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"WITH THEIR FEET ON THE GROUND":
WOMEN'S LIVES AND WORK IN THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE, 1951-1966

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Abstract

In 1951, the Canadian government declared that women would be recruited into the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Women were needed in the military because, in spite of the conservative image towards women in the time period, their social role in Canada was changing. Thanks to the expansion of the Canadian economy, women were now needed to fill positions in the public sphere for which there had never been a real demand. In addition, Canada's military requirements also expanded at the same time, due mainly to the commitments made in response to the Cold War. In particular, the RCAF needed greater numbers of personnel because of the construction of three radar lines across the country: the Distant Early Warning Line, the Mid-Canada line and the Pinetree line. The RCAF (which, of the three armed services was expanding most quickly in this period) began to recruit women as part of the permanent force.

By the early 1960s, changes in radar technology meant that the RCAF's personnel needs had dropped considerably. The RCAF decided to stop recruiting women, and asked the federal government for permission to close its doors to women completely. The federal government refused permission, citing that (by then) there were too many women in the civilian labour force, and the military had to reflect this change. At the same time, however, the government restricted the role of women in the Armed Forces, describing them as

temporary workers.

Although the experience of women in the RCAF appears to be confirmation that women are used as a reserve “force” of labour, this is not the whole story. Throughout the period of recruitment, the Air Force put limits on the number of women to be recruited. Moreover, the terms of service, the number of jobs available, and the chance for promotion was much more restrictive for women than for men. Yet, the records show that women were not being recruiting in enough numbers to even reach the expectations that the RCAF had limited them to. In addition, airwomen were leaving the Air Force in great numbers.

Interviews with the former airwomen demonstrate that the great majority of them did not make a permanent career in the Service. The interviews also showed that women were not leaving for work reasons, but for social reasons, including marriage and children. In addition, many airwomen were engaging in behaviour that did not necessarily conform to the RCAF’s ideal. Airwomen made lifestyle choices that included dating officers, consuming alcohol, engaging in extra-marital sex, and as well pursuing homosexual relationships. The RCAF attempted to control the women’s behaviour through courses, lectures and recreational activities, in order to encourage traditional and “feminine” behaviour among women.

Women either did not join the Air Force or left it because their choices in their lives outside of work were incompatible with the ideal that the RCAF wanted the women to portray. In conclusion, women’s priorities in their lives are different from that of men, and their work patterns are often determined by their lifecycle and the choices they make in their personal lives.

Dedicated in loving memory
to my mother
Suzanne Langevin Power

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"WITH THEIR FEET ON THE GROUND":
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Introduction

In 1951, the Canadian Government declared that women would be recruited as regular members of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). With the exception of Nursing Sisters, who had served in the Armed Forces during both World Wars, the only time that women were part of the Canadian military was during the Second World War as part of the Auxiliary forces. The expansion of defence systems in North America during the Cold War, combined with technological changes in radar and communications propelled the Air Force into expanding its recruitment to include women. However, by 1960, radar technology had changed again, and it now required fewer personnel to operate it. In spite of having been recruited as "permanent" members of the force, by 1965, the Canadian Armed Forces, including the RCAF, requested that they be allowed to close their doors to women once again, as the change in technology meant that their services were no longer necessary.¹ However, this request was denied by the Federal government: women were to be

¹This thesis concentrates on the experience of women in the RCAF, as they were the first to actively recruit women in this period. The Canadian Army and the Royal Canadian Navy began recruiting women in the mid-1950s. Until this time, women were recruited only in the Auxiliary Forces of these two services.

retained permanently in the Armed Forces.

It is not surprising that the RCAF would once again turn to women when the Service began to expand during the Cold War. Ruth R. Pierson has argued that the Armed Forces used women as a reserve army of labour during the Second World War, only to let them go after the end of the conflict.² Nevertheless, the 1950s are considered a very conservative period in Canadian history. Studies have shown that, unlike the 1930s and 1940s, the post-war era projected a highly traditional image of women in society.³ How is it then, that women were recruited into the Air Force?

Nor is it surprising that technological change would have an impact on women's employment. Ruth Schwartz Cowan has recently argued that as long as women are limited to working on technology already developed, their work patterns will continue to be influenced by technological change.⁴ However, the example of airwomen in the RCAF between 1951 and 1966 suggests another story. As will be shown, women in the RCAF were leaving the Service in large numbers long before technological change occurred, and the RCAF continually discussed ways to augment

²Pierson, Ruth Roach, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1986.

³Prentice, Alison, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History*, Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1988; Ruth Roach Pierson, *ibid*; Susan M. Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising in *Maclean's* Magazine, 1939-1950," *Atlantis*, vol. 8, no.2, 1983, pp. 84-87; Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us: Images of Women in National Film Board Films of the 1940s and 1950s," *Atlantis*, vol. 4, no. 2, Spring, 1979, p. 21.

⁴Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "Technology is to Science as Female is to Male: Musings on the History and Character of our Discipline", address delivered at the Society for the History of Technology Meeting, Lowell, Massachusetts, 07.10.1994.

their numbers throughout the 1950s. If technological change was not the main reason explaining their departure, why did they leave?

What is startling is that women did remain permanent members of the Armed Forces, in spite of technological change and the RCAF's willingness to use women as a reserve force of labour. The twenty years following the Second World War are not known as a time period when women's move towards equality made progress. If anything, it is known as a time when women's social role was restricted to marriage and motherhood.⁵ And yet, by 1966, the Federal government no longer considered women to be a reserve labour pool. What had changed between 1946 and 1966, when the Federal government decided that women could remain in the Armed Forces?

In order to answer these questions, it became clear that studying the work performed by women and the effect of technology on this work would not suffice in the case of those who joined the RCAF in the 1950s. One also needs to study women's lives outside the workplace. Airwomen represent a good case in point: unlike civilian women, airwomen did not go home at the end of the day; they lived at the air stations where they worked. Therefore, their personal lives and their paid work experiences were even more closely linked than were civilian women's.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

However, trying to study the lives of airwomen both in and outside the

⁵Prentice et al., op. cit.

workplace proved impossible without input from the women themselves. None of the studies that have examined women's experiences in the Canadian military have taken into account the point of view of the women themselves. In this thesis, oral interviews were conducted with eleven women, while ten women responded to written interviews. All were part of the RCAF sometime between the years of 1951 and 1966. Oral and written interviews are now recognized as an important and legitimate methodological tool in most branches of social history, especially in women's history.⁶ There are problems with oral history of course, such as the reliability of memory, the historian's control over the source and the questions being asked. But, these issues can also be discussed for other kinds of sources: care must be taken to make sure that the historian does not extrapolate more from a source than is there; a certain amount of bias, both on the part of the subject and on the part of the historian can be also equated with the use of other sources. In the end, the strengths of oral history far outweigh these problems. As historian Paul Thompson explains:

[Oral history] can and does provide significant and sometimes unique information from the past....[I]t can convey the individual and collective consciousness which is part and parcel of that very past....[T]he living humanity of oral sources gives them a third strength which is unique. For the reflective insights of retrospection are by no

⁶For more information on oral history as a source, see: Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; Haim Seligman and Yad Tabenkin, "Is Oral History a Valid Research Instrument?," *International Journal of Oral History*, Vol. 10, No.3, Nov. 1989, pp.176-77; Michelle Palmer et al, "I Haven't Anything to Say": Reflections of Self and Community in Collecting Oral Histories," in *International Annual of Oral History*, 1990, ed. Ronald J. Greele, Westport (Ct.): Greenwood Press, 1992, pp.167-69, 175; Marie-Françoise Chaufrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, New York: Routledge, 1991, p.82;

means always a disadvantage...the *living* presence of those subjective voices from the past also constrains us in our interpretations, and allows us, indeed obliges us, to test them against the opinion of those who will always, in essential ways, know more than ourselves.⁷

Oral history allows historians to give history back to the people who were there. Certainly, the oral and written interviews changed the focus of my study. Responses to the questionnaire (see Appendix IV) about women and work brought to light the importance of the airwomen's lives outside of work. It was therefore impossible to focus simply on the airwomen's work experience and the effect of technological change on their work patterns. In effect, most women were far less interested in talking about their work than they were in discussing their social lives. I thus tried to shift my questions accordingly, adding more about what the airwomen did outside the workplace. Unfortunately, I missed the opportunity to gain the same insights from the first few women I interviewed.

In addition, the names of most of the women interviewed were acquired at an RCAF airwomen's reunion. As a result, these airwomen probably depicted their experience in the Air Force in a more positive light. I have tried to take this into account when discussing their reaction to certain circumstances. This does not make their contribution any less valuable. Indeed, perhaps because of their enthusiasm for life in the Air Force, they spoke candidly about many of their experiences in the Service.

Another problem encountered with this research was that many of the sources

⁷Thompson, *ibid*, pp. 148-149.

dealing with women in the RCAF and with the change in radar technology are restricted. Because of these limitations, the experiences of RCAF women are discussed here in general terms. For example, it was not possible to examine the experiences of visible minorities in order to see problems they faced because of prejudice or ignorance, not only from the RCAF, but from other airwomen.⁸ Although there is brief mention of some of the language problems faced by Francophone women, I would have liked to explore the additional barriers posed by their language. It is interesting to note in this respect that only one Francophone woman responded to my request for interviews (in spite of the sign up sheets being in both languages), and that she was from New Brunswick. In addition, no women of visible minority responded. It would also have been interesting to study more closely the experiences of female officers, and the problems they may have faced as a tiny minority in the Service, such as insubordination from both airwomen and airmen. The only officer who responded to my call was a woman who stayed on to her retirement in the 1970s. But, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, she had not achieved officer rank.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

There are a number of studies devoted to women's experiences at work during the Second World War. Many discuss the immediate post-war period as well. At first, it was argued that the move towards women's equality had been accelerated during

⁸It is not known if women of visible minorities made up part of the RCAF. However, women of other countries were allowed to join providing that they had landed immigrant status and were born in other Commonwealth countries.

the war, and that the feminist movement had been ongoing since the War.⁹ This argument was disputed by the end of the 1970s. Feminist historians now countered that the Second World War did not further women's rights. On the contrary, women were used as a reserve pool of labour, by the military and by various levels of government. As long as the emergency lasted, women were encouraged to work outside the home in non-traditional jobs in factories and the armed forces. The federal government encouraged magazine publishers, film makers and advertisers to portray women in this patriotic work. However, at war's end, women were asked to go back to the home and to their traditional duties as wives and mothers.¹⁰

Ruth Roach Pierson's *"They're Still Women After All"* remains the definitive work on the women during the Second World War. Pierson examined women's lives at home, in industry, and especially in the military. She concluded that women acquired no new rights or power as a result of their war effort, either within the military or in civilian industry. They were used, rather, as a reserve labour force, to be disbanded after the war. In fact, the temporary nature of their contribution was emphasized by almost all segments of society. There was great concern for the preservation of

⁹Sylva Gelber, in Cerise Morris' "Determination and Thoroughness: The Movement for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada," *Atlantis*, vol. 5, no. 2, Spring, 1980, p. 67; Barry Broadfoot, *Six War Years: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1974, p. 353; National Museum of Man, "Canadian Women and War: A Long Tradition," Oracle, Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1984, p. 7.

¹⁰Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us: Images of Women in National Film Board Films of the 1940s and 1950s," *Atlantis*, vol. 4, no. 2, Spring, 1979, p. 21; Susan M. Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising in *Maclean's* Magazine, 1939-1950," *Atlantis*, vol. 8, no.2, 1983, pp. 84-87; Ruth Roach Pierson, op. cit.

women's femininity, especially for those women in the Armed Forces.¹¹

All of the revisionist historians, such as Yvonne Mathews-Klein and Susan Bland, have tended to agree with Pierson's conclusions. Women made no real gains during the war, and they were encouraged, as part of their "natural" duty, to go back to the home or to traditional jobs after the war.

Finally, it would appear that women's role in the Armed Forces during the Second World War is still of little importance to the Armed Forces and to military historians. In a recent work published by the Department of National Defence, the *Official History of the RCAF*, there is a whole volume dedicated to the Second World War, and yet, women's role in the Air Force is not discussed at all.¹²

It is not only in works that relate to women's role in the military that women are relegated to the role of "victim". This is also true of studies on the effect of technology on women's employment. In the history of technology, the powerlessness of women with regards to technology was the major theme in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹³ This theme has also been carried through to more recent works, with a

¹¹Ruth Roach Pierson, *ibid.*

¹²Brereton Greenhous et al., *Crucible of War 1939 - 1945, Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Vol. 3*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995. To date, further volumes studying the post-World War Two era have not been published.

¹³For example, Cynthia Cockburn, *Machinery of Dominance: Women, Men and Technical Know-How*, Dover (New Hampshire): Pluto Press, 1985; Roslyn L. Feldberg and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Technology and Work Degradation: Effects of Office Automation on Women Clerical Workers", in (ed.) Joan Rothschild *Machina Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1983; Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, *Gender at Work*, London: Pluto Press, 1984; Heather Menzies, *Women and the Chip: Case Studies of the Effects of Informatics on Employment in Canada*, Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1981; M. Patricia Connelly and Martha MacDonald, "Women's Work: Domestic and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community," in *Studies in Political Economy*, vol.10, Winter, 1983; Hacker, Sally L., "Sex Stratification, Technology and Organizational

certain amount of good reason. Barbara Drygulski Wright found that gender socialization worked throughout women's education. Women are directed away from mathematics, sciences, and mechanics as subjects that are not fitting for their gender. They are understood to be intellectually unsuited for science and math, and hence, excluded from the abstract development of technology, and physically unsuited to work materially on a technology.¹⁴ Women thus have very little input on how technology is designed; this has been controlled by men. The dominance of men in the development of technology means that women do not have their concerns addressed by technology, and it makes it hard for them to use the technology in order to attain their own goals. Technology is built by men, for men's needs.

One can guess that technological change and the RCAF's attitude to women's paid labour may have had an effect on the airwomen's employment between 1961 and 1963. Certainly, these two had an effect on the RCAF's decisions to stop recruiting women. In addition, at least two papers written for the Department of National Defence have stated that these were the reasons that women were no longer

Change: A Longitudinal Case Study of AT&T", in *Social Problems*, vol. 26, no. 5, 1979; Lowe, Graham S., "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office," in *Labour / Le Travailleur*, Vol. 10 (Autumn), 1982.

