

# "A Woman's Right to Charm and Beauty": Maintaining the Feminine Ideal in the Canadian Women's Army Corps

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## ABSTRACT

How a military engages with gender is most evident when it attempts to integrate women as soldiers into its armed forces. Focussing on the internal military media, this paper examines the Canadian Army's efforts during World War II to create a women's corps which exuded an image of femininity and respectability.

## RÉSUMÉ

Comment l'armée s'y prend-elle avec la question des hommes et des femmes est encore plus évident lorsqu'elle tente d'intégrer les femmes en tant que soldats dans ces forces armées. En se concentrant sur les médias militaires internes, cet article étudie les efforts de l'armée canadienne durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale pour créer un corps composé de femmes qui exsuda une image de féminité et de respectabilité.

Labour shortages during World War II generated a rapid expansion of women's public roles as they moved into paid employment in fields that had been considered masculine according to conventional ideology. Feminist historians have argued that enthusiasm for women's patriotic war efforts was soon dampened by concerns for the maintenance their femininity (Anderson 1981; Campbell 1984; Pierson 1986; Summerfield 1984). These historians have suggested that the rhetoric of government mobilization propaganda and mass media coverage emphasized the temporary and subordinate nature of women's wartime contributions while simultaneously highlighting those aspects of women's war work which were perceived as innately feminine. Other scholars have argued that government propaganda and the mass media served to inform the general public of the wartime ideal of femininity (Bland 1983; Dabakis 1993; Gledhill and Swanson 1995; Honey 1984; Montgomerie 1996; Pierson 1986; Rupp 1978). Public anxiety over women's wartime femininity was further exacerbated by women's movement into the three arms of Canada's military. In addition to expanding the Nursing Service, first established by the Army in World War I, the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division, and the Canadian

Women's Army Corps (CWAC) were formed (Dundas 2000).

Widely celebrated as a hallmark of women's liberation, the World War II establishment of women's military services did not mark the first time that women had served in a military capacity in Canadian (Dundas 2000) or Western history (DePauw 1998). DePauw (1998) and Hacker (1981) have demonstrated that the female soldier is part of a long history of gender constructions that dictated not only that soldiering and masculinity are interrelated, but that military service and respectable femininity are incompatible.

During World War II, this negative historical conceptualization of women's military service was reinforced by a rash of pervasive gossip maligning the moral respectability of servicewomen. Exaggerated reports of drunkenness, licentiousness, pregnancy, venereal disease and prostitution surfaced in the media, society and the armed forces. This "whispering campaign," as it was commonly referred to in Canada, transcended international borders, and seriously impeded recruitment efforts in Canada (Pierson 1986), the United States (Meyer 1996) and Britain (Costello 1985). Examining recruitment materials for the CWAC, Sentek (1997) argues that a tension between propaganda images of a total war effort

and the reality of a war of limited exertion exposed preexisting gender and class biases and manifested itself into the whispering campaign. In order to combat poor public opinion, the Canadian Army exerted itself to construct an idealized public image of the CWAC that simultaneously met prevailing standards of femininity and was also morally respectable.

To some degree, regulations and policies would appear to be the most obvious medium through which the army would have been able to promote its version of the feminine ideal among Cwacs.<sup>1</sup> Regulations did dictate particular aspects of Cwacs' appearances, including height and weight restrictions, and uniforms.<sup>2</sup> Army policy which made hair dressers, rayon stockings, and supplies of cosmetics available to servicewomen also helped reinforce the feminine ideal expected of the Cwacs. In much the same manner that the mass media and government propaganda affected Canadian society in general, the internally produced and circulated military media arguably would have informed the Cwacs, and servicemen, of the military ideal of femininity.

This article will consider some of the efforts in military regulations and policies to maintain the feminine ideal among Cwacs. In particular, the military's concern for maintaining a respectable femininity in terms of uniforms, cosmetics, hairstyles, and other visible signifiers of femininity will be considered. However, this article will specifically examine how the Canadian military relied heavily on its official internal publications *Khaki: The Army Newsletter (Khaki)* and its ancillary, *The CWAC Newsletter (NEL)* to promote its vision of the feminine ideal.

