

11-30-2010

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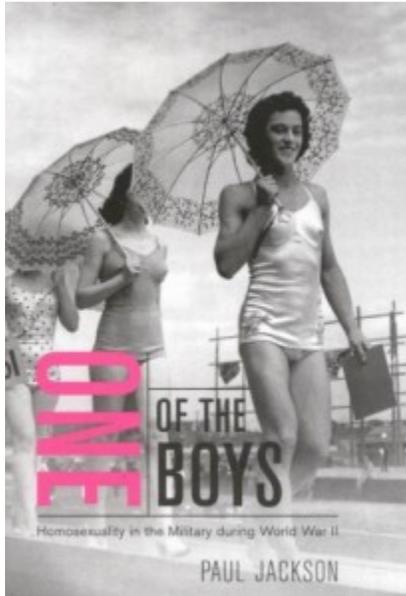
Recommended Citation

Wexelbaum, Rachel S., "*One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military* by Paul Jackson" (2010). *Library Faculty Publications*. 4.
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‘One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military’ by Paul Jackson

Posted on 30 Nov, 2010 by Rachel Wexelbaum



One of the Boys

Homosexuality in the Military during World War II

by Paul Jackson

[McGill-Queen's University Press](#)

ISBN: 9780773537149, Paperback, \$29.95, 338 pp.

In 1992, the Canadian Forces allowed LGBT people to serve openly in the military, free from harassment and discrimination. Today, Canadian LGBT military personnel can have military marriage ceremonies and they can participate in Pride Parades.

An academic study conducted on behalf of The Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military at UC Santa Barbara showed that Canadian military performance did not decline with openly gay servicepeople, sexual harassment claims dropped by 46% and no assault charges for three years after legalization involved gay bashing or discrimination due to sexual orientation.

The Canadian Forces seem to have come a long way. According to Paul Jackson in his new edition of *One of the Boys: Homosexuality in the Military during World War II*, however, parallels can be made between the Canadian military and its attitudes toward homosexuality during World War Two and its 21st century attitudes toward “the war on terror.”

Jackson makes the point that today, Canadian Forces often serve under command of the United States Armed Forces, as part of the “American Empire.” While today’s Canadian Forces allow LGBT people to serve openly, it is very likely that LGBT Canadian servicepeople serve quietly alongside their U.S. counterparts during their invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and

Iraq. Many Canadian citizens today criticize their government and military brass for accepting and embracing “the master’s” sterilized views on terrorism, colonialism and masculine patriotism.

A small detail excised from Jackson’s painstaking research for this book—the fact that American Mark Bingham, who diverted the fourth plane during 9/11 to crash in a field rather than into the White House, was openly gay—was not mentioned in the mainstream press as, to this day, American patriotism as communicated by the “American Empire” must appear as heterosexual as possible.

In writing *One of the Boys*, Jackson made a substantial contribution both to queer history and to the social history of the Second World War. To make this masterpiece a reality, Jackson had spent years analyzing court-martial transcripts, police reports, and psychiatric assessments in Canadian military archives where modern Canadian servicemen felt free to express their anti-gay opinions. Jackson also conducted dozens of interviews with Canadian WWII veterans, which helped him bring the varied, colorful experiences of gay Canadian soldiers to life in his book. Writing about any aspect of pre-Stonewall/Trudeau Omnibus era Canadian gay and lesbian history entails extensive detective work.

The establishment and gays themselves used many coded phrases to disguise homosexuality, and Jackson found the key to unlock that language.

During World War Two, the term “gay” was rarely used, and so in describing his subjects and their sexual behavior, Jackson carefully employs the terms used at the time—homosexual, queer, fairy and fruit—while also probing the meanings of these terms. He most frequently uses the terms “homosexual” and “homosexuality”, which he broadly defines to be “the ability to derive sexual pleasure from members of one’s own sex”. Jackson keeps the term homosexuality broad in the context of this book, to contrast against what military psychiatrists would define as homosexual behavior.

Jackson often points out that military psychiatrists would often decide 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. 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 combines policy analysis and social history into one thought-provoking book. 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.

What will strike contemporary American readers is that, from Jackson's reports, it seems that Canadian military psychiatrists and court martial officers were not interested in mass discharges of homosexual service people. While the Canadian military did not have an official written policy that addressed homosexuals during World War II, through his research Jackson intuited that the Canadian military would keep any mentally stable, functional man and would look the other way at their homosexual behavior. Soldiers would only be court-martialled for homosexual relations if it disgusted their unit or officers, or if military police "should choose to pursue" it, or if "such activity becomes too overt and threatens to embarrass a unit publicly."

It was very rare for the term "homosexual" to even appear in military records; many times the recorded homosexuality of a soldier was couched in alcohol abuse, psychiatric instability or immoral character. Canadian military psychiatrists and commanding officers did not want to ruin a man's life with a homosexual stamp on his record. Courts martial were used primarily to deter homosexual activity, but rarely led to discharge; the soldier would be sentenced to serve time in a detention facility, after which he would be allowed to return to service. Officers, on the other hand were more likely to be discharged if found guilty, as officers had to uphold a moral standard for their men.

Jackson suggests that the reason military psychiatrists were reluctant to identify men as homosexuals had to do with their moral standing. The early 20th century medical profession constructed the homosexual as a degenerate, antisocial individual, a standpoint reflected in the moral standards of the court martial officers. At the same time, it was hard to reconcile this conception with the productive, healthy men who stood under examination. As a result, many were released, especially when they had fellow officers and servicemen willing to vouch for their good character.

Canadian military psychiatrists often would forgive homosexual "offenses" of younger servicemen if they were caught in the act with older men, the justification being that the young men knew no better as they did not have enough life experience, while the older men would be punished more harshly, often sent to civilian court to sentence them to prison or institutionalization once they were discharged from the military. In those days, a "good" homosexual was someone who wanted to change their behavior, while a "bad" one was unrepentant.

Jackson addresses some of the phenomena that the Canadian Forces experienced during World War II that made investigation of homosexuality particularly cruel. Unlike the U.S. military, the Canadian Forces during World War II actively engaged in drag performances to entertain each other (Halladay, 2004). Not only was it a great source of comedy for the men, but a sign of their camaraderie and comfort with each other. One soldier even went so far as to dress up like a woman while on leave and compete in a woman's beauty contest, where he won a prize and the accolades of his comrades. Jackson includes many black and white photos of the Canadian

servicemen in and out of drag, as well as the Canadian servicemen hugging each other, performing fake marriages, and engaging in other acts of male intimacy.

Where the Canadian Forces followed the trends of the U.S. military was after World War II. In his Appendices, Jackson provides many charts that show the discharges for homosexuality in all branches of the Canadian forces—all of them spike dramatically between 1945 and 1946—but then taper off, as opposed to the U.S. military who pursued an anti-homosexual agenda on a parallel with the Communist witch hunts of the McCarthy era.

Perhaps the Canadian Forces have always been historically more gay-friendly than the U.S. military, but cannot truly serve as an openly gay-inclusive military today when their orders come from the United States.

This is the loudest statement that Jackson makes in *One of the Boys*, and one that gay activists in Canada and the United States should remember.

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