began to read Paul Jackson's book on the World War II experiences of queer Canadian servicemen (and women). *One of the Boys* is an exhaustively-researched study of homosexuality in the Canadian armed forces during the war years, the result of hours of pouring over court-martial transcripts, police reports, psychiatric assessments, and dozens of interviews. Writing about any aspect of gay and lesbian history from the pre-Stonewall era (or to use the Canadian equivalent, before Trudeau's Omnibus bill) entails extensive detective work. The historian must decipher the coded phrases that were used to disguise homosexuality, and Jackson has done an admirable job of this. In the hypermasculine, heteronormative world of the Armed Forces, Jackson has uncovered a rich tapestry of homosexual experiences, and thus has made a substantial contribution both to queer history and to the social history of the Second World War.

Jackson chooses his words carefully. Eschewing the term "gay," which was rarely used in its modern sense during the Second World War, he carefully employs the terms used at the time--homosexual, queer, fairy, fruit, and so forth--while also probing the meanings of these terms. He deliberately addresses the topic of "homosexuality," which he broadly defines to be "the ability to derive sexual pleasure from members of one's own sex" (p. 148). In this manner, he refuses to narrowly limit homosexuality to those who self-identified as such, or to exclude those who engaged in homosexual sex for physical pleasure, rather than emotional love. He also avoids the contentious debates over whether homosexuality is innate or learned behavior. For the purposes of this work, Jackson casts a wide net to encompass the very diverse incarnations of homosexuality in the Canadian military during World War II. Indeed, as he points out, military psychiatrists often decided that a person was not a "homosexual," despite

overwhelming evidence that the individual had engaged in same-sex sexual relations, and often regardless of the claims of the man himself that he was homosexual (p. 145). This book treats sexual encounters between men who did not identify as homosexual as equally important as those between men who did.

One of the Boys reads almost as if it is two books merged together: one a policy analysis, the other a social history. The first three chapters deal with how the institutions of the Canadian military attempted to regulate homosexuality. Chapter 1 looks at the rather confused efforts of the military to define its policy on homosexuality. Chapter 2 examines the court martial proceedings of those charged with homosexuality-related legal offences, while chapter 3 shows how military psychiatrists tried to assert their authority over homosexuality as a medical issue. The latter two chapters are oriented around a systematic reading of their respective primary sources: court martial transcripts and psychiatric assessments. Jackson systematically takes the reader through the various stages of the court martial and psychiatric evaluation processes, providing detailed and personalized accounts of how these two branches of the military dealt with the issue of homosexuality, the first as a moral and legal issue, the second as a medical one.

It is clear that there was a serious reluctance on the part of authorities to discharge homosexuals from military service. Courts martial were used primarily to deter homosexual activity, but rarely led to the discharge of noncommissioned servicemen. More commonly, the soldier would be sentenced to serve time in a detention facility, after which he would be allowed to return to service. Officers were more likely to be discharged if found guilty, but were conversely much less likely to be convicted. Jackson suggests that the reason here matches the reason as to why psychiatrists were so reluctant, more so than the courts martial, to declare that a man was homosexual. The medical model of homosexuality constucted a homosexual as a degenerate, antisocial individual, a standpoint reflected in the moral standards of the court martial officers. Yet it was hard to reconcile this conception with the productive, healthy men who stood under examination; so, many were released, especially when they had fellow officers and servicemen willing to vouch for their good character.

This contrast between official military policy condemning homosexuality and the routine tolerance of homosexual behavior is reflected in the first chapter of the book, which examines the various facets of the military's policy on homosexuality as crafted by the medical services, the National Film Board, the military police, and the RCAF. The overall structure of this chapter presents a rather haphazard and inconsistent approach to homosexual behavior in the Canadian military: ruthless investigations on the one hand, routine denials on the other. This chapter climaxes amusingly in Jackson's satirical "Routine Order" on homosexuality, in which he describes the ***de facto*** military policy on homosexuality, in the absence of an official one. Boiled down to essentials, the ***de facto*** policy was to ignore or deny homosexual behavior unless the perpetrator was otherwise a misfit or a behavioral problem. Any penalties should be light for men in combat units, and heavy for noncombatants, unless they were well liked. Again and again, Jackson finds that the Canadian military tried to ignore homosexuality unless individuals were otherwise problematic or were flaunting their sexuality. This unspoken policy followed from 1940s conceptions of sexuality: all soldiers were presumed to be male, masculine,and heterosexual, and in the absence of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, would be treated as such.