### THE NEWSLETTERS

While *Khaki* was devoted primarily to the men in uniform, its regular feature column, "Mademoiselle in Khaki" ("Mademoiselle"), was dedicated to servicewomen. *Khaki* repeatedly solicited submissions from rank and file personnel, but submissions from service personnel were rare. Whatever the original intentions of the Army, *Khaki* was produced largely by staff writers and editors; their only military function appears to have been the publication of the newsletter. Although authors were frequently not identified at all, some

information about gender and rank is available. *Khaki* was written primarily by men although women also contributed. "Mademoiselle" appears to have been written entirely by women. Where rank is listed, Corporals and Lieutenants predominate.

*NEL* was comprised primarily of news bulletins from individual CWAC companies. These bulletins appear to have been submitted by enlisted women who either volunteered or were appointed to write the bulletins. However, each issue began with several editorial pages which were generated by a *Khaki* staff writer, and items originally printed in one of these Army publications were frequently reprinted in the other. In spite of the obvious editorial presence, the original editor's reluctance to use the terms "I" or "we" resulted in the coining of the acronym *NEL* in reference to *The CWAC Newsletter*.

Although complete collections of both publications are available, they have not yet been the focal point of any study of women in the military during World War II. However, their particular value to this paper is that they were internally produced and circulated military documents. As *Khaki* and *NEL* writers make evident in their frequent references to the input and criticisms of higher ranking military members, both publications were subject to a centralized military editorial process, and therefore are far more reflective of military ideology than the opinions of the enlisted personnel.

### THE AVERAGE Cwac

The physical appearances of Cwacs whose images were used to publicly represent the CWAC were important to the Army. For example, while Cwacs selected for overseas service were required to be a minimum of twenty-one years of age, healthy, and have an excellent character, "appearance and general smartness" were also considered relevant factors (Gossage 1991, 151). Whether photographed or artistically rendered, *Khaki* and *NEL* cover girls, as well as Cwacs appearing in mass circulating recruitment propaganda, were invariably white, young, slim, well-made-up, and conventionally attractive.

In spite of this overwhelmingly homogeneous image, much of the Corps did not fall within these parameters. Official Army regulations

regarding height, weight, age, and race qualifications of CWAC volunteers allowed for a greater range of body images among volunteers than propaganda indicated. The following quote from "Mademoiselle" illustrates this diversity.

The Average Cwac is somewhere between five and six feet tall; she is blonde, brunette, red-headed, grey-haired; she wears her hair up, down, in a roll, in a bun, in a feather-cut, in a boyish-bob; she is fat, thin, middling, curvaciouss [sic], bean-polish, just-rightish;...old, young, beautiful, homely....In fact, she is just a side slice of feminine life anywhere (November 6 1944, 2).

The artwork of the first female military artist Lieutenant Molly Lamb (Dundas 2000; Gossage 1992) and Lieutenant Beulah Jaenicke, a frequent contributor to the newsletters, also indicates that Cwacs came in an array of appearances, many of which were widely divergent from the ideal.

### THE UNIFORM

As the most visible element of the women's services, the uniform introduced the greatest degree of regimentation to this range of volunteers. While serviceability was an Army priority (Conrod 1983, 37), femininity was also an essential component of the uniform design (Pierson 1986, 139).

The final result was a two-piece khaki suit with a gored skirt to allow for freedom of movement and a long, fitted jacket. The uniform was designed along tailored lines that emphasized the feminine figure. Without a properly fitting uniform, this aspect of the uniform design would have been wasted. To facilitate the process of individually tailoring each uniform, the designer decided on semi-ready uniforms. The rationale being that, "because of the various bulges which must be accounted for in fitting women it is impossible to have a straight issue of uniforms and have them looking smart and natty at the same time" (Arnold 1941, 6). Once the uniform was perfectly fitted, regulations also dictated the standard by which it was to be worn, generating a homogenous appearance. *Khaki* and *NEL* printed frequent

reminders of these regulations, and also emphasized the maintenance of neatness and femininity while wearing the uniform (*NEL* June 1944, 4; repeated in "Mademoiselle" August 7 1944, 4).