¹⁴Wright, Barbara Drygulski et al., *Women, Work and Technology: Transformations*, Ann Arbor (Mich.): University of Michigan Press, 1987. Other examples with variations of this argument include: Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *Theorizing Women's Work*, Toronto: Garamound Press, 1990; Ava Baron, "Contested Terrain Revisited: Technology and Gender Definition of Work in the Printing Industry, 1850-1920," in *Women, Work and Technology: Transformations*, Ann Arbor (Mich.): University of Michigan Press, 1987; Betty Collis, "Psychological Implications of the Sex Differences Towards Computers: Results of a Survey," in *International Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1985; Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992; Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology*, University Park (Penn.): Pennsylvania University Press, 1991; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, op. cit.

recruited in the early 1960s.¹⁵ In fact, the impact was not that great. As we shall see, women's numbers in the Air Force were never as high as expected by the RCAF. To study the effect of technological change and the RCAF's use of women as a reserve force of labour without looking at the reasons why women's numbers in the Air Force remained low, is to study the subject in a vacuum. A significant number of historians, through the use of oral history, are beginning to measure the real impact of women's life cycle and of women's unpaid work on employment patterns. As Joan Sangster points out, the examination of women's paid work must also include their response to pressures outside paid work, whether economic, social or domestic.¹⁶ For her part, Joy Parr argues that the challenge of women's history is to go beyond dualisms such as masculine v. feminine, wage v. non-waged, public v. private. In effect, no one woman or man lives solely in one part of each of those dualisms: everyone dwells in both.¹⁷

When examining the 1950s, many women's historians have focussed on the

¹⁵Lt-Col. Lois J. Davis, "Employment of Women in Canada's Armed Forces Past and Present," D.His. 86-330, file 236, 1966; "Women in the Canadian Forces: Past, Present and Future," D.His. 77-411, 1971, p.4.

¹⁶Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: the Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995. For other works that discuss women's life cycle, and its effect on women's paid work, see: Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: women, men, and change in two industrial towns, 1880-1950*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990; Joy Parr, *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995; Isabel Dyck, "Integrating the Home and Wage Workplace: Women's Daily Lives in a Canadian Suburb," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: essays on women*, eds. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992; Melody Hessing, "Talking on the Job: Office Conversations and Women's Dual Labour", in *British Columbia Reconsidered*, op. cit.; Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *Theorizing Women's Work*, Toronto: Garamound Press, 1990.

¹⁷Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect*, *ibid.*, p. 8.

increasing numbers of married women who, for the first time, were entering the paid workforce. Studying women in the armed forces means studying the experience of single women almost exclusively. In the 1950s, single women were becoming more independent. They were not necessarily living at home with their parents or in a surrogate home.¹⁸ In this thesis, I have examined airwomen's lives on and off the job, in order to discover whether they lived according to society's expectations, to determine how their social lives affected their working lives, and, as importantly, to try to discover the goals they had set out for themselves.

Recent women's history has tended to distance itself from the "woman as a victim" approach. While it is true that their gender can mean fewer jobs and lack of advancement,¹⁹ women are still capable of making certain choices. They have, as Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong stated, "struggled, both individually and collectively, to shape their own lives."²⁰ In the 1950s and early 1960s, women were joining the paid workforce in large numbers, as will be seen, this ended up affecting the employment of the women in the military. The main reason given by the federal government for continuing to employ women in the RCAF was because the Armed Forces now had to reflect the reality in the rest of Canada: women were becoming more integral to employment patterns.

¹⁸Prentice et al., op. cit, p. 309.

¹⁹Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "Sex and the Professions in Canada", in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1992.

²⁰Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and their Segregated Work*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994, p. 224.

OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides a general overview of the changes taking place in Canadian society, in gender constructs, and in the military. It then examines the circumstances which led to women being recruited into the Air Force.

The second chapter examines the problems with recruitment and training. The RCAF set ceilings on the number of women to be recruited. But the number of female recruits never reached expectations. In addition, the training of women left them very little choice as to which job they would fill in the Service.

The third chapter describes the airwomen's social lives and experiences outside of the workplace. It delineates the RCAF's imposed contradictory expectations with regards to their conduct. The Service expected the women to act in a traditional feminine way, while asking them to live and work in a masculine environment. As a result, women had a much larger turnover rate than did the men, and they also left the Air Force in high numbers.

The last chapter deals with the airwomen at work. The change in the radar technology in the early 1960s meant that the Air Force needed far fewer personnel. Because the rate of attrition among women was so high, the RCAF simply stopped recruiting them. As a result, the numbers of women in the Service dropped dramatically within two years. Eventually, the RCAF requested permission to close their doors to women as it had at the end of the Second World War. But, this was denied by the federal government, which argued that there was room for women in

the military as in the civilian workforce.

Chapter One

The Good Old Days: Canada's Expansion in the 1950s

INTRODUCTION

The 1950s and early 1960s tend to be viewed as a conservative time in Canada. After the Second World war, Canadian society seemed to want to settle down. Canadians were getting married, having children, buying homes, going to church, all in record numbers. In the meantime, the perceived threat of Communism made it difficult for new or different ideas to be accepted.¹

Yet this was a period of great growth and change in the country, especially in the economic, social and military sectors. For the first time in peacetime, these areas were directly targeted by federal policy. The three main sectors of the economy (resource, manufacturing and service sectors) were stimulated to avoid an economic depression similar to the one which had followed World War I. Although women were initially encouraged to resume their traditional roles as wives and mothers in the private sphere, the 1950s saw an expansion of their presence in the paid labour force. Canadian society gradually accepted this change, and the federal government

¹See: J.L. Findlay and D.N. Sprague, *The Structure of Canadian History*, Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1989; Robert Bothwell et al., *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981; J.M. Bumstead, "Home Sweet Suburb: The Great Post-War Migration," in *Coming of Age: Readings in Canadian History Since World War II*, Donald Avery and Roger Hall (eds.), Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, Canada, 1996; John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, Burlington (On.): Welch Publishing Co. Inc., 1988; Pat and Hugh Armstrong, "Women, Family and Economy," in *Reconstructing the Canadian Family: Feminist Perspectives*, Nancy Mandell and Ann Duffy (eds.), Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworths, 1988.

enacted legislation recognizing women's right to equal pay in the workplace, albeit with limitations. The role of the military was also seen as one which would shrink at war's end. But it also expanded as the State responded to the realities of the Cold War. All these changes, which occurred in three areas - economic, social, and military - led to women being recruited into the RCAF on a permanent basis.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

During the war, the Canadian economy grew and expanded in many ways, and the federal government wished to maintain this trend during peacetime by actively encouraging economic growth. The primary, or resource, sector was more fully developed with new initiatives, such as the mining of oil in Alberta, and iron ore in Newfoundland. In the secondary, or manufacturing, sector, housing and the automobile industry were booming. The manufacturing of rubber, plastics and electronics had taken hold during the war, and new uses were found for them in peacetime.² In addition, there was great growth in the service, or tertiary, sector.³

Sustaining the flourishing economy - and contributing to it - was the spiralling population growth. The baby boom was underway and Canada sustained the highest birthrate of any industrial country throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s.⁴

² Findlay and Sprague, *ibid.*, p.376.

³ Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, Toronto: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Canada, 1996.

⁴ Findlay and D.N. Sprague, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

Thanks to Canada's open door policy, immigration reached new levels.⁵ Consumerism, which was helping all sectors of the economy, was also pushing growth forward.

To promote this expansion, the Canadian government attempted to regulate the labour market and keep unemployment down. In sum, while the Canadian state was never as actively involved in the economy and labour market as the Swedish government, for example, it nevertheless saw itself playing an important role.⁶

THE REGULATION OF WOMEN'S WORK

Such expansion was not foreseen at the end of the war. Fearing a recession similar to the one that followed the First World War, the Canadian government was determined to provide jobs to returning soldiers after demobilization. As a result, not only were the doors of the military closed to women, but so were most jobs in the public service.⁷ The government encouraged married women to return to the home, and single women to go back to their traditional jobs as domestics, teachers, stenographers, nurses, dressmakers, and social workers.⁸ This was in keeping with the outlook that the Canadian government, supported by many segments of society, held with regard to women's role after the Second World War. Although women had

⁵Jean Bruce, *After the War*: Don Mills: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1982.

⁶Harvey J. Krahn and Graham S. Lowe, *Work, Industry and Canadian Society*, Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1993, p. 53.

⁷M. Patricia Connelly, and Martha MacDonald, "Women's Work: Domestic and Wage Labour in a Nova Scotia Community," in *Studies in Political Economy*, vol.10, Winter, 1983, p. 49.

⁸Alison, Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, op. cit..

played a major role in the war effort, both in the military and in society at large, their participation was perceived as a temporary measure brought about by the emergency.

Gender socialization was far more stringent in the 1950s and early 1960s than it is now. Men were brought up to work outside the home (the public sphere), while women were raised to work in the home (the private sphere). As Pat and Hugh Armstrong state: "The exigencies of marriage, pregnancy and child care had a major impact on the continuity of work for a large majority of women, but almost no impact on men."⁹

Leading "experts" in the medical and academic fields also encouraged women to step back from the gains they had made in the workplace during the war. The influential sociologist Talcott Parsons believed that the sexual division of labour was necessary in the highly mobile competitive society in North America, so that men and women could complement each other, not compete against each other.¹⁰ Medical experts agreed with this dominant paradigm. Freudian views were more predominant in the 1950s, and doctors emphasized the importance of women's reproductive and maternal roles, and stressed that women who did not accept these roles were actually rejecting their sex.

⁹Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "The Conflicting Demands of "Work" and "Home"," in *Family Matters*, ed. Karen L. Anderson, Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1988, p.132.

¹⁰Talcott Parsons, "The Social Structure of the Family" from *The Family: Its Function and Destiny*, ed. R.N. Anshen, New York: Haynes, pp.241-274. In Hamilton, "Women, Wives and Mothers," in *Reconstructing the Canadian Family: Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Nancy Mandell, Ann Duffy, Toronto: Butterworths Canada, Ltd., 1988 p.45.

Women were perceived to have a different "nature". It was believed that women would, by reason of their maternal instincts, raise the standard of morality in whatever milieu they found themselves.¹¹ However, women led by example; they were not meant to be the leaders in society. Women were meant to be helpmates to men. In addition, there was a perception that women were more nurturing, patient, and dexterous than men, and that this would affect the type of work for which they would be considered better suited, in order to fit within women's perceived abilities.¹²

Advertisements, too, continued to portray women as the "second sex." Women were considered to be the main consumers in society, as reflected by advertisements of which over 70 percent were directed at women by 1950.¹³ Those aimed at single women encouraged them to catch a man, and how to do so: with the help of the company's products. Whereas "Rosie the Riveter" had been a model that women could follow during the war years, unmarried women were now expected to be "sweater girls". Glamour was a woman's most prized attribute.¹⁴ The fashions of the decade emphasized rounded shoulders, full busts, and narrow waists. Women were expected to have a high standard of hygiene as well, being clean and well-kept in all circumstances. Films also demonstrated to women how to get married, and they also

¹¹Deborah Findlay, "Professional Interests in Medicine's Construction of Women's Reproductive Health," a paper presented to the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, Winnipeg, 1986, 29, 10, 21. In Alison Prentice et al., op. cit., p.304-7.

¹²Talcott Parsons, op. cit., p.45..

¹³Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, op. cit., p. 308.

¹⁴M.Susan Bland, "Henrietta the Homemaker and Rosie the Riveter: Images of Women in Advertising in *Maclean's Magazine*, 1939-1950," *Atlantis*, Vol.8, No.2, Spring, 1983, p.10.

portrayed them mainly as consumers.¹⁵ In sum, this was the image that pervaded the psyche of the majority of Canadians during this period.

Conversely, men had a very different image to upkeep. Men's "nature" allowed them to be more impatient, to be logical, and to lead. Male bachelors were considered to be carefree and untroubled. Men were not portrayed as wanting to get married, they had to be "caught." Once married, men became much more serious as they now had the responsibility of being the breadwinners of the household.¹⁶ Although his home and family were very important, most of his efforts were to be directed on his paid work. The husband's regular work around the house was minimal, and was confined mainly to outdoor maintenance. Even when men were portrayed doing work that was considered a woman's domain, in order to make it acceptable, the image of the male was construed to give a "manly" appearance to the job. For example, a man at a barbeque was not simply cooking dinner, he was cooking outdoors on an open fire, harking back to a more primitive time.¹⁷ It was not only at work, but at home that the spheres for men and women were very separate.

Women working outside the home thus had to deal with the restrictions which

¹⁵Yvonne Mathews-Klein, "How They Saw Us: Images of Women in National Film Board Films of the 1940s and 1950s," *Atlantis*, Vol.4, No.2, Spring, 1979, p.26.

¹⁶Robert A. Stebbins, "Men, Husbands and Fathers: Beyond Patriarchal Relations", in *Reconstructing the Canadian Family*, eds. Nancy Mandell and Ann Duffy, Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworths, 1988, p. 28.

¹⁷Christopher Dummit, "The Family Barbecue: Leisure, Technology, and Masculinity in Canada, 1945-1960", Paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, 31.05.1998.

gender constructs imposed on their participation in the paid labour force. These restrictions afflicted single as well as married women. Because it was expected they would soon be getting married and having children, most single women were considered temporary paid workers. The pervasiveness of these gender constructs also dictated certain jobs, such as teaching, nursing, and clerical work, were better suited to "women's nature". It also led to women's paid work being regarded as less important than men's paid work.¹⁸

The active "return home" campaign led by the Canadian government after the war resulted in a decline in women's participation in the paid work force between 1945 and 1947, when 9% of women dropped out of the labour force.¹⁹ However, this was the only decline in women's participation in the post-Second World War period. After 1947, women began to rejoin the workforce in larger numbers. The expansion of the economy largely accounted for this trend: the jobs were available and unemployment was practically non-existent. Also, Canadians had turned into a society of consumers. In order to afford all the new goods on the market, families needed larger incomes, a need which sent women into the paid labour force. For the first time in peacetime, the percentage of married women working outside the home thus increased significantly.²⁰ It grew from less than 4% in 1941 to 11% in 1951 and

¹⁸Graham S. Lowe, "Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office," in *Labour / Le Travailleur*, Vol. 10 (Autumn), 1982, p.162.