The second half of Jackson's book is largely a social history of homosexuality in the armed forces during the Second World War. Chapters 4 and 5 look at the experiences of queer servicemen in Canada and overseas, and chapter 6 looks at

the impact of homosexuality on ***esprit de corps***, cohesion, and morale. These chapters rely heavily on oral histories and war diaries in addition to the sources used for the earlier chapters, and paint vivid pictures of the wartime experience for queer servicemen. Indeed, these sections bring to mind Desmond Morton's excellent work on the experience of Canadian soldiers in the First World War.[2] Using the personal recollections of dozens of veterans, some of whom are openly gay, while others are married with grandchildren, Jackson probes the various dimensions of the homosexual encounters which took place during the war, the stories of coming to awareness of a different sexual orientation, the differing reactions to these encounters, and the unvarnished tales of quick sexual romps in London hotel rooms for mutual pleasure. Of particular interest in these sections is his description of the open sexuality of wartime England, which will certainly be of interest for British historians. Jackson debunks the stereotype that homosexuality in the military was merely the product of an all-male environment, or that these encounters always involved a combination of a masculine top and feminine "queen." While this was the stereotypical image of wartime homosexuality, it was far from being its only manifestation or even the predominant one.

Turning to the impact of homosexuality on unit cohesion, morale and ***esprit de corps***, Jackson not surprisingly found that in established units a court martial of an accused serviceman was usually more damaging to morale than the homosexual serviceman himself. Often these men were well integrated and well liked, and their fellow servicemen reluctant to testify against them. The issue of sexuality was more problematic in training camps, when bonds had not yet been formed. However, sexuality was not any greater a barrier than an individual's race, ethnicity, behavior, or a lack of physical prowess, all of which posed challenges to forging unit cohesion during this phase.

While Jackson's analysis of the queer experience of World War II is impressive, there are a few areas in which his work might have been stronger. Unlike BÃ©rubÃ©'s work, there is little in this book about female homosexuality. Jackson justifies this omission partly on methodological grounds, since the Canadian military did not target women for courts martial or psychiatric evaluation on this basis. Given that these are his main primary sources, one can see how this could pose a major challenge. However, in terms of oral history, Jackson asserts that he could not find lesbians to interview because the Canadian Legion Magazine would not allow the word "sexuality" in his advertisements, and that as a gay man he found it difficult to find lesbians to interview (p. 22). This is a rather unsatisfying rationale for not including lesbians in this study. Indeed, it might have been better to simply argue that the experience of homosexual women in the second world war is likely to have been qualitatively different from that of men, and therefore out of the scope of his study. To his credit, Jackson does include the occasional reference to the experiences of lesbians in the Wrens. However, those hoping this book will provide the comprehensive examination of lesbianism in World War II called for in Ruth Roach Pierson's ***"They're Still Women After All"*** will be disappointed.[3]

While the Canadian experience of the Second World War was markedly different from that of the United States, and Jackson clearly indicates why and how his methodology differs from that of Allan BÃ©rubÃ©, it is likely that many readers of Jackson's book will be familiar with that of BÃ©rubÃ©. In some respects, the differences and similarities between the two countries are well-addressed. For example, the Canadian regimental system, organized by region, is contrasted against the American buddy system which BÃ©rubÃ© claims provided cover for homosexual relationships, and indeed fostered them. Jackson also argues that contrary to the American experience found by BÃ©rubÃ© and John dâ??Emilio, dis-

charges for homosexuality did not lead to postwar gay activism among Canadian veterans.[4] However, it would have been useful to test some of the other conclusions of the American experience. For example, to what extent did Canadian veterans who had homosexual experiences during the Second World War remain in urban centers where queer networks existed after demobilization? How did the battle between psychiatrists and military police for jurisdiction over the issue of homosexuality play out and what were the larger impacts of this for the psychiatric profession? BÃ©rubÃ© argues that American psychiatrists went far towards establishing their professional credentials during the Second World War; it would be interesting to know if the same held true for their Canadian counterparts and the degree to which diagnosing homosexuality was important for this. One hopes that Jackson's next project (mentioned on the book jacket), of examining Canadian and American military policies towards homosexuality since the Second World War, will probe these cross-border comparisons more deeply.

An impressive amount of research has clearly gone into *One of the Boys*, and I would be remiss if I neglected to mention the visual component of this work. Jackson presents an impressive array of war art, including many works by gay war artists which illustrate aspects of homosexuality and the homosocial bonds that formed during the war. Many of these pieces illustrate homoeroticism and same-sex emotional bonds in the military more clearly than a chapter of text can. Combined with images from drag shows, stills from NFB films, and photos of young soldiers together, these illustrations add a rich visual element to the text. One must also credit Jackson for his use of frank, explicit language in describing homosexuality during the Second World War. Not only does this reflect the actual language used in the records he found, but it is appropriate to the sexually-charged material he is dealing with. Jackson tells the story with candour and wit: I am impressed that he managed to get the subtitle for his section on inter-rank relationships, "Officers and their Privates" past his editor. He is to be commended for a stimulating and often intimate account of the experiences of queer servicemen, which will be of interest to both an academic and a general audience.

Notes

[1]. Allan BÃ©rubÃ©, *Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: MacMillan, 1990).

[2]. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993).

[3]. Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 219.

[4]. John d'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

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