Conrod's official history of the CWAC notes that the skirt hemlines, which fell between sixteen and seventeen inches from the ground, were widely regarded to be "dowdy" and "old-fashioned" (1983, 33). The additional length served no military purpose, as it would only have proved more cumbersome than a shorter length skirt on marches and parade. The unfashionably long hem length demonstrated that the Army was more concerned with maintaining a morally respectable appearance than with either military serviceability or contemporary ideals of feminine attractiveness. This conservative attitude toward hemlines was confirmed by the Army's refusal to allow the CWAC Pipe Bands to wear the traditional kilts simply because their knees would show (Canadian Press June 8 1943).

Yet another indication of the Army's determination to maintain a conservative ideal of respectable femininity among the Cwacs was its reluctance to issue trousered uniforms to servicewomen, even where they would have been beneficial to and welcomed by Cwacs. Although trousers were issued to some Cwacs as early as the end of 1942, the wearing of slacks was restricted to CWAC drivers and mechanics, and the trousers were to be worn only in specific circumstances. Even hospital wear, which was traditionally issued with trousers, was redesigned to include skirts that coordinated with the rest of the hospital suit ("Mademoiselle" February 9 1944, 2). Although slacks and coveralls were already being worn by many female factory workers, the military chose to set its own more conservative standards of femininity rather than to follow the public lead. As Pierson (1986) has argued, the Army's refusal to issue trousers as a part of general issue served as a very visual reminder of the subordinate and gendered roles that Cwacs were filling.

A variety of criticisms, including objections to hemlines, were directed toward the new CWAC uniform ("Mademoiselle" May 13 1944, 2; *NEL* July 1944, 1; Conrod 1983, 38-9). In spite of the negative comments, the uniform received accolades from the *Stars and Stripes*, the official organ of the United States Armed Forces

during the war, as the "smartest" in all the women's services. This was repeated and reprinted in "Mademoiselle" numerous times (January 19 1944, 2; May 22 1944, 2; June 12 1944, 2; December 4 1944, 2). Memoirs in Gossage (1991) and Bruce (1985) indicate that many Cwacs were reportedly attracted to the CWAC precisely because of the uniform. Nevertheless, Cwacs were reportedly gleeful at the announcement that they would be permitted to wear civilian clothing when off-base on 36- and 48-hour leaves (*NEL* April 1944, 4). Civilian clothing continued to be a signifier of real femininity. In the Editorial of *NEL*, Corporal Bridget Pearse commented that the relaxation of Army regulations on civilian clothes "will mean that twice a month girls will be able to cast aside the khaki for something more feminine" (April 1944, 4).

Nevertheless, the uniform was depicted as evoking a sense of pride in self, and superiority to civilian women. On the CWAC's second anniversary in 1943, the August tribute in *Khaki* was accompanied by two illustrations. The first was dated 1941 and pictured a line of civilian women looking with disdain and open curiosity on the only uniformed woman in their midst. The second one was dated 1943 and showed a line of Cwacs looking disapprovingly at the lone young civilian woman in their midst. Volunteers were not always anxious to shed the prestige of their uniforms. When a line of CWAC blazers complete with CWAC crests for off-duty wear was released, many Cwacs scrambled to purchase one in spite of the prohibitive price of sixteen to seventeen dollars ("Mademoiselle" July 23 1945, 11).

The uniform was a critical component of the first impressions the public would form of the CWAC. Consequently, the military exercised extreme care in ensuring that the uniform indicated the Army's commitment to maintaining the femininity of its women volunteers. Regulations, routine orders, and the military media encouraged servicewomen to wear the uniform correctly and with pride.