¹⁹Prentice et al., op. cit., p.350.

²⁰Prentice et al., ibid., p.351.

to 22% in 1961.²¹ The proportion grew in spite of the fact that in 1957 and 1958, the economy experienced a slowdown, and that the unemployment rate rose from 4% in 1956 to 7% in 1957.²² Married women's paid work, indeed, now served to supplement their husband's lost income, in cases of unemployment.²³

As women entered the labour force in greater numbers and as the need for their participation was better understood, the Canadian government began to take steps towards granting them more equality. Although these steps were small and timid, they were an indication of its willingness to intervene to improve women's conditions in the paid labour force. This was a significant change in direction as far as women's right to paid work is concerned. The public service was re-opened to women in 1955, and in 1956 the government enacted the Female Employees Equal Pay Act.²⁴ The act was applicable to employers and employees engaged in works, undertakings and businesses under federal jurisdiction and to federal Crown employees.²⁵ Therefore, the act did not apply to all Federal agencies nor to the staff of the House of Commons and Senate. However, this was the first federal legislation

²¹Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1977, p.54 - The 1941 number is evidently taken before women joined the labour force in large numbers during the war, and the 1961 number had risen considerably despite the drop between 1945 and 1947.

²²Findlay and Sprague, *op. cit.*, p.388.

²³Prentice et al.*ibid.*, p.351.

²⁴Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, *op. cit.*, p.56 - As the Royal Commission stated, the federal government was following in the footsteps of Ontario's government, which had enacted the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act in 1951, as well as other provinces with similar acts.

²⁵Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, *ibid.*, p.56.

which recognized that men and women might hold the same job in the workplace. It also established that men and women should be equally rewarded for doing similar work. In addition, the legislation demonstrated that the earlier presumption that women and men were different and, therefore, always unequal was being replaced by the notion that they might, in some cases, be the same and therefore equal.²⁶ There were other signs that the changes in women's participation in the labour force was gaining acceptance. In 1954, the Dominion Chief Statistician thus declared that, "...women's place is no longer in the home, and the Canadian home is no longer what it used to be."²⁷

Hence, the rapid expansion of the economy of the 1950s and the growth of consumerism brought about a change in gender constructs. There was a greater acceptance of women within the workforce, although within limited roles, which did help to bring up the level of women's pay in some areas of the workplace.²⁸ As important, the principle that women had a right to equal pay for equal work was also gaining strength.

EXPANSION OF THE MILITARY IN THE POST-WAR ERA

This changing context led to women being recruited in the military for the first time in peacetime. In 1945, the expansion of the military was not expected. Social

²⁶Sandra Burt, "Legislators, Women and Public Policy," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, eds. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993, p.154.

²⁷Prentice et al., *ibid.*, p.351.

²⁸Burt, *op. cit.*, p.138.

security and domestic improvement were the priorities, not defence. By 1948, Canada was practically disarmed, the defence budget was at an all-time post-war low, and every armed service was below authorized strength. This state of affairs changed quickly. Within one year, Canada had signed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) pact, and had made plans with the United States to defend the North American continent as well.²⁹ This signified a change in the Western world's concept of defence. Up to the early 1960s, the Canadian military, and the Royal Canadian Air Force (the RCAF) more specifically, made a number of commitments that meant that it would have to greatly extend its force for the first time in a period that was nominally, at any rate, considered peacetime. By the end of 1950, the RCAF had committed itself to a "police action" in Korea and to the defence of North America against invasion by Communist countries, the Soviet Union in particular. In addition, the Air Force was committed to helping the International Civil Aviation Organization and its seaward approaches.³⁰

The most immediate problem had to do with the defence of North America. There had been military personnel stationed at bases all over Western Europe since the war's end, but the air defence of North America was almost nul in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The United States and Canada began to closely co-operate to defend the continent because of the vulnerability of the Arctic. A bomber attack

²⁹Bothwell et al., *op. cit.*, p.135.

³⁰"RCAF in 1960-1961," Report to the Ministry of Defence, D.His. 75-200, 1961, p. 8.

across the North Pole was considered a real possibility.³¹

As a result, three lines of radar stations were built across Canada and the northeastern United States: the Distant Early Warning (DEW), the Mid-Canada and the Pinetree lines. These air defence warning systems were run by the RCAF in connection with the United States Air Force. The Pinetree Line was built and maintained by the U.S. and Canada, and was first operational around 1950. The Mid-Canada line was built and maintained by Canada, and was running by 1954. The DEW line was built and maintained by the United States, and was operational by 1955.³² The control and warning lines were set up to monitor any planes (and later missiles) flying over Canada. These stations needed personnel to operate them. Every aircraft flying over Canada was monitored, and its course plotted by the fighter control operators. The people in this new trade³³ would become the first line of human defence in the case of attack by the Soviet Union.

THE DECISION TO RECRUIT WOMEN

Because of this commitment, the RCAF needed a great deal more personnel than ever before in peacetime. However, with almost full employment in civilian life,

³¹J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *For Better or For Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s*, Toronto: Copp-Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991, p.184.

³²"North American Radar Defence Systems in Canada," NA RG24, vol. 17909, file 900-950-3, Public Relations - Telecommunications - Radar Equipment, c. 1955.

³³The trade of fighter control operator was an amalgamation of two trades, radar operator and clerk operations (fighter), a change that occurred in 1951 - E.A. Peters, S/L for Group Commander, "Amalgamation of Radar Operator and Clerk Operations Trades", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 555, file 421-F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter COps, Memo to Chief of the Air Staff, AF HQs, Ottawa, 15.05.1951.

most men who had not joined up did not feel inclined to do so. The nationalistic fervour which propelled so many to join during World War II was no longer an impetus. The RCAF had to expand its pool of personnel to attract people from civilian life into the military. Since the closing of the armed forces to women at the end of the war, there had been a number of discussions as to whether women should be recruited back into the force.³⁴ With the plans for the radar lines meaning a great expansion of the Air Force, the RCAF decided that it had become imperative that women be recruited once more, and this time into the regular force, not simply as part of an auxiliary force.

In 1950, Brooke Claxton, Minister of Defence, announced that women were to be recruited into the RCAF. This was an about face from one of the branches of the military that had closed its doors to women at the end of the Second World War. It was indicative of the changes that were beginning to occur among Canadians regarding women's social role. Although many elements in society still felt strongly that women's first and only place was in the home, women themselves were leaving the private sphere to be in the workforce. But pragmatic reasons dictated above all the Air Force's course of action. The expansion of the Service meant that there was a need for more personnel. The Service then turned to women to fill the growing number of vacancies. For the first time, women were welcomed into the permanent regular force, something that was evidently considered impossible only five years

³⁴As mentioned in the historiography, unlike Canada, the armed forces of Great Britain and the United States had retained women personnel at war's end.

before. However, as will be shown, this did not alter basic attitudes concerning the “nature” and women’s role in society at large. As a result, the RCAF could remain a male bastion, where women’s contribution could be deemed secondary.

Chapter Two

"Vive la difference?": Recruitment and Training

INTRODUCTION

Women were to be recruited to the RCAF because of the expansion of a newly created trade in particular, that of fighter control operators. Because of the new radar lines, radar was "one of the prime reasons" for women's recruitment in the RCAF.¹ In 1951, the trades of Radar Operator and Clerk Operations (Fighter) had been amalgamated into the trade of Fighter Control Operator.² The fighter control operators had basically the same function as that of air traffic controllers for the RCAF. As well as directing planes on their courses, the "Fighter COps" also monitored the Arctic and Canadian skies for all aircraft, watching for any invasion force through the Arctic Circle into Canada. The Fighter Control Operators used the radar as "the eyes of a modern air force...to detect, identify and control aircraft in the skies."³

But there were also other motives behind the decision to enlist women. In

¹Research Branch, Library of Parliament, "History of the RCAF (Women's Division) 1941-1971," D.His. 90-447, file 104, 1971, p. 6.

²E.A. Peters S/L, for Group Commander, "Amalgamation of Radar Operator and Clerk Operations Trades", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 555, file 421-F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter COps, Memo to Chief of the Air Staff, AF HQs, Ottawa, 15.05.1951. The RCAF referred to this trade by the acronym Fighter COps. Because this term was also used by the women interviewed, it will be used in this paper as well.

³"Today's Airwoman...in the RCAF," op.cit., p. 4.

1949, Air Marshall W.A. Curtis, Chief of the Air Staff, wrote to the Minister of Defence, Brooke Claxton, to state the reasons women should be enlisted to the RCAF:

Apart from their ability to carry out technical duties satisfactorily, the enlistment of women in the Royal Canadian Air Force (Regular) undoubtedly will provide an incentive which will tend to raise the standard of dress, deportment, morale and efficiency throughout the service....Furthermore, employment of women in the Royal Canadian Air Force would simplify some of the manning problems inherent in current expansion plans.⁴

Curtis thus perceived women as a "civilizing" force which could benefit the whole service. On the other hand, the RCAF could have had a problem, as radar communications was traditionally looked upon as men's work. However, the RCAF remained true to the gender constructs of the day, by arguing that women could be "particularly useful in radar and communication trades requiring great concentration and patience."⁵

Indications of the RCAF's perspective regarding women can be found even before the airwomen were actually recruited. Ceilings were placed on the number of women to be recruited, and their terms of service were more restrictive than those for men. Once recruitment began, the campaigns were designed to attract only a certain segment of the Canadian female population, and the recruiting both reflected and re-enforced prevailing gender stereotypes. Moreover, trades open to women were few and tended to be low in profile. Women were not in the air: they were in the offices and the hangars, the kitchens and the laundries.

⁴Air Marshall W.A. Curtis, Chief of the Air Staff, Letter to the Honourable Brooke Claxton, Minister of Defence, N.A. RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 1623, file 304-98, pts. 1-3, 14.10.1949.

⁵Ministry of Defence, "Women in the RCAF," D.His. 71-383, 09.02.1953, p. 1.

One result of these restrictive policies was that women did not join in the numbers expected. But they also ensured that the impact of women's recruitment on the RCAF would be minimal, inside and outside the Service, and that the RCAF would remain a male stronghold, both in image and in reality.

PRE-RECRUITMENT POLICIES

Throughout the 1950s, the RCAF deemed it necessary to limit how many women joined the service. In the early part of the period, this was understandable. The Air Force had to house and clothe the women, and it would take some time to build these resources. Almost immediately, the stockpiling of women's uniforms began (this was approved by Cabinet even before formal approval for recruiting), and the RCAF began looking at various ways to house the women once recruited.⁶ In addition, it was decided that female officers who had served during the war, and those who had remained in the Regular and Reserves forces, would be recruited or re-mustered to help train the new recruits. Furthermore, there was to be no publicity before Cabinet approval, and very little immediately afterwards to give the Service time to provide housing and clothing accommodation for the women.⁷ The RCAF also thought it necessary to institute special measures to deal with the social and

⁶F.H. Darragh S/L Secretary, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, "Employment Airwomen" Memo to AMP, AMTS, at CAS, 12.10.1950.

⁷F. Wait A/C for CAS, "Employment of WDs", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, "Employment Airwomen", Memo to Air Officer Commanding, NW Air Command, RCAF Edm, 13.04.1951; also, "Extract from Minutes of 53rd meeting of Defence Council 29 March 51," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, "Employment Airwomen", 29.03.1951.

physiological "problems" resulting from the communal employment of women.⁸

Ideally, women were only to make up 7% of the total Air Force. This was consistent with the proportion of women to men which existed during World War II.⁹ Ruth Roach Pierson does not mention that any such ceilings were enforced during the war, when women's employment in the Forces urgently needed and considered a temporary measure. However, it seems that as part of the permanent post-war Service, women's numbers were not to be boosted.

These ceilings were in place from 1951 to 1961. But if the RCAF limited women's numbers because it expected to turn women away, it was mistaken. In 1953, the goal was set at 5 000. This number was never reached: by 1953, the number of women in the RCAF was only 3 133. The RCAF then radically reduced their expectations to 2 500 in 1955, an action which resulted in the only time that the limits were overshot. Yet the actual numbers of enlisted women was lower, standing at 2 903 in 1956.¹⁰ Overall, there were fewer women in the Service than first intended (the proportion of women to men was 6%). However, the RCAF satisfied itself with the fact that this percentage was in line with that of women in the air forces

⁸R.S. Turnbull G/C DRM 6882, NA, RG24 Acc. 83.84/049, Box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, "Employment Airwoman", Memo to DAF from "Manning - WD Female Staff at RU", 21.04.1951. Turnbull did not give details as to the type of social and physiological problems that stemmed from having women on the air stations.

⁹Ministry of Defence, "Women in the RCAF," D. His. 71-383, 09.02.1953, p.1.

¹⁰The numbers of women were lower because of the high attrition rate of women in the Service, as will be more fully discussed in Chapter Four.

of Western European countries.¹¹

RECRUITMENT TERMS AND CONDITIONS

In April 1951, Brooke Claxton announced to the House of Commons that women would be recruited in the RCAF. Here again, conditions were imposed to limit the visibility of women in the Service. Firstly, there would be no women clerks in uniform at headquarters. Secondly, women were to be employed in trades that fell into the sphere of "women's work". Finally, there were to be neither special establishments¹² for women, nor any separate units.¹³ During the Second World War, women had served in an Auxiliary Force. Being part of the regular Air Force in the 1950s could appear as a positive sign that women were now recruited on the same terms as men. However, the small number of women to be admitted meant that they would not be very visible among the heavy majority of airmen on any air station. In sum, women in the RCAF would have a much smaller profile than those recruited during World War II.

In his announcement to the House, Claxton certainly did not suggest that women's recruitment into the Air Force signified any great change in either the government's or the military's way of thinking of women's roles. In spite of the fact that there was a "whole new group of occupations related to radar and

¹¹Ministry of Defence, "RCAF - The First Twenty Years," D.His. 77-411, 1964, p.4.