### COSMETICS

The newsletters also reminded Cwacs that "climbing into uniform isn't the signal for throwing aside your feminine heritage to smartness....You

may be in the Army but you retain a woman's right to charm and beauty" (*NEL* June 1944, 4; "Mademoiselle" August 7 1944, 2). Official regulations permitted the use of "inconspicuous"<sup>3</sup> cosmetics, and servicewomen were encouraged to add this touch of feminine individuality to uniformed regimentation.

Significantly, official regulations neither encouraged nor discouraged the use of cosmetics, but merely permitted the practice. Furthermore, the wording of the regulations addressing the issue of cosmetics is extremely ambiguous and open to individual interpretation. In spite of confusion regarding the use of the term "inconspicuous," the Army chose not to clear up the ambiguity.

While the Army could have easily decided to forbid cosmetics use among servicewomen, Kathy Peiss (1990) has argued that cosmetics had become a standard signifier of feminine appearances since the 1920s. From a public relations perspective it was essential that the public face of the CWAC should be a properly "made-up" face. Rather than impose overt control on individual Cwac's expressions of femininity, the ambiguously worded regulations afforded the military hierarchy the authority to control what might have been perceived as immoral appearances among Cwacs without delineating an exact description of what constituted feminine respectability in cosmetics.

While "Mademoiselle" acknowledged the problematic "thin dividing line between conspicuous make-up" and respectable makeup (June 5 1944, 2), it neatly skirted the issue by placing responsibility for interpreting regulations on the individual Cwac, suggesting that all Cwacs "know the score there" (December 4 1944, 2). Nevertheless, the military media encouraged cosmetics use in a number of subtle fashions. Both newsletters promoted the cosmetics classes offered by all three women's services, and carried occasional information about cosmetic availability as "news" items, thereby implying that the information was important ("Mademoiselle" July 3 1944, 2). Secondly, the newsletters featured cosmetics use as part of an everyday Cwac regimen. Although this was done in a non-intrusive fashion, these frequent casual references in text and image to cosmetics as part of the daily Cwac routine served as poignant reminders that they were the "norm" among servicewomen (for text examples, see:

"Mademoiselle" March 13 1944, 2; March 20 1944, 2; April 17 1944, 2. For examples in image, see: "Mademoiselle" November 24 1943, 2; January 12 1944, 2; *NEL* February 1944, 6; May 1944, 15). To some extent, therefore, *Khaki* and *NEL* functioned as interpreters of the military policy on cosmetics.

Simultaneously, the military media subtly discouraged what it considered "conspicuous" use of cosmetics. *Khaki* and *NEL* poked fun at Cwacs whose cosmetics were time-consuming or overly noticeable (*Khaki* January 16 1944, 3; "Mademoiselle" February 2 1944, 2; *NEL* September 1944, 2). Emphasizing "natural shades," "Mademoiselle" counselled Cwacs: "just remember, what may look bright and colorful on a civilian can look cheap and gaudy on a girl in uniform, so keep it down to a reasonable minimum" (December 4 1944, 2).

Servicewomen who wore lipsticks and rouges softened the regimented harshness of the uniform. Nevertheless, it was a fine line distinguishing between the respectable use of cosmetics and appearances of sexual immorality. The Army was unsure how to effectively negotiate the difference, let alone define it in regulations. To this end, the military media simultaneously encouraged Cwacs to apply cosmetics while urging them to exercise restraint. Cwacs were expected to distinguish between femininity and immorality for themselves. Nevertheless, Cwacs who did not exercise sufficient caution were subject to reprimand and ridicule in the pages of *Khaki* and *NEL*.

### HAIRDOS

Army regulations on the subject of hairstyles dictated that "hair must be dressed neatly and clear of the collar at all times."<sup>4</sup> Clear of the collar meant at least by two inches ("Mademoiselle" December 4 1944, 2), so these regulations put an end to the long, loose, and "glamorous" hairstyles popular among civilian women ("I've joined the Army," *Maclean's*, April 15 1942, 30; Anderson, April 24 1943, 26; *NEL* June 1944, cover; "Mademoiselle" February 23 1944, 2). More so than most other Army regulations regarding Cwac appearance, "Mademoiselle" credits this item with having generated the "biggest Army head-ache" (June 25 1945, 11). *NEL* also makes frequent

reference to Cwacs being reprimanded because "their hair was getting too chummy with their collar" (Spring 1945, 4; June 1945, 19; September 1945, 6). Many cartoons in *Khaki* and *NEL* portrayed Cwacs adorned in hairstyles that fell well past the collar, even when disobedience of the regulations was not central to the incident being portrayed ("Mademoiselle" June 5 1944, 2; *NEL* February 1945, 9; Spring 1945, 21). As illustrated in the following quote, "Mademoiselle" linked the reluctance to comply with Cwacs' longing for civilian freedoms: "As long as a girl can worry about her hair she feels there is one thin straw linking her with the gay civilian days" (June 5 1944, 2.)

However, failure to fully comply was not always deliberate. Inclement weather and time constrictions both affected the ability of Cwacs to control their hair to the Army's satisfaction. *NEL* and *Khaki's* compulsive complainer, the fictional character Pinky, pleads,

Rain, rain go away--  
My hair will not stay up today,  
And when it falls down on my collar  
The Orderly Room puts up a holler.  
(*NEL* October 1944, 12)

"Mademoiselle" sympathized with this dilemma, and suggested that a tight roll is the most efficient way to control hair during rainy weather (June 5 1944, 2). *NEL* suggested that Cwacs who were pressed for time were frequently reprimanded "for being in the bathroom putting up [their] hair after lights out" (December 1944, 3).

In spite of these problems, neither publication suggested adopting a shorter or more masculine hairstyle for the duration. Far from it, "Mademoiselle" preferred hairstyles that were "utterly feminine" and decried the "boyish bobs" which "send us screaming to the nearest exit" (December 4 1944, 2). Femininity coupled with compliance with orders was the Cwacs' priority, and *Khaki* offered frequent suggestions to help alleviate volunteers' difficulties. The feathery brush cut was portrayed as being the easiest style which complied with military regulations. "With a handful of hardware - sold at dime stores under the alleged trade name of bobby pins and curlers - any child can handle the feather cut" proclaimed

"Mademoiselle" (June 5 1944, 2). The following quote suggests that "Mademoiselle" also tried to make light of Cwacs' sacrifice of their civilian hairstyles: "Happy those heads that shed their curls for a pert feather cut, for primping and fussing has gone by the boards. Glamour hits a new low and fun hits a new high" (October 9 1944, 2).

Unfortunately for Cwacs, the streamlined hairdos of the military required professional upkeep,<sup>5</sup> and they could not afford the necessary maintenance. The Army's response to this dilemma indicates how important the volunteers' femininity was to them. In 1943, Cwacs' hair became "an Army responsibility."<sup>6</sup> The Army began supplying on-base hairstyling services at a nominal cost (*Khaki* June 16, 1943, 2). "Mademoiselle" enthused "it's a nifty idea and generally does wonders toward keeping the girls groomed without slashing the pay check" (January 26 1944, 2). Although Army barbers for servicemen's short and relatively uncomplicated haircuts were not a novelty, the hairdressing installations on CWAC barracks indicated that a much more complex styling was anticipated for Cwacs' hair.

While Army regulations stated nothing about the femininity of servicewomen's hairstyles, *Khaki* and *NEL* made it quite clear that volunteers were not expected to adopt a short, masculine hairstyle, and indicated a strong disapproval of Cwacs who did so. The military policy which established hair salons on all CWAC Headquarters indicated that the newsletters were speaking with some authority when they claimed that femininity was an essential consideration in complying with orders. *Khaki* and *NEL's* enthusiastic support of these facilities reinforced their role as interpreters of military policy and attitudes, and their important function as promoters of the Army's feminine ideal.