¹²For example, a separate auxiliary force, as had been the case in the Second World War.

¹³Lt-Col. Lois J. Davis, "Employment of Women in Canada's Armed Forces Past and Present," D.His. 86-330, file 236, 1966.

communications...a large part [of which could] be done by women," these jobs corresponded to women's perceived "natural" abilities, just as were the trades of stenographers and typists, for which women were "obviously suited."¹⁴

Following government approval, the RCAF started to recruit women in the summer of 1951. The recruiting pamphlets and press releases declared that women would receive the same pay as single airmen, with the same benefits, and share the same responsibilities, making them equal to the servicemen.¹⁵ This was a change from Second World War policy, where the pay of women was first set at 75% of the men's, and then raised to 80%.¹⁶

Equal pay, benefits and responsibilities within a trade do not necessarily mean that women were treated equally to the men. The terms of service for the women were far more restrictive. Like the men, the women had to be Canadian citizens residing in Canada or other British subjects residing in Canada with landed immigrant status, and like the airmen¹⁷, they had to be medically fit. But there were different requirements for airwomen in other areas. Female recruits had to be at least eighteen (as opposed to seventeen for men), and the maximum recruiting age

¹⁴The Honourable Brooke Claxton, Statement on the "Participation of Women in the Armed Services, House of Commons," D.His. 71-383, 24.04.51.

¹⁵Today's Airwoman...in the RCAF," Recruiting Pamphlet, Ottawa: Queen's Printer, Nov. 1956, p.4; and, "Women in the RCAF," Press Release, D.His. 71-783, 09.02.1951.

¹⁶Pierson, Ruth Roach, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1986.

¹⁷In this thesis, the terms "airwomen" and "airmen" denote enlisted personnel. When speaking about both officers and enlisted personnel, "women" and "men" will be used.

was thirty (as opposed to forty for men.) A grade ten education was required¹⁸ (men only needed grade eight), and women were recruited for three years only, as opposed to their male counterparts, who were recruited for five years. Both airmen and airwomen had to be single, but there were a variety of ways to circumvent this rule for the males. If they were skilled or had trained for a needed trade and were over twenty-one years of age, men could be married on recruitment. They could also be married and enrolled if they were an officer, if they had served in the War, or had served since September, 1947.¹⁹ Another difference was that men could get married while in the Service, to either an airwoman or a civilian, and remain in the Air Force. An airwoman²⁰ could stay in the Service if married to an airman (not to an officer), and if neither was transferred, if she did not become pregnant²¹, or if her husband was not posted to another air station.²² In sum, while the ceilings on recruiting limited the numbers of women joining, the authorized length of service ensured a

¹⁸Female officers had different educational requirements from the airwomen. Like male officers, they needed a university education, or had to possess the academic qualification and/or experience required for each branch of the Service. Other than education, the other requirements for officers were the same as for airwomen.

¹⁹"Information Book 1952 Enrolment Policy - Airmen and Airwomen", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Enrolment - Female Members of the RCAF, 1952.

²⁰For a variety of reasons, female officers could not be married during the duration of the period, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

²¹This not only holds true in the beginning of the period, but later as well. Even if a woman was married, she was discharged when the Service found out she was pregnant.

²²Actually, until 1953, women could not marry while in the service at all. Only after the first two years were airwomen allowed to marry, and only to enlisted men. "Indoctrination, 'Esprit de Corps' and Marriage Counselling", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470-28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, February, 1954.

high turnover, as did the rules regarding marriage and pregnancy. Indeed, as we shall see, these restrictions in women's employment would later be used to shrink their number in the Force.

It was not only age and length of service that made the terms of service more restrictive for women. The RCAF also stipulated that the female recruits had to be "of good moral character." This term was given little definition. It seemed that it was left to the discretion of the recruiting officer to assess the airwomen. The RCAF's preoccupation with a woman's morality began when she walked through the recruiting office door.²³ The RCAF tried to screen applicants, looking for women with the "highest ideals of service and conduct."²⁴ Character references from ministers, school teachers and employers were required.²⁵ At one point, the Service even considered screening applicants with a reference form, which would have to be filled out and signed before a potential recruit was accepted (see Appendix I). This form included questions concerning whether a woman respected her elders and parents, whether her associates were younger or older, whether she went to church, and

²³The Service's interest in a woman's morality continued throughout her career in the RCAF. This will be discussed again later in this chapter, in "Training", and in depth in Chapter Three.

²⁴"Indoctrination, 'Esprit de Corps' and Marriage Counselling", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470-28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, February, 1954.

²⁵"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

again, whether she had "high morals and unquestionable character."²⁶ The attitude was that "girls of the right sort" would not object to such a requirement, and that it would be reassuring to their families that the women with whom their daughters were associating were of the same moral calibre. Unfortunately, the files do not show whether this reference questionnaire was ever used.²⁷

But, it was not only the role of enlisted women that the RCAF wanted to limit. As mentioned above, the RCAF did not at first intend to resort to a large number of female officers. As well, the original intention was to keep those few in areas that fell well within the context of women's work. The Service also believed that women should not supervise men, even in their work, because of the possible repercussions on the airmen's morale. Finally, women were not originally supposed to be in the officer class of such trades as fighter control operators; they were to be kept in the more traditional lines of the female sphere. The few female officers in the Air Force were therefore relegated to administration and recruitment functions. But, as time went on, female officers were present as supervisors in some of the trades where men and women worked together.²⁸ We do not know how the airmen reacted to this situation. Outside of the work environment, such as in the barracks, women were not

²⁶MacPhee (Doctor) F/L MORU Edm, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.100.98, pt. 1, Enrollment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to RU Edmonton, 09.03.1953.

²⁷"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

²⁸S.I. Evans S/L AMP/SO/WP 7440, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement, Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to Acting D/AMP, 15.04.1954.

supervising men at all. This again ensured that the Air Force projected a "masculine" image.

The Air Force actually made few provisions for female officers, taking for granted that women would attain officer rank as their service lengthened. This attitude changed, as the need for more female officers became evident sooner than expected originally. Male officers began to complain about supervising female personnel, especially outside of the work environment. As a result, the decision was made to assign female officers to every unit where women were employed;²⁹ recruiting units were then instructed to recruit female officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from the Second World War who had "outstanding qualifications in the rank which they held."³⁰

The RCAF had originally made it tougher for women to become NCOs, as compared to men. The airwomen's terms of service contributed to this, especially the shorter length of engagement. In general, women were not promoted with the same frequency of men. Between 1951 and 1963, only two of the women I interviewed were promoted beyond Leading Air Woman (LAW) to Corporal. Until it was decided that airwomen needed more female supervision, there were no female NCO courses.

²⁹E.A. McNab G/C Acting/D/AMP CANAIRHED, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.98, vol. 3, Employment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to CANAIRDEF, 10.11.1952. The same directive stated that there should never be less than ten airwomen in any unit that consisted of both men and women.

³⁰P.A. Gilchrist G/C DPM 0882, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Enrolment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to CMO, 04.01.1952. As the period wore on, the number of female officers increased as more women were commissioned from the ranks. By 1960, there were over 300 female officers at thirty-nine air stations in Canada, England, France, and Germany.

Once these were instituted, the percentage of female NCOs to male NCOs increased.³¹ This original practice of promoting women out of the ranks shows that the Air Force did not understand how restrictive its terms of service were. It also demonstrates that the RCAF was more concerned with the needs of the airmen: they were worried about men being supervised by women, while it did not occur to them that the airwomen may have needed leaders that were not male.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

The types of decisions that were made to restrict the numbers of women recruits and to curtail their role in the Service continued through the women's careers as well. In addition, the motives the RCAF had in recruiting women did not necessarily conform to those which incited the women to join the Air Force.

Local newspaper and magazine advertisements were the main recruiting methods used by the RCAF used to attract women. The Service also sent pamphlets and posters to various towns and cities. Pictures of airwomen in front of an airplane, or of women at work in front of radar scopes, or discussing something with airmen were the most common images displayed in the literature. However, the recruiting drive also stressed how life in the Service would do nothing to jeopardize women's "femininity". A woman could be feminine even while serving in the RCAF uniform. In fact, the campaign seemed to be concerned more about this matter than with the tasks they would be performing in the RCAF.

³¹S.I. Evans S/L AMP/SO/WP 7440, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement, Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to Acting D/AMP, 15.04.1954.

As had been the case in World War II, the RCAF found that the best way to enhance an airwoman's femininity was through the uniform. The earlier press releases of the period emphasized how the new attire was much improved in style as compared to the last war, stressing the "smart new uniforms" that the women would be wearing.³² The pamphlets, for their part, usually began with a picture of a woman in front of a plane, with a caption reading something along the lines of "[n]eat and trim in her uniform, the airwoman plays an important role in the RCAF today." Although there were pictures that showed some of the trades in which the women worked (especially the trade of fighter control operator), this did not appear as important as how the women looked and behaved. The women in the Service did not change the Air Force, it was argued, rather, that they "added a refreshing touch to a traditional masculine Service."³³

Throughout the years, the Air Force played up women's feminine image. One press release which described operational field conditions in which women were involved in exercises, explained:

Far from minding the "this is not like home" atmosphere of living eighteen to a tent, washing in cold water, and cooking their own meals over an open fire, the girls enjoyed the experience immensely. Wearing bush clothes and rubber boots, the airwomen had a tough time in the glamour department. But try they did. One of the most incongruous sights in the Exercise was an airwoman, complete with gas mask,

³²Press Release # 7882, D.His. 71-383, 31.05.1951; Press Release #7901, D.His. 71-383, 29.06.1951; Press Release #7929, D.His 71-383, 14.08.1951.

³³"Today's Airwoman...in the RCAF," Recruiting Pamphlet, Ottawa: Queen's Printer, Nov. 1956, p. 4.

"hitting the dirt" into a cold slit trench with her hair done up in curls."³⁴

Not everyone in the Service was happy with this image, as it seemed to get in the way of work. At a conference of Administrative Officers in 1952, one participant displayed frustration when possible changes in women's uniform accessories came under discussion, observing that "the suggestions were so numerous as to bear comparison with proposals for the Easter Parade or the Lili Dache design shop."³⁵

This emphasis on femininity during recruitment probably contributed to the low numbers enlisted. The Recruitment Units (RUs) were responsible for recruiting women into the RCAF. They soon realized that the RCAF's appeal to the "right" woman was not all that attractive to prospective recruits. In turn, they offered many suggestions on ways to increase enrollment. These included lowering the minimum age requirement and raising the maximum limit, thus lengthening the term of service to match the men's requirements. RUs also wanted the RCAF to look at ways to entice women to re-enlist after their terms had ended.³⁶ However, the RCAF did not implement any of these suggestions.

Other suggestions included producing a film such as the ones used to recruit men. The Service claimed, however, that this would be too expensive. It also

³⁴William M. Lee, Squadron Leader, RCAF, "Canada's Air Division in Exercise Carte Blanche", Press Release, NA RG24, vol. 17910, file 900-960-4, vol. 2, Public Relations - Operator - Fighter, c. 27.07.1955.

³⁵"Administration Officers Conference", NA RG24, vol. 17835, file 842-8, Administrative Services, 17-19 Sep 1952.

³⁶"Items Pertaining to AW Recruiting (and Decisions) from Annual COs Conference 1955 and Regional Conferences Held at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Halifax, 1955", NA RG24, vol. 17852, file 846-3, vol. 4, 1955.

dismissed the idea that slide shows should portray enlisted women at work, as well as men.³⁷ Of course, the slide shows and recruitment films were expensive to produce, and the RCAF was not willing to put the same resources into women's recruitment. In addition, this material was also produced to project a "masculine" image of the Air Force. To have women featured would give them a much higher profile than the RCAF intended.

It was not only the Air Force who expressed concerns about women's proper image and conduct. These were shared by many elements of Canadian society, resulting in strong pressure on some women not to join the RCAF. In Québec for example, the Catholic Church was strongly opposed to their recruitment, and parents often refused to brave such important opposition.³⁸ The RUs thus requested that the Service come up with ways to "help convince parents and the clergy that the RCAF [was] not totally void of morals and religious principles..."³⁹

But parents were also opposed to recruitment of their daughters in other various parts of the country. Many did not want to see their daughters posted all over Canada or Europe or anywhere too far from home. They, too, preferred to keep their

³⁷"Items Pertaining to AW Recruiting (and Decisions) from Annual COs Conference 1955 and REGIONAL Conferences Held at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Halifax, 1955", NA RG24, vol. 17852, file 846-3, vol. 4, 1955.

³⁸Although there were probably parents in other parts of the country who were opposed to their daughters joining, it was only the RUs from Québec who brought this up at a number of meetings, singling it out as a large problem, and one that had to be dealt with.

³⁹J.B. Rainville, S/L, CO, RCAF RU, Qc, NA RG24, vol. 17852, file 84-3, vol. 1, dated 04.04.1952.

daughter a little closer to home.⁴⁰ Some of the women who were recruited asked to leave shortly after because their parents objected strenuously once informed of their daughter's decision to join up. Although some RUs favoured getting parental consent, it was left up to the individual unit to screen the applicants, and decide which women should receive parental consent to join.⁴¹

Still, despite the various impediments to recruitment, there were many women who were willing to join. Many of the women interviewed came from an Armed Forces background; they adhered to the principle of pride in service, of discipline, of comradery, and of hard but satisfying work that the RCAF tried to promote in its recruitment campaigns. Women joined the Air Force for other reasons as well. Of those interviewed, some were interested in the travel, some wanted a career other than secretarial work, teaching, and nursing. And although they may have been aware that they might be posted to this type of work, their perception of life in the RCAF made those jobs more appealing.

The RCAF knew the women were joining for these reasons. It was acknowledged that Service life and travel were of more concern to women than the trades and pay. In addition, women seemed more interested in pictures depicting

⁴⁰Items Pertaining to AW Recruiting (and Decisions) from Annual COs Conference 1955 and REGIONAL Conferences Held at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Halifax, 1955", NA RG24, vol. 17852, file 846-3, vol. 4, 1955.