#### **SUPERFICIAL SOLDIERS: SIGNIFIERS OF FEMININITY BELIE THE UNIFORM**

The Army's small acknowledgments of feminine appearance in uniforms, cosmetics, and hairstyles may well have served as visible reminders that the Cwac remained a woman, as enlistment was perceived as indicating that her femininity had become secondary to her wartime role as a soldier. In the pursuit of good public

relations, the Army wanted the woman in uniform to remain "a woman first and a soldier second" (Internal memorandum from Director of Army Recruiting quoted in Bruce 1985, 44). *Khaki* and *NEL* reinforced this ideal to female volunteers by placing emphasis on such signifiers of femininity as lingerie and silk stockings. The suggestion that Cwacs did or should value these things over compliance with regulations and other soldiering skills served as a reminder that Cwacs only "appeared" to be soldiers.

The one component of CWAC attire which did not become an issue was their underwear. Rather than issue underwear, the military offered Cwacs an allowance to purchase their own.<sup>7</sup> While this particular policy may have had practical motivations, Pierson (1986) has demonstrated its effect was to focus attention on Cwacs' underwear as evidence of their irrepressible femininity. *Khaki* and *NEL* made frequent reference to Cwacs' desire for feminine lingerie ("Mademoiselle" December 22 1943, 2; *NEL* January 1945, 13; October 1945, 22). Feminine underwear provided a source of endless amusement. One *NEL* comic depicted a CWAC Corporal with her lace-trimmed slip hanging out of her suitcase, while a soldier remarks "Pardon me, Corporal, but I believe your slip's showing!" (August 1944, 17). Another edition of *NEL* punned: "A corset is something to keep the waves out of CWAC" (November 1944, 12; *Khaki* April 30 1945, 12). This emphasis called into question the serious intent of women in uniform. Underlying the humor was a reminder that women's military presence was temporary, and the appearance of being soldiers was - literally - only superficial.

However, in the opinion of the Cwacs themselves, perhaps the biggest disappointment in the uniform was the stocking issue. Silk was in short supply, so CWAC issue stockings were made of a cotton called lisle. Regulations did allow Cwacs to wear silk stockings with summer issue, for "walking out," and for dressing up - "if you're good" ("Mademoiselle" June 5 1944, 2). According to "Mademoiselle," the wearing of silk stockings was closely tied to CWAC morale. The summertime order reinstating permission to wear silk stockings while on duty was reported to have "shot the morale barometer sky high" (July 10 1944, 2). Conversely, the winter order to return to wearing the issue lisle stockings was greeted as "inevitable

but sadly - silk-stockings do so much for CWAC morale" (October 23 1944, 2).

In spite of the expense of silk stockings, many Cwacs resisted wearing the regulation issue lisle ones ("Mademoiselle" June 5 1944, 2; October 23 1944, 2; December 5 1944, 2). Resistance to the winter season stocking orders presented a discipline problem, apparently second only to the discipline problem of hairstyles ("Mademoiselle" October 23 1944, 2; *NEL* April 1944, 2; June 1944, 7). Nevertheless, as the next quote illustrates, "Mademoiselle" grudgingly admitted the general issue stockings not only suited the uniform (December 4 1944, 2), but some Cwacs even preferred them: "The bolder members of the Corps...could be seen gambolling around in silk hose...but such luxury terrifies the more conservative members of the Corps - they don't like to admit it but they're happy in lisle and you'll see them slinking up alleys, content and comfortable in cotton" (July 3 1944, 2).

Early in 1944, the Army conceded a victory to continued Cwac resistance and began to issue four pairs of rayon stockings to each Cwac (*NEL* February 1944, 3). This was no negligible privilege. Rayon stockings became increasingly popular during World War II as a substitute for silk stockings. Yet, even rayon hose were in short supply, and civilian women could count themselves fortunate to have one pair, let alone four (*NEL* May 1945, 12; June 1945, 3).

It is difficult to say why the Army gave way on the issue of silk stockings. Perhaps the issue of rayon stockings was intended to keep CWAC morale high, while simultaneously providing encouragement not to consume real silk. The rayon stockings may well have been intended as a recruitment ploy in the sense that it demonstrated the military's commitment to maintaining the femininity of its servicewomen. Certainly, Cwacs' unwillingness to simply pass off silk stockings as yet another peacetime luxury confirmed the importance of silk stockings as a crucial signifier of femininity.

The military media's emphasis on signifiers of femininity such as cosmetics, hairdos, and lingerie belied and undermined the importance of the Cwac's role as a soldier. As such, Cwacs were encouraged to view femininity as normative, and soldiering as an aberration. Servicemen and

women alike were reminded that the Cwac was only a superficial soldier. She may well have looked and sounded like a soldier at first glance, but stripped of the uniform, her lipsticks and lace revealed her irrepressible femininity.

### BEHAVING LIKE A LADY: OFF-DUTY RECREATION

Maintaining the appearance of respectable femininity among Cwacs was an integral component of the Army's efforts to assuage public concern that women in uniform ceased to be women. Nevertheless, it was servicewomen's sexual morality that the "whispering campaign" called into question. As one issue of *NEL* remarked: "There are plenty of people who are only too ready to criticize you, and that is why it behoves you to be especially on your guard when you are off duty. There are many things you can do in Civvies which are quite harmless in themselves but in uniform they somehow become bad form" (July 1944, 2).

The Army employed a wide variety of supervised recreational activities as the most effective way of distracting servicewomen from illicit behaviour. Supervised recreation areas, organized athletics, and free educational courses were featured frequently in the pages of *Khaki* and *NEL*. Although it was a much more complicated matter to supervise the recreational activities of Cwacs on off-base leaves, the Army offered a number of partially supervised leave centres for Cwacs, which both newsletters promoted ("Mademoiselle" September 11 1944, 2; March 5 1945, 6; *NEL* September 1944, 10-11; Spring 1945, 24).

The connection between these organized off-duty activities and the Army's efforts to ensure that Cwacs maintained the appearance of conventional attractiveness and high moral standards was neither tenuous nor coincidental. *NEL* reported that educational opportunities were promoted "to foil the Devil and make sure that he has no idle hands to exploit" (October 1944, 2), while "Mademoiselle" remarked that in spite of Cwac's apparent preference for spending leisure time with their "favorite date," the athletics officers were "determined to get a greater number of girls

interested in developing the body beautiful" (March 13 1944, 2).

### FEMININITY AND STATUS AS SOLDIERS

The emphasis in the military media on Cwacs' respectability and femininity does more than just indicate the Army's interest in maintaining the status quo of femininity. Military regulations, policies, and orders established the terms of the feminine ideal for servicewomen, and the military media reinforced the ideal and encouraged Cwacs to emulate it. Ironically, although the pursuit of this ideal often created an image of Cwacs' inefficiency as soldiers, the mistakes Cwacs allegedly made were overlooked if the mistake was a result of their efforts to maintain femininity. This is depicted in the next quote as "Mademoiselle" reminisces about

a time when our leaders were outwardly terrified at the thought of drilling and training girls - they lay sleepless at nights imagining the atrocities that would be committed on the parade square. In nightmares they saw their Guppies dropping coyly out of formation to straighten a stocking seam, interrupting gas drill to touch up their lipstick or breaking off fatigues to experiment with pancake makeup. (July 3 1944, 2)

Although "Mademoiselle" reassured readers that Cwacs had proved more competent than to indulge in any "fluffy feminine act on the parade square" (July 3 1944, 2), both *Khaki* and *NEL* often recounted incidences of Cwac incompetence related to their femininity and preoccupation with their appearance.