⁴¹Items Pertaining to AW Recruiting (and Decisions) from Annual COs Conference 1955 and REGIONAL Conferences Held at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Halifax, 1955", NA RG24, vol. 17852, file 846-3, vol. 4, 1955.

men and women working together.⁴² And yet, the methods of recruitment were never changed to reflect the reality.

TRAINING

The training women received also demonstrated the Air Force's main motive in recruiting women. Throughout the training period, from basic training to trades training, the Service showed that women were present above all because of employment needs, not because it had changed fundamentally its position regarding women's place and role in the military.

On 3 July 1951, the first eighty enlisted women arrived for basic training at St-Jean, Québec. Basic training was eight weeks long. It consisted of drill, which was, in the words of one woman interviewed, "extensive and intense."⁴³ In addition, daily physical education was mandatory for all. Apparently, a lot of time was spent cleaning as well, as the women were all responsible for the cleanliness of the barracks.⁴⁴ Finally, basic training also included class study, with such subjects as Canadian politics, first aid, navigation, meteorology, RCAF history, aero-engines, radar and communications, aircraft structure, and principles of flight.⁴⁵

⁴²"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁴³Interview B5. Most of the information available concerning courses was information gained from the women interviewed.

⁴⁴Interview B8, B4

⁴⁵Interview B5, B2, B4. Although the training for women and men was almost the same, the men and women went through basic separately. During that time, the two sexes saw each other at a distance, but that was about all. [Interview B4, and A5]. Also, "Information RCAF Station, St-Jean,

Men, too, went through the training described above. But there were also differences in the basic training schedule. Women did not have any weapons training, they did not participate in the "active" part of the course⁴⁶, and they did not receive any ground defence training.⁴⁷ The time left free was filled with courses on morality and personal hygiene. These courses, which will be described more fully in the next chapter, were the first of many that women had to take during their RCAF careers; they were designed to have women conform to the standards which corresponded to the RCAF's perception of women's nature and of women's role.

During basic training, women were tested on the courses they took, and, towards the end of the training period, they wrote aptitude tests. The combination of their scores on both types of tests helped determine the trade for which they would train.⁴⁸ One of the jobs most in demand was that of Fighter Control Operator. This prestigious position was also one of the most demanding as far as course training was concerned. The course for Fighter Control Operator was twenty weeks long, and consisted of in-class instruction as well as a considerable amount of homework. In

P.Q.," NA RG24, vol. 276. File 304-4, vol. 7, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1954.

⁴⁶For example, obstacle courses, hikes, etc.

⁴⁷Interview B5, B2, B4. Also, "Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, vol. 276. File 304-4, vol. 7, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1954.

⁴⁸After basic training, francophone women did not accompany anglophone women immediately to trades training (which took from four to five months to undergo), but firstly underwent language training to learn English. Due to space limitations, the francophone population could not be treated separately in this thesis. However some of the problems francophones faced through their careers did come to light. Firstly, the women complained vigorously about the language training, stating that they learned more English in contact training than they did on language courses. Secondly, once posted, some English-speaking personnel often ridiculed francophones when they attempted to speak English.

addition, there were many hours of simulated work situations. However, because the technology often changed, there were other courses that had to be attended in order to update skills throughout the "Fighter COps" career.⁴⁹ As a result, airwomen spent quite a bit of time at school. In spite of the work involved both in school and on the job, both women interviewed who had been "Fighter COps" were satisfied with their job. As mentioned, it was one of the most prestigious trades open to women, and it was considered by the RCAF to be highly skilled and imperative to the efficient running of the Service.⁵⁰

POSTING

Aptitude was not the only factor in the decisions made regarding the trade for which a woman would train. If there was an urgent need for staff in a particular trade, many would be directed there. The women did have some choice: they listed the top three trades for which they wished to train, and if there was a need for staff, they could be considered depending on the RCAF's evaluation of a woman's aptitude. But, if she was considered to be incapable, or if the trade was fully staffed, then she would be assigned elsewhere.

Furthermore, if a trade for which a woman had expressed a preference opened up later, she would find it very difficult to get re-training. For example, a senior airwoman who had trained before larger numbers of women were being sent

⁴⁹Interview A1, B4.

⁵⁰"Recommendations for Introduction of Group 4", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 555, file 421-F4, RCAF Trades and Branches, Ftr. COp, 14.07.1995.

overseas,⁵¹ and who was already engaged in a trade might find it hard to get a posting abroad. Junior airwomen, who were less experienced, but who had taken foreign language courses, could qualify to go overseas.⁵²

Women also complained about jobs that were advertised as open to them, only to find that they had been re-allocated to men only. For example, the Communications Operator trade was still being advertised as open to women in 1952. It was only after the women interested had signed up for a three-year commitment to the RCAF that they discovered they were not eligible to compete for this position.⁵³ In fact, few of the women interviewed got the job they wanted. Although they did not contest the RCAF's decisions, many were displeased.

Although airmen faced posting problems, the availability of postings was more limited in the case of airwomen. It was stated clearly from the beginning that the women would not be working on planes, not even as stewardesses. But the possibilities were also limited on the ground. There were far fewer postings available to women than to men. And, although their number increased throughout the period, the career opportunities for women were still severely curtailed (see Appendix

⁵¹Overseas postings for women did not really open up until 1953.

⁵²S.I. Evans S/L SO/WP 7440, "Employment Overseas Airwomen - FCOps, NA RG 24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, Employment Airwomen, Memo to DAPC, DOS 15.09.1954. Apparently, this particular complaint was common enough that after 1954, it was decided that some senior airwomen would be language trained to serve overseas.

⁵³R.H. Morris S/L for AOC, TC, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Memo to Chief of Air Staff, Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 14.02.1952.

II).⁵⁴ In actual fact, the number and range of trades open to women throughout the period never achieved the quantity or scope of trades open to those women who served in the Second World War (see Appendix III). During that period of international conflict, the RCAF had been more willing to ignore the limits that gender constructs placed on women, so great was emergency. In the 1950s, however, the number and range of jobs open to women were confined to work which the RCAF felt could be incorporated in their concept of femininity.

The most conspicuous difference between the work experiences of women and those of men was that the former could not be pilots, which had also been the case during the war. Apparently, this was something that the RCAF was at pains to make sure would not happen any time soon. When one woman asked why women could not be pilots, the primary reason given was that women were not needed as pilots. It was more "practical" that women be members of ground crews. In addition, pilots were expensive to train; the high turnover of women personnel due to marriage thus did not justify their training. The author, a member of the Chief of the Air Staff's (CAS) office, went on to state that it was felt that the jobs for which women were trained in the Service should help them in later life, and no airline companies hired women as pilots. It was also pointed out that not all airmen were pilots, and that the

⁵⁴There are indications that, although very few trades were open to women when first recruited, the Air Force did want to broaden employment opportunities for women. However, this pressure seemed to begin at the lower officer levels, and it was not until the mid-1950s that more progress was made towards regaining the number of trades that had been open in the Second World War. ["SPSO's Conference, 19, 20, and 21 Nov. 1951," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.98, vol. 3, Employment - Female Members of the RCAF, 18.12.1951.]

need for groundcrew was far greater than the requirements for pilots. The author admitted that, apart from the practical reasons invoked above, there was no reason why women should not fly. However, policy would not change for "some time to come."⁵⁵ There are certainly a number of holes in the author's argument. If women were in jobs that would help them in later civilian careers, why could they be trained in parachute rigging? And, although it may be true that airlines were not hiring female pilots, neither were airports hiring women with any frequency as air traffic controllers, a job which RCAF airwomen were performing as Fighter Control Operators, and female officers, as Fighter Controllers.

Regulations were also put into place which ensured that, in certain trades, women would have more trouble moving ahead. For example, men could not train in the Technical Assistant - Medical trade, but they could be trained as Senior Medical Assistants.⁵⁶ There is, of course, the obvious point that men could instruct women to change bedpans, although, as males, they could not be seen to do the task themselves. But since the regulations insisted that only women could be Technical Assistants, their chances for promotion to Senior Assistant were restricted. In addition, the trade of Technical Assistant suffered from chronic shortages;⁵⁷ thus if

⁵⁵W.C. Van Camp Group Captain for the Chief of the Air Staff, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 3, Enrolment Female Members of the RCAF, letter to Miss Carol Belyea, East St. John, N.B., 24.05.1956.

⁵⁶J.B. Millward, G/C DSM 6882, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 309, file 315.1, vol.2, Enlistment Policy, Memo to DHS, 20 June 1949.

⁵⁷Interview B4.

there was a choice between promoting a woman from this trade, or promoting an airman from another trade with fewer shortages, then the latter would be the most likely to be promoted.

Of course, the fact that the position of Technical Assistant - Medical was closed to men was a form of reverse discrimination as well. However, the job was not as prestigious as that of Senior Medical Assistant. Another example of reverse discrimination can be found when examining nursing: the job was not open to men either, as it did not fit with the masculine image which the Service wished to project.⁵⁸ The Air Force regulations made it quite clear that regardless of a man's possible aspirations, he could not be a nurse in the RCAF.

But the RCAF could, and did, use gender in trades to suit its needs as well. When men became available for a trade which had formerly been open to women, that job could be closed to women: this was done in the case of Communications Officer.⁵⁹ In the case of Flight Control Operator, however, the RCAF used gender constructs in order to fill the available positions with women. In this case, they portrayed women as having the necessary qualities of concentration and patience which, it was claimed, were not strong in men.⁶⁰ The same strategy was used when

⁵⁸"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁵⁹R.H. Morris S/L for AOC, TC, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Memo to Chief of Air Staff, Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 14.02.1952.

⁶⁰Ministry of Defence, "Women in the RCAF," D.His. 71-383, 09.02.1953, p.1.

the Air Marshall wrote to the Ministry of Defence explaining why the Air Force wanted to send women overseas. He referred to the shortage of staff, the high morale among women, and their eagerness to go. But, he also argued that the mere presence of women would be a morale boost for male ranks. He finally suggested that it would be "most desirable that our Canadian airmen should be afforded the company of Canadian girls in the social life of the stations, particularly on the Continent."⁶¹

Although this might make a statement about airmen's behaviour on European bases, the issue of overseas travel provides another example of the RCAF's attempt to, as often as possible, have women working in the background. It was not until the need for staffing overseas became too great to ignore that women were sent to European air stations. Although the communication from the Air Marshall to Claxton was issued in 1951, it was not until 1953 that overseas work was really opened to women. This in spite of the fact that the possibility for overseas travel was one of the primary reasons women joined the Service.

It was not only directives from the Chief of Air Staff's Office which confined women to traditional "female" trades and / or in less visible locations. The Office was willingly supported by many of the individual male officers at the Air bases where the women worked. Women who trained for traditionally "male" jobs faced the resistance of male officers. They complained of this behaviour, especially after

⁶¹WA Curtis, Air Marshall, Chief of the Air Staff, NA RG24, acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.98, vol. 3, Employment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to the Minister, 10.12.1951.

having been told when recruited and throughout training that this would not happen.⁶² This was especially true in the more technical positions; across the board there were complaints from women who were sent to work in the laundry, kitchen or office upon arriving at a station. Sometimes the reason given for posting them in traditionally female work was that an air station was not yet fully operational, or did not have housing for women.⁶³ However, the majority of complainants stated that Commanding Officers were refusing to allow women to work at their trade, because they preferred that those trades remain staffed by airmen. One woman wrote that she had "run into numerous officers who make no secret of the fact that they don't want and don't like women in the service. And sometimes in their official position, they can make it quite tough from women on their stations."⁶⁴ The airwomen were therefore sent to the washing machines, the stoves and the typewriters. A number of times, orders had to be issued stating that commanding officers were to ensure that women not be placed in unskilled jobs upon posting, but that they be given the posting for which they had been trained.⁶⁵ At the same time, Recruiting Units were

⁶²ME MacAgy F/O, RCAF RU, Quebec, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Memo to CO RCAF-RU, c. Oct. 1951.

⁶³LE Wray A/C D/AMP 3105, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 3, Memo to A/V/CAS, 30.10.1952.

⁶⁴E.C. Hick, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Female Officers, Letter to S/L Sutherland, 27.08.1952. Although there was some resentment towards the women very early on, this apparently was not a concern by 1952. [P.G.M. James P/O Officer i/c AW, CJATC Rivers, Manitoba, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 30-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Female Officers, Letter to S/L Sutherland, Senior Welfare Officer, Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, c. 1952]

⁶⁵F.G. Wait A/V/M for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, File 304.98, vol. 2, Enrolment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to all Commands and Groups, 09.11.1951.

to inform women that it might be necessary to employ them at duties other than their trade, and that these duties - it is not clear if this was to be a temporary situation - were not to be construed as misemployment. The women were to be told that these tasks, "such as station clean-up are a necessary service commitment in which all personnel, especially junior airmen and airwomen, should participate."⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

The recruitment campaigns of women was far less aggressive than the drives to recruit men. And both the recruitment and training stages of the airwomen's careers were designed to re-enforce the Service's perception of femininity. As a result of these measures, the numbers of women being recruited never reached expectations. However, as will be seen, the women who did join and remain in the service demonstrated that they were not all willing to have their whole life regulated by the RCAF. Many, indeed, would either live their social lives as they wished, or they would simply leave.

⁶⁶F.M. Gobeil W/C for AOCTC, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 2, Memo to Chief of the Air Staff, AF Headquarters, Ottawa, 30.05.1952.

Chapter Three

Living On the Inside: Women's Social Life on the Airstations

INTRODUCTION

It was not only unattractive recruiting methods, restrictive and inflexible terms of service, and poor career choices which kept the number of enlisted women low in the Air Force. It was also the RCAF's efforts to control the women's social lives.

The most effective method used by the RCAF to this end, was to enroll airwomen in courses which gave lessons on morality, charm and hygiene. In addition, as time went on, the accommodations the Air Force provided for women were meant to promote activities which conformed to the image it wanted them to project.

However, this supervisory role assumed by the RCAF was not accepted by all women, as we shall see. Many, on the contrary, achieved a certain independence on joining the Air Force. The dilemma was that airwomen (and airmen) did not just work at the air stations; they also lived there, and the people with whom they worked were the same people with whom they socialized. Hence, the line between the public and the private spheres of activities was far more blurred than it was in civilian life. As a result, women could often engage in activities that were deemed inappropriate for "respectable" women.

As discussed in Chapter One, a woman's expected life goals in the 1950s

were marriage and children. Overall, women at the time adhered to these goals.¹ Yet, marriage or pregnancy could mean dismissal for an airwoman. The paradox was that the RCAF wanted the women to work and live in a masculine environment, while abiding to traditional female roles and behaviour.

I. EXPECTATIONS OF PROPER "BEHAVIOUR"

Certainly the RCAF wanted the women in their Service to emulate the conduct of "ordinary" women, and they wanted to fight the negative image that persisted among civilians. At one conference, women officers, many of whom had served in the Second World War, were concerned that there was not enough training regarding personal and social relationships. There had been a number of courses offered during the war in basic training and women officers' courses regarding mental hygiene, neuropsychiatric problems and sex.² Many of the airwomen were also dissatisfied with the judgment of public opinion; they felt they were open to criticism for having joined the Service. As during the Second World War, they were seen to have joined up simply to get a man.³ According to one report, 50% of airwomen felt that civilians thought of them unfavourably, and one-third thought that their status

¹Veronica Strong-Boag, "Their Side of the Story: Women's Voices from Ontario Suburbs, 1945-1960", in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980*, ed. Joy Parr, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

²S.I. Evans AMP/SO/WP 7440, "Basic Training - AWs," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to DGT/GT3, 17.05.1954.

³Report on series of informal letters, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Officers, Memo, Ottawa, 09.03.1955.

was inferior to that of civilians.⁴

The RCAF's policies indicate that it agreed that this image needed to be improved. It was maintained through her career that if "one girl in uniform misbehaves in public she stands out as though she were ten."⁵ The RCAF feared that with neither parental supervision nor the social structure that they would encounter in civilian life, the women would not adhere to the strict standards which Canadian society set for them. As in World War II, the RCAF response was that airwomen should have good manners, and should be encouraged to be especially gracious.⁶ This was reflected in new courses designed to promote proper behaviour in women, and in the planned "recreational" activities reserved for women.

MORALITY TRAINING COURSES

As we saw in Chapter 2, these courses began in basic training, taking the place of weapons training and ground defence training. Women at basic training attended "lectures of a specialized nature", which included courses on deportment and morality.⁷ Also requested were more films and other material. It was then suggested that the U.S. Armed Forces pamphlet, "You - In Uniform" should be recommended

⁴"Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, vol. 276. File 304-4, vol. 7, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1954.

⁵Report on series of informal letters, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Officers, Memo, Ottawa, 09.03.1955.

⁶Evans S/L for CAS, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Officers, Memo, Ottawa, 09.03.1955.

⁷Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, vol. 276. File 304-4, vol. 7, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1954.

reading for the airwomen.

One of the most often quoted female officers, S.I. Evans, stated that many "problems leading to maladjustment in the service, sex delinquency, and ill-advised marriages might be avoided - and the consequent "wastage rates" of personnel reduced - if more education was undertaken..."⁸

The RCAF wanted female officers like Evans to make sure that the Service's goals would be attained. Through course work, the Air Force thus tried to instill the type of conduct they thought that female officers, as leaders of airwomen, should also demonstrate. Along with courses on leadership, discipline, supply, organization and administration, NCO courses for women included deportment (including behaviour), personal relations (including "disposal" of problems), hygiene and health (for themselves and airwomen including "normal and abnormal behaviour" especially in social and sexual relations), and morale (keeping an eye on unhappiness and total fitness).⁹

The female commissioned officers were expected to set a good example for all airwomen. They had to be of exceptionally "good character" in order that the women under their care would know what was expected of them. They had to be especially

⁸S.I. Evans AMP/SO/WP 7440, "Basic Training - AWs," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to DGT/GT3, 17.05.1954. Evans was not the only female officer who adhered to the military discourse. This was perceived as a problem by many of the enlisted airwomen, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁹"NCO Course for Airwomen," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self Improvement Programme Female Personnel, c. 1954.

gracious, practice good manners, and encourage airwomen to do the same.¹⁰ Although male officers also had to set an example for airmen, it does not seem that the RCAF made the same concerted effort to shape and control their conduct.

The RCAF also expected female officers to look after the welfare of the women under their care. The Air Force felt that airwomen "looked up to women officers as they would do older members of the family", and that these officers were in the best position to understand other women.¹¹ But it would seem that this raised the airwomen's suspicion among airwomen that their officers were really the mouthpieces of the RCAF. A number of women who were interviewed stated they did not feel comfortable going to female officers with any problems. In their opinion, the latter were to be avoided unless one wanted all her problems officially reported.¹² This was supported by a report from 1955 that stated that the airwomen felt that officers (both female and male) were not interested in their welfare.¹³ If the men felt the same, however, their complaints were not recorded in the documents.

Courses especially designed for women were recommended beyond basic training. Throughout her career, she was expected to follow extra courses and

¹⁰S.I. Evans S/L for CAS, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letter to Female Officers, Memo, 09.03.1955.

¹¹"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command HQs held at AF HQs, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470-28, Ground Training - Self Improvement, Programme - Female Personnel, p.18.

¹²Interview A6, B4.

¹³S.I. Evans S/L for CAS, NA RG24, vol. 271, file 300-107, Personnel - Informal Letters to Officers, Memo, Ottawa, 09.03.1955.

lectures, which were all part of the "Self-Improvement Programme" set up by the RCAF in an effort to improve her image among civilians, and to control her activities. And these courses were programmes. In 1959, one such programme included the following subjects: Health for Effective Living; Mental Health; Physical Fitness; As Others See You (which included grooming, wardrobe planning, and accessories); Better Speech and Vocabulary Building; Reading for Pleasure; Art of Conversation; Etiquette; Dating; Preparation for Marriage; Brides and Wedding Plans; Home Decoration; Cooking; and, Travel Tips. According to answer sheets recording reactions to these courses, the least popular were those on "Dating", "Preparation for Marriage", and "Brides and Wedding Plans".¹⁴ Why these were unpopular is open to speculation. It certainly did not escape the women's attention that although the Air Force promoted marriage as an ideal, it actively discouraged it while the women were part of the Service.

RECREATION

The Self-Improvement Programme was also considered part of the women's recreational activities. The RCAF did not have a fitness programme for women. The men had to be kept physically fit as part of their preparation for battle. There was a sports recreation programme for men, but, in keeping with the feminine image it was

¹⁴"Supervisors Service Training School Critique on Self Improvement Programme," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, part 2, box 851, file 470.28.98, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, c. 05.03.1959. To give the RCAF credit, when the course was held in 1960, these subjects had disappeared. ("Schedule - Self-Improvement Programme - 28 Mar. - 1 Apr. 60," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, part 2, box 851, file 470.28.98, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, c. 05.03.1959.)

promoting for women, the Service did not feel that their fitness was a priority. On many stations, the recreational officer (who tended to be male) was not expected to design a separate programme for women. His primary responsibility was to the airmen, and there was "no time to organize activities peculiar to airwomen only", especially on air stations where the majority of personnel were male.¹⁵ Female officers were told that they could design an activity programme for women, but this would be outside of their primary duties, and done in their spare time. In fact, the responsibility for a fitness recreation programme often rested with them on a given base. The Recreation Branch was encouraged, though not given an actual mandate, to develop an activity programme that was of interest to women by employing professionally qualified women to design it.¹⁶

On stations where there were sufficient numbers of women, there were other activities that were available to women as part of their recreation programme. There were photo clubs, dances, concerts, and hobbies that were encouraged included cooking, weaving and millinery.¹⁷ These types of activities were acceptable to the RCAF as "wholesome" and appropriate activities for women. However, these often

¹⁵"Recreation - Airwomen," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049. box 851, file 470.28.98, part 2, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to CAS, 22.02.1957.

¹⁶J.K. Trett W/C DPA/PA6 (4-5081), NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049. box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Minute Form, 29.04.1957; and, "Recreation - Airwomen," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049. box 851, file 470.28.98, part 2, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to CAS, 22.02.1957.

¹⁷"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

took a long time to organize as they required money, space, time and leadership.

The programme that the Recreational Branch did develop was perceived to be of interest to women. It included a charm school, domestic arts, and lectures. The material included an article taught at one charm school, in 1957, by Dr. Marion Hilliard¹⁸, who discussed how a woman could lead a "happy, useful life without a husband and without children". Dr. Hilliard counseled women to retain their virtue, to join clubs, share an apartment with other females with similar tastes, and not to engage in premarital sex.¹⁹ The topics this programme included lectures about improving one's personality by getting along with people, developing strategies that helped to work with others, and "twenty-five marks of a successful, popular personality."²⁰ Airwomen were encouraged to go to church and to join church activities, as this was part of the expected behaviour of the "right sort" of airwoman. In addition, many of the lectures in the various "recreational" activities were led by the chaplain.²¹

HOUSING

In order to encourage airwomen to behave in a way that was deemed

¹⁸A regular contributor to *Chatelaine*, Dr. Hilliard was a obstetrician/gynecologist.

¹⁹The title of this article was not mentioned in the memo. It appeared in *Chatelaine* magazine in February, 1956.

²⁰D.L. Pope F/L for AOCTC "Airwomen Administration," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to CAS, AFHQ, 06.06.1957.

²¹"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

acceptable, the RCAF took pains with accommodations. If women's housing was more "homey", women might take a greater interest in domestic pursuits. As a result, especially on the newer stations, women's housing was modern, and afforded more privacy than typical barracks. This eventually also held true for St-Jean, where basic training took place. Most of the women interviewed remembered clearly that they were eighty in the barracks there, although this number was eventually reduced to eight in a room through renovations in later years.²²

However, women's housing at stations, especially the newer ones, took much longer to build. As a result, there were many complaints about over-crowding. Eventually, the RCAF had to order that women not be posted until they could be properly housed.²³ But, before women were properly housed, many who did not re-enlist at the end of their three-year term cited poor housing as one of the main reasons for their departure.²⁴

Accommodations were vastly improved by 1954. However, housing varied across air stations. At the older stations, women were housed at forty to a room, while the newer ones tended to have barracks that were divided into rooms accommodating

²²"Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, vol. 276, file 304-4, vol. 6, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1955.

²³"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

²⁴Research Branch, Library of Parliament, "History of the RCAF (Women's Division) 1941-1971," D.His. 90-447, file 104, 1971, p.5.

two to four women.²⁵ In addition, they also had lounges, reading rooms and recreation rooms. Even on those stations where the women were not so well housed, facilities were to be at least as good as the airmen's.²⁶ Confirmation of this last statement was not provided by the women interviewed, as the reaction to the question tended to be along the lines of: "I don't know, I was never in the men's quarters."²⁷

The RCAF also wished for segregated facilities because it felt that it was not always "appropriate" for women to be in the mess with the men. Women's quarters thus included facilities where they could relax. Facilities were planned with room for stoves, fridges, and utensils for light refreshments. The refreshments included beer and soft drinks, although coffee and snacks were emphasized, "for the sort of entertaining the girls would do if in their own homes."²⁸ Even at St-Jean, where there were far more men than women, the Air Force advertised separate facilities, such as the Airwomen's Sub-Canteen (for snacks), the beauty parlour, and the cosmetic parlour.²⁹

UNIFORMS

As discussed in Chapter 2, the RCAF used the uniform to encourage female

²⁵Interviews A3, A5, B2, B6.

²⁶S.G. Cowan G/C for CAS, "Kitting of WD Personnel," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, Employment Airwomen, Memo to Air Office Commanding, RCAF Air Material Command, No. 8 Temporary, c. 1952.

²⁷All of the oral interviews were answered in the same vein. Interviews B1-B8

²⁸"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

²⁹"Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, vol. 276, file 304-4, vol. 6, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1955.

recruitment. But it also used it as a means to control women's demeanor. By instilling pride in the uniform, the Air Force hoped women would behave themselves in the properly prescribed manner. It was regulated that women were not allowed to wear civilian clothing except on certain occasions. However, it became evident in time that some women did not necessarily adapt their behaviour when in uniform to conform to RCAF standards, which resulted in the RCAF changing the regulations to allow women to wear civilian clothing to dances, and after hours off the base as well.³⁰

II. THE REALITY OF AIRWOMEN'S LIVES

Despite all the efforts of the Air Force to make women conform to a perceived standard of conduct befitting a woman in the RCAF, there was an important gap between the image of women and what women actually did. The women may have participated in and actually enjoyed many of the activities that the Service planned for them in their off hours and time in barracks. But, at the same time, they also pursued other social interests that, if not leading to discharge, were frowned upon by the Air Force as conduct unbecoming to female RCAF personnel.

OFFICERS AND MARRIAGE

Between 1951 and 1953, women who married had to leave the RCAF. This was changed to allow women to marry male Air Force personnel, as long as neither husband or wife were posted. However, the rules for marriage between officers and enlisted personnel differed. Female officers had, from the beginning of women's

³⁰"Information RCAF Station, St-Jean, P.Q.," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, vol. 276, file 304-4, vol. 6, Enrolment - Instructional Bulletins, c. 1955.

recruitment, been allowed to remain in the Service after marriage. Here, however, the rules were complicated by the RCAF's concept of hierarchy. The RCAF had a problem when service personnel were married to each other, and when either the husband or the wife, but not both, was an officer. Evidently, the main dilemma was that the enlisted personnel was not allowed to be served in the officers' mess. Socializing, or "fraternization", among enlisted personnel and officers was traditionally discouraged by the Service. It was decided that if the husband was the officer, then the enlisted woman was released from the Service, in order to be able to join her husband at mess functions. When the situation was reversed, and the wife was an officer, then she was released, since she would not be allowed to have her husband accompany her to mess functions.³¹ The RCAF was thus willing to ignore the long established traditional rules of hierarchy on which the Service was built, because more weight was given to a man's position in the Air Force, even if a woman was of higher rank.

IMPROPER CONDUCT

In spite of its multiple efforts, all airwomen did not adhere to the Service's regulations and code of "proper" feminine behaviour. There were certainly some who believed in the same ideal of femininity espoused by the Force, and acted accordingly, as they most likely would have done in civilian life. But, the same holds true for those women who continued to act in ways that were not approved by the Air Force.

There were all kinds of behaviour which pre-occupied the military authorities.

³¹W.W. Brown A/C Acting AOC; TC, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 488, file 393.98, vol. 1, Release, Female Members of the RCAF, Letter to CAS, AF HQ, 02.07.1952.

Many involved situations that had existed before women joined the Air Force: fraternization between officers and enlisted personnel, excessive drinking, extra-marital sex, venereal disease, and homosexuality. However, much of this was ignored as long as it did not interfere with the men's work. But, with the arrival of women, societal pressures now entered the equation: the RCAF thus began to interfere in the women's personal lives to a considerable degree.

ALCOHOL

In general, the women interviewed acknowledged that functions where liquor was served tended to be the most popular. One woman stated that, on looking back, she found it hard to believe how often liquor was part of socializing, and was amazed at how much the women and men drank, by today's standards. Yet, at the time, they did not think they were drinking excessively, although in retrospect, another woman disclosed that life in the Air Force produced a lot of alcoholics among its personnel.³²

In order to curtail what it considered to be excessive drinking, the RCAF made an effort to control women's drinking habits, examining the possibility of establishing a curfew or check-in system in quarters. It did not put these into effect, but discipline during social events was tightened to discourage "excessive drinking and loose morals."³³ But, in spite of the Service's attempts at regulation, it seems the women did not change their habits. The drinking did not really seem to be curtailed.

³²Interview A9, and A3.

³³"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

FRATERNIZATION

The RCAF's encouragement of "wholesome" types of recreation as discussed above was the most significant attempt to try to discourage the extra-marital sexual relations, which the Service considered so much more unacceptable for women than they ever had for men. As mentioned above, fraternization had traditionally been discouraged among male personnel. However, when women entered the RCAF, fraternization took on a whole new meaning. Dating between enlisted airmen and airwomen was to be expected, but dating between enlisted personnel and officers was discouraged by the Service hierarchy.

Nevertheless, dating, especially between male officers and female airwomen, occurred often, with the opposite happening far more rarely. Part of the reason for high frequency fraternization was that the proportion of female officers to male officers was rather small, so the male officers were asking the enlisted airwomen out. When the situation was discovered, however, it was rarely the male officer who was disciplined. According to one woman interviewed, she never heard of a single case where the officer was held responsible for going out with an enlisted airwoman.³⁴ The RCAF stated that the "problem of fraternizing between officers and junior ranks was worse with women,"³⁵ placing the blame for the liaisons squarely on the shoulders of the latter.

³⁴Interview A3.

³⁵"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

PRE-MARITAL SEX AND PREGNANCY

This last quote indicates the expressed concern that the airwomen's moral behaviour was not up to Service standards. As mentioned above, women had to attend lectures, where they were greatly encouraged to abstain from extra-marital sex.³⁶ And, almost invariably, when the RCAF talked about the "right" and "wrong" type of airwomen, they were referring to whether women were sexually active or not.

One of the inevitable results of women engaging in pre-marital sex with men was pregnancy, which meant automatic release from the Service. The RCAF considered pregnancy testing at the recruiting stage and throughout a woman's career, but this was never authorized.³⁷ The Service wanted women to immediately report any suspicion of pregnancy. But the women knew this would mean that they would not be recruited³⁸, and if already in the Service, that they would be discharged. Instead of reporting a pregnancy, women tried to hide it as long as possible to avoid discharge.

³⁶D.L. Pope F/L for AOC TC "Airwomen Administration," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28.98, part 1, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, Memo to CAS, AFHQ, 06.06.1957.

³⁷A.A.G. Corbett Group Captain for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box. 489, file 393.100.98.3, vol.2, Releases, Female Members of the RCAF, Pregnancy Cases, Letter to Dr. W.P. Warner, Director General Treatment Services, Department of Veteran Affairs, Ottawa, 26.12.1951. The Service was especially concerned about pregnant women who were scheduled to go overseas. Posting anyone overseas was expensive, and there were cases where women arrived in Europe already pregnant. Although there was not a pregnancy test, during the physicals for women headed overseas, medical officers were directed to ask probing questions in regard to sexual activity and menstrual history. Under no circumstance were women who were suspected of being pregnant to be allowed to go overseas. (A.A.G. Corbett A/C for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box. 489, file 393.100.98.3, vol.2, Releases, Female Members of the RCAF, Pregnancy Cases, Letter to Air Officer Commanding, Training Command, Trenton, 02.12.1952.)

³⁸In fact, even women with a history of illegitimate pregnancy would not be enrolled in the Service. [W.K. Carr W/C for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.100.98, part 1, Enrollment - Female Members of the RCAF, Manning Directive No. 54/55, 31.03.1955.]

They also resorted to abortion, dangerous as it was at the time, in an effort to remain in the Service.³⁹

The RCAF was also concerned because, as time went on, a larger percentage of the fathers were officers in the Service. The answer to this quandary was that more "wholesome" recreation was needed, which resulted in the increase of station patrolling and the tightening of discipline. However, even though it was found that a number of the fathers of "illegitimate" pregnancies were officers, or perhaps because of this, it was decided in 1954, that the section of the pregnancy report form where an airwoman reported the father's name would be deleted.⁴⁰ Hence, the airwoman would bear alone all the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy. But, notwithstanding existing regulations and the monitoring of women's sexual activities, as well as the lack of support a woman would receive from the Air Force, the numbers of pregnant airwomen continued to rise.⁴¹

HOMOSEXUALITY

Another perceived problem was that of homosexuality on the base.⁴² According

³⁹"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁴⁰"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁴¹W.K. Carr W/C for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.100.98, part 1, Enrollment - Female Members of the RCAF, Manning Directive No. 54/55, 31.03.1955. The exact numbers of women who were discharged from the Air Force over the years is not known

⁴²For a more complete discussion on societal attitudes towards homosexuality, see: Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, Montreal: Black Rose, 1987; Daniel J. Robinson and David Kimmel, "The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada," in *Canadian*

to the women interviewed, there were a number of homosexual females in the Service, but the RCAF tended to turn a blind eye. The official order was that if there were women reported or rumoured to be lesbian, women officers should be called in to take administrative action, or to allay suspicions or rumours.⁴³ Apparently this is not what usually happened. The officers' attitude, according to one woman, was that because lesbians were not allowed to enroll, there were none in the Service, regardless of whether an airwoman complained of a colleague's behaviour.⁴⁴ Most of the women interviewed agreed that there were lesbians; however many stated that they were so discreet that there were only rumours about certain women and that there was never any real evidence to be seen or found. On the other hand, when asked whether homosexuality existed at the station, one woman pulled out unit photographs and began pointing out the lesbian couples which she knew.⁴⁵ The evidence from the interviews points to the fact that although the RCAF discouraged women's homosexuality, little was done to stop this "deviant" practice. For their part, lesbian women did not change their behaviour despite the oppression and sanctions that they could face. Knowing this meant, however, that the behaviour was hidden, as it had

Historical Review, LXXV, 3, Sept. 1993 ; Elise Rose Chenier, "Tough Ladies and Troublemakers: Toronto's Public Lesbian Community," MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1995; Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Construction of Heterosexuality*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

⁴³"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁴⁴Interview A5.

⁴⁵Interview A3.

to remain undetected. Because the RCAF did not discuss lesbianism in any of the available material, it is difficult to know if such “deviant” behaviour was less expected from women than from men, or if the Service feared lesbianism as much as male homosexuality.

CONCLUSION

The evidence gathered suggests that despite lectures and courses on morality, despite all the efforts to engage women in “respectable” activities and hobbies, many airwomen did not conform to the RCAF’s standards of morality and behaviour. On the other hand, regardless of whether the women agreed or disagreed with the RCAF’s efforts to regulate their lives, many chose to leave the service. This option, as we shall see, would eventually be used against aspiring recruits, when the RCAF resorted to using the women’s high attrition rate in its attempt to close its doors to them once again.

Chapter Four

A "Sage" Use of Women's Work

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1950s, because of strict rules or disciplinary action, because of marriage or pregnancy, or because of the decision not to re-enlist at the end of their term of service, the number of women leaving the RCAF was considerably high. For example, 3,147 women had enrolled into the Service in 1951, but 505 had been released by 31 August 1952.¹ For its part, the RCAF did not seem willing to make the changes that were necessary to keep women in the Service.

However, while the need for more personnel in the RCAF had surfaced in the early 1950s, the demand began to evaporate by 1959. The main reason for this was two-fold: the founding of the North American Defence Command (NORAD) and a major change in radar technology. The birth of NORAD meant that the command of air defence in Canada and the United States became centralized in the United States. Also, combination of two of the lines and one radar "super-station", replaced the former technology. The result was that it now took far less personnel to run the technology than previously.

The declining need for personnel was quite drastic, and the RCAF began to

¹W.E. Kennedy A/C A/VCAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 489, file 393.100.98, Release, Female Personnel, Memo to AMP, c. 1952.

look at ways to quickly limit the numbers enrolled in the Service. Its first solution was quite simple. Aware of the high attrition rates of service women, the Air Force stopped recruiting them. They were thus able to drop the numbers of women in the Service by almost 75% between 1960 and 1963. However, the RCAF had a further goal. By 1965, it decided not to keep women in the Service any longer, and it began to look at ways to eliminate them from the Force altogether.

In the end, the RCAF needed the permission of the federal government to do so. This request was denied. The government claimed that too many women were now in the workforce, and that the RCAF could not completely deny them access. The Air Force would thus have to keep a minimum number of airwomen in the Service. But this did not mean that the government opposed the use of women's attrition rates to lessen their numbers in the Force. Indeed, in the Department of Labour's Manpower study of 1966, the government authorized the RCAF to continue to use women in order to expand and contract its personnel whenever necessary.

REASONS FOR LEAVING

The RCAF did not blame its own policies when faced with the high rate of attrition of service women. Although it felt that the latter were doing good work, the high "wastage" rates was attributed to the women themselves, and to their "low morale". During the period of recruitment, the solution was to "encourage [recruitment of] the type of women needed" - that is, of women who would stay

regardless of conditions. If that was not possible, there would be further reductions.²

The RCAF did consider the stated reasons behind the women's departure. A number of the women left to get married. However, others were discovered to be "obtaining their releases under the provisions of this order without later getting married",³ in order to leave before their terms of service was complete. It was then ordered that a letter from the person authorized to perform the ceremony be provided to certify that the arrangements had been made and to confirm the date of the impending marriage.⁴

There were other apparent reasons why women were leaving. For example, one Commanding Officer at Whitehorse complained that his unit had lost 40% of the female strength posted to his Radio Unit. Out of forty women at his station, 1 had transferred, 1 had been discharged for security reasons, 2 for compassionate reasons, 3 for medical reasons, and 9 for marriage. And, at that time, he had received more applications for discharge which were still being processed, again because of prospective marriages.⁵

²"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

³R.C. Weston G/C DAPC (4591), NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 488, file 393.98, vol. 1, Release, Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to AMP, 11.09.1953.

⁴R.C. Weston G/C DAPC (4591), NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 488, file 393.98, vol. 1, Release, Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to AMP, 11.09.1953. This memo also mentioned that some women overseas were being released for marriage, and were being stranded in Europe if the marriage did not take place. It was ordered that women overseas should not be released until after marriage.

⁵C.L. Olsson W/C Commanding Officer, RCAF Station Whitehorse, YT, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 3, Enlistment in the RCAF - Policy Governing, Memo to Air

Disciplinary action taken by the RCAF against some women also accounted for their departures. Like airmen, an airwoman could be disciplined for any number of reasons, such as not getting up on time, or for not keeping an orderly appearance. However, automatic dismissal only occurred in the cases of pregnancy and of female officers marrying enlisted men. But dismissal - although not automatic - did occur for other more minor infractions. The RCAF did not sentence women to field detention, such as hours standing at attention, which was a common disciplinary action for men, since it often involved physical hardship. The unforeseen result was that women were submitted to court-martial for relatively small infractions if consistently repeated. This in turn led to a higher percentage of women than men being imprisoned or discharged.⁶ The RCAF took steps to avoid this situation occurring too often. They included in the "Scale of Punishment" the disciplinary measure of "forfeiture of pay in lieu of detention".⁷ This action led to fewer women being automatically dismissed or sent to court-martial; however the numbers remained high compared to men.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The RCAF considered the suggestions made to lower attrition rates. One was to change the length of women's engagement from three years to five years, and

Officer Commanding, Tactical Air Group Headquarters, Edmonton, 11.03.1953.

⁶"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954. The numbers of women dismissed is not included in the minutes.

⁷"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa," NA RG24, 17835, file 842-8, Administrative Services - Women Administration Officers' Conferences, c. 1952.

another was that the length of re-engagement be shortened to two years from three years.⁸ Although this type of suggestion was made more than once, it was never implemented.⁹ Yet, at least one of the women interviewed would have re-enlisted had the repeat term been shortened.¹⁰ Another proposed solution to stem the flow of women leaving the Service to be married was to raise the maximum age at which a woman could enlist from 30 to 35 years. The idea was that a larger percentage of women over 30 would remain single than those in the 18 to 30 age group.¹¹

As already pointed out, the RCAF argued that the airwomen's high rate of attrition was indicative of the low morale afflicting many. It ultimately laid the blame for low morale on the women themselves, stating once more that if it could keep the "undesirable" type of woman out of the Service by screening more thoroughly at recruitment, the ones remaining would have a higher morale.¹² The RCAF also referred to those airwomen who had been sheltered at home, only to find themselves in the company of people who smoked, drank, and swore. Then there were women

⁸"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

⁹J.G. Archambault G/C for CAS, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 298, file 304.103, Enrolment, Terms of Service, Memo to Air Officer Commanding, Training Command Headquarters, Trenton, 07.03.1955.

¹⁰Interview A6.

¹¹V.J. Favrot S/L CO RU Van, BC, Enrolments - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to Chief of the Air Staff, Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 03.05.1955.

¹²"Minutes of a Conference - Women Administration Officers from Command Headquarters held at Air Force Headquarters, Ottawa, 1 to 4 Feb. 1954", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 851, file 470.28, Ground Training - Self-Improvement Programme - Female Personnel, 1-4 Feb. 1954.

who had joined impulsively, whom the RCAF viewed as immature and obstinate. Finally, many women did not feel comfortable with female officers, especially those recently appointed, who were labeled by the hierarchy as "inexperienced" and "immature."

The only problem for which the RCAF took responsibility was the case of women who were misemployed because the air stations could not yet accommodate them, and who were unhappy with the jobs they held.¹³

It is hard to know just how low morale really was. If the RCAF was gauging morale by the higher rate of attrition among women, then this was an unfair test. Women had shorter enlistment periods, and it was far easier for a woman to be discharged from the Service than it was for a man. Another indication may have been the amount of complaints from the women compared to the men. Morale certainly seemed to be high among the women interviewed. However, as mentioned, those interviewed came from a rather enthusiastic group of former airwomen. Nevertheless, every one of the women interviewed stated that, if they could, they would re-enlist.

CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY

The airwomen's high rate of attrition continued to plague the Air Force throughout the 1950s. Yet the Service seemed incapable or unwilling to implement policy which would alleviate the situation. Instead, by the 1960s, a number of

¹³E.P. Sloan S/L CO1 STAU, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 489, file 393.100.98, Release, Female Personnel, Letter to Air Officer Commanding, Training Command, RCAF, Trenton, 15.10.1952.

changes took place which altered the RCAF's stance on women's employment in the Service. Changes in technology greatly reduced the staffing requirements, and the RCAF was able to use women's high attrition rate to easily cut its personnel.

This shift in perspective began to take shape after Canada entered the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) agreement on 24 July 1957. NORAD combined the air defence of Canada and the United States to defend the continent against a Soviet attack. At the time, the RCAF felt that the ties to the stronger American Air Force would serve to advance Canadian defence.¹⁴ Closer ties with the US also meant that the Canadian military would no longer have complete control over defence technology, but would have to design policies with its American counterpart.

It was under the auspices of NORAD that the radar warning system technology was modified. Firstly, NORAD realized that the Mid-Canada line offered too little warning to be useful by 1959. It was found that by the time fighters were unscrambled as a result of a Mid-Canada Line warning, the targets were under surveillance by Pinetree radars.¹⁵ Thus, the short additional warning time did not warrant the expense of maintaining and operating the defence line. In 1957, the

¹⁴Jack Granatstein, *Canada 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986. Other works that describe the evolution of the concept of continental defence from a Canadian perspective include J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer's *For Better or Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s*, Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991; and, Robert Bothwell et al., *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

¹⁵Canadian Forces, "The Mid-Canada Line," *Communications and Electronics Newsletter*, 1982, vol. 1, D.His. 82-253, p.62.

RCAF began shutting down some of the radar stations in the Mid-Canada line. The central and western Canadian portions of the Mid-Canada Line were completely shut down by 1964. The eastern section was closed down in 1965. This decision by itself affected the airwomen directly. The primary reason they had been hired was to run the radars that made up the Mid-Canada line.

In addition, the end of the 1950s saw the birth of two new radar technologies: the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) system, run in conjunction with the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS). The installation of SAGE began in 1957, and by 1962, its effects were being felt by the airwomen of the RCAF. There were fewer radars needed in the SAGE system than had been with the old warning system, because the new radars were heavier and had a longer range (up to 3,000 miles). As well, these radars could be controlled by a central location. Furthermore, much of the work that used to be done by staff could now be done on computer. This resulted in most of the Pinetree line being revised to be controlled by SAGE.

These three technological developments meant that there were far fewer fighter control operators needed to run the new system. It was no longer necessary to have someone constantly monitoring a radar screen, nor to have someone search flight plan messages to correlate the targets and plans.¹⁶ With the advent of SAGE, no longer was it necessary to have someone find the height, monitor a scope, plot a flight's course, etc. Whereas it had once taken thirty airwomen and airmen to staff

¹⁶C.B. Weick F/O RW4-2-2 (8259), NA RG24, vol. 17992, file 977-3, vol. 1, Telecommunications Data Processing Ground Environment, Memo, 04.11.1955

a watch, it now only took four or five. When one of the women interviewed (who had been a former flight control operator) went to see one of the new stations, she had a hard time believing it took so few people to run the radar system.¹⁷

As a result, by the early 1960s, there were only three new stations needed to monitor the same amount of territory¹⁸ that had been monitored by the Mid-Canada line and the Pinetree line.¹⁹ The SAGE system was located in North Bay, Ontario, in a large underground complex, making the North Bay area "the most important operational centre in Canada."²⁰ It also meant that North Bay was the only station in Canada that continued to need a significant number of Fighter Control Operators.

However, even at North Bay, the number of Fighter COps needed were not as high as previously. Between 1961 and 1964, North Bay alone went from being a three squadron station, to being run by only one squadron.²¹ As well, in 1961 alone, at least five other squadrons were disbanded as a result of the introduction of the SAGE and BMEWS System.²² The number of surplus personnel would increase even further.

¹⁷Interview A1.

¹⁸On completion, the plans called for seven stations across the Continent.

¹⁹"Dewline and BMEWS (Ballistic Missile Early Warning System)", NA RG24, vol. 17909, file 900-950-3, Public Relations - Telecommunications - Radar Equipment, c. 1959; and R.J. Gillis F/L Secretary Trade Structure Committee, "Trade Specifications - Fighter Control Operator", NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 573, file 421.100.F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter Control Operator, Memo, 16.03.1959.

²⁰"SAGE Goes Underground," Pamphlet, Ottawa NORAD Sector, 1964, p. 3.

²¹"SAGE Goes Underground," Pamphlet, Ottawa NORAD Sector, 1964, p. 3.

²²"RCAF in 1961-1962," D.His. 75-200, Report to the Ministry of Defence, p. 16.

It was not only the Fighter Control Operators that were affected by technological change. Also introduced in conjunction with SAGE and BMEWS was the BOMARC missile programme (which replaced the AVRO Arrow enterprise²³). These missiles, which were directed from the ground, replaced the airplanes which were employed to intercept alien aircraft. The airplanes, which were costlier to build and maintain than missiles, also needed ground and flight crew to operate them.²⁴ In this case, technological change thus affected the airmen more directly than the airwomen.

In 1959, the RCAF realized that the advent of SAGE in the Canadian Air Defence System would materially alter the trade specifications for Fighter Control Operators,²⁵ meaning that far fewer numbers within the trade would be needed. The RCAF decided to eliminate 1196 Fighter Control Operator positions between 1960 and 1962.²⁶ However, those numbers would not be cut across the board. Instead it decided that women working as Fighter Control Operators would no longer be employed in those duties, and would be "gradually phased out", either by compulsory reassignment or by release. This action was lessened by the concurrent decision that, until definite action regarding the women's careers was taken, the latter would

²³Canada was to build two missile sites at a cost of 14 million dollars, far less than the 100 Arrows that would have been needed to do the same job. See Robert Bothwell et al., *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981.

²⁴"RCAF in 1961-1962," D.His. 75-200, Report to the Ministry of Defence, p. 16.

²⁵F.R. Sarty S/L for AOC ADC, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 573, file 421.100.F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter Control Operator, 16.03.1959.

²⁶"Minute Sheet," NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 573, file 421.100.F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter Control Operator, c. 1960.

continue to be employed in duties associated with the trade. The women to be reallocated could prioritize three available trades for their transfer; if recommended, they would be posted to these new duties.²⁷

The RCAF had another major problem besides having too many Fighter COps; it now had surplus male personnel in other trades as well. The RCAF resolved to keep the men. In order to do so, male personnel would replace women in all the capacities held by the latter until all the men were re-assigned.²⁸ Only women would therefore lose their jobs as a result of technological change.

To achieve its objectives, the RCAF stopped recruiting women in 1962. The Service wished to reduce the number of women to 1000, and they adjusted their ceilings accordingly. As a result, whereas in 1960, there had been over 2 800 women enrolled, in 1962, the enrollment stood at 2,024. By 1963, there were 1,830 women, and in 1966, there were only 530 women left in the Air Force.²⁹

While women were leaving the Air Force through attrition, the RCAF was also shrinking the number of trades which women were allowed to enter. In 1958, sixty-three trades were listed for women. These were gradually whittled away until, in 1963, there were only thirteen trades open to women,³⁰ the others having been

²⁷CANAI RHED, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 573, file 421.100.F4, RCAF Trades and Branches - Fighter Control Operator, c. 1960.

²⁸"RCAF in 1961-1962," D.His. 75-200, Report to the Ministry of Defence, p. 16.

²⁹E.R. Johnston G/C DPersP, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.98, vol. 3, Enrolment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to AMP, 11.12.1962, and "Women in the Canadian Forces: Past, Present and Future," D.His. 77-411, Ministry of Defence, p. 4.

³⁰It is not known which trades were open to women at this time.

turned over to the men.³¹ Although women's attrition rates lowered their numbers quickly, this action certainly encouraged those women who might have re-enrolled to leave at the end of their term of service. As stated earlier, many of the women interviewed stated that they had joined in order to have a choice of jobs that would not have been so easily available to them in civilian life.

The RCAF justified its policy by arguing that women were too expensive to train. There were four months of basic training, followed by eighteen months of trade training, which adds up to twenty-two months. Women signed up for, and tended to stay, an average of thirty to thirty-six months.³² For their part, men signed on for sixty months. But, as already demonstrated, this was not a new development. As long as the RCAF needed airwomen on radar, this expense was acceptable; it now was invoked as the main reason for their exclusion.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR'S MANPOWER STUDY

By 1965, the RCAF (as well as the other Services) was ready to take the final step, which was once again to close the doors to women, as it had at the end of the Second World War. However, the RCAF could not simply disband the women as it had done after the war. Women were now integrated in the units with the men.³³

³¹Research Branch, Library of Parliament, "History of the RCAF (Women's Division) 1941-1971," D.His. 90-447, file 104, 1971, p. 6.

³²Research Branch, Library of Parliament, "History of the RCAF (Women's Division) 1941-1971," D.His. 90-447, file 104, 1971, p. 5.

³³"Women in the Canadian Forces: Past, Present and Future," D.His. 77-411, Ministry of Defence, p.4.

Nevertheless, the RCAF did recommend their dismissal to the Government.³⁴ It did not consider this as an extreme step. It was simply a natural outcome to a changing context. Since women were no longer necessary, they should be let go.

The government did not act upon this recommendation. In 1966, the Labour Department's "Minister's Manpower Study" rejected it formally. This study, which took into account the drive towards the unification of the Canadian Armed Forces, gave a number of reasons for the refusal. It stated that, based on past performance, women had demonstrated that they were capable of continuing to work in the Armed Forces. It also argued that, by 1965, one-third of the civilian labour force was made up of women and that consequently, an all-male force would not reflect this changed context.³⁵ The federal government's reaction demonstrated that women were now more welcome in the paid labour force, and that the range of occupations available to them had broadened considerably.

This is not to say that the Manpower study recommended complete equality between women and men in the Armed Forces. Rather, women would continue to work in the RCAF, but with a number of restrictions. The study considered women to be a flexible and inexpensive workforce, to be used accordingly. It found that, overall, women were cheaper to use in the force than men because women could be recruited when the forces needed to expand, while their high attrition rates meant that

³⁴Lt-Col. Lois J. Davis, "Employment of Women in Canada's Armed Forces Past and Present," D.His. 86-330, file 236, 1966, p. 10.

³⁵"Minister's Manpower Study," Report to the Ministry of Defence, D.His. 75-520, 1966, pp.148-149.

their numbers could be lowered easily when necessary. In spite of the positive aspects of women's work, men would remain the predominant sex in the Armed Forces. As well, while men's lower attrition rates meant that they often had to be kept on for longer periods of time when they were not needed, women could be drawn upon to work in temporary positions more easily. Furthermore, because women who married could not renew their term of service, housing airwomen was less expensive than posting the men, the majority of whom were married. To help lower the cost of employing even more, the study recommended that women work at trades that consisted of short training periods, and that the number of those trades be limited (See Appendix II). Finally, the ceiling for women in the Armed Forces (which by then would be unified) should be placed at 1,500, with the recommendation that women not be employed to the detriment of male personnel.³⁶

In sum, although the RCAF could not eliminate female personnel completely, the glaring inequalities between the women's and men's terms of service would continue. In addition, women would not have the choice of careers that they had enjoyed in the 1950s, while the jobs they would now hold would be considered less skilled.

There was, at least, one positive dimension in the study's recommendations. While it did recommend restrictions on women's enlistment, for the first time the RCAF was not allowed to shut women completely out of the Service. The Minister's

³⁶Minister's Manpower Study," D.His. 75-520, Report to the Ministry of Labour, pp.148-149.

Manpower Study suggests that women were now considered to have, like men, a right to be part of the military workforce, although not on an equal basis with men.

Conclusion

The 1950s and early 1960s were a time of change for women in Canada. In spite of the continuing restrictions placed on women's private and public lives by prevailing gender constructs, married and single women entered the paid workforce in increasing numbers. This would have a significant impact on RCAF policy by the mid-1960s. Simply by virtue of their larger numbers in the civilian paid work force, women had thus imposed a change on the Air Force.

One suspects, however that the RCAF did not basically change its former attitudes towards women. While admitting women in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Air Force had put up several barriers that prevented them from a career similar to that of men. It also tried to impose moral guidelines on airwomen. There was no suggestion that these attitudes would change as a result of airwomen remaining in the Service. The Canadian Manpower Study itself did not make any recommendations regarding the promotion of women in the Air Force.

Evidence shows that the women interviewed in this study are representative of other airwomen. They suggest that the reasons which led them to leave had little to do with decisions regarding technological change, including the one to no longer employ airwomen. In effect, they had more to do with other aspects of their lives, such as marriage and children.

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the restrictions placed on women, in the terms of enlistment, in the number of jobs available to women, and in promotion did much to ensure that a career in the Air Force did not offer possibilities for advancement. It is not surprising, then, that the number of women who joined the Air Force never reached original expectations. Many women were not tempted to join, while a number chose to leave after their