Cwacs were portrayed as wearing too much make-up on occasion, worrying about make-up at inopportune moments, and disrupting military efficiency by taking too long to complete their morning toilettes (*Khaki* January 26 1944, 3; April 10 1944, 3; "Mademoiselle" February 2 1944, 2; *NEL* February 1944, 11; September 1944, 12). Efficient soldiering was presented as proving beyond the capabilities of the feminine Cwac. She dropped things (*NEL* November 1944, 11), could never reach the upper bunk (*NEL* April 1944, 12), did not understand saluting (*NEL* January 1944, 7)

or rank insignia (*NEL* July 1944, 8), and even appealed to Santa Claus for her promotion ("Mademoiselle" December 25 1944, 6). Sometimes, when being a soldier got to be too much for a Cwac, she simply burst into tears (*NEL* June 1944, 8). Nevertheless, while *Khaki* and *NEL* construed a Cwac's concern with her appearance as often interfering with her ability to perform her duty competently, these publications usually exempted Cwacs from blame for small mistakes resulting from a commitment to their femininity (*Khaki* May 29 1944, 3).

Perhaps *Khaki* and *NEL* so readily dismissed Cwacs' alleged minor offences against military discipline and regimentation because their skill as soldiers was seen as being of secondary importance to their ability to maintain the appearance of femininity. They were not "soldiers" in the true sense of the word. They were women whose presence in the military was justifiable because it released a man for more important soldiering duties. The "Cwac's Prayer," a poem submitted by Lance Corporal Ruth Carter Lewis exemplifies this subordination, and the importance of femininity in uniform.

I fight with files and ink and pens,  
At each new job I find.  
I have no gun. You see I'm just  
The girl he left behind....  
Make me a soldier, strong and true  
Stalwart of heart and mind:  
But underneath, God, let me stay  
The girl he left behind.  
(*Khaki* May 12 1943, 3)

The survival of the prewar gender ideal into the war years depended on women's willingness to continue to accept a subordinate role, and to regard their femininity as their chief asset. The army had no less a vested interest in a return to prewar ideals than did the civilian sector of society.

### CONCLUSION

The acceptance of women into the three branches of the Canadian military during World War II has been offered as evidence that the war brought about conditions of greater equality for Canadian women. Yet, as Pierson (1986) has

pointed out, they were restricted in promotional opportunities, limited in occupational opportunities to traditionally female tasks, unequivocally excluded from holding combat or combat-related positions, and encouraged to include the maintenance of femininity among other job requirements. Although military regulations and policies contributed toward maintaining the appearance of the femininity of Cwacs, where these were ambiguous and open to interpretation, *Khaki* and *NEL* served to reinforce the military's feminine ideal among servicewomen.

The conservative femininity of the uniform was enhanced by other signifiers of femininity such as cosmetics and hairdos. In addition to appearing feminine, Cwacs were encouraged to behave as respectable women through supervised recreational opportunities. The military's focus on femininity served to emphasize the subordinate and secondary

status of the CWAC, and reminded Cwacs that they were expected to return to the domestic realm at the end of the war. If any further reinforcement of the auxiliary and temporary status of the female military presence was needed, their disbandment at the war's end issued a clear statement that "in normal times, women do not soldier."

## ENDNOTES

1. Hereafter, CWAC in upper-case letters refers to the Canadian Women's Army Corps organization itself, and Cwac in lowercase letters refers to the individual Corps members.
2. See for example Draft Canadian Army Routine Order No. 5671, May 9, 1945. NAC, RG 24, VOL 2255, file HQ 54-27-111-33, vol. 3.
3. See for example Draft Canadian Army Routine Order No. 4434, May 3, 1944. NAC, RG 24, VOL 2254, file HQ 54-27-111-33, vol. 2; Draft Canadian Army Routine Order No. 5671.
4. Ibid.
5. *Women In Khaki* nd. 24; NAC, RG 24, VOL 16546, War Diaries, July 1942.
6. Correspondence to A.G. regarding Hairdressers - CWAC Ottawa, August 13, 1943. NAC, RG 24, VOL 2257, file HQ 54-27-111-146.
7. Regulations and Instructions for the Canadian Women's Service, June 23, 1941. (Draft) NAC, RG 24, Vol. 2252, file HQ 54-27-111-112, vol. 1.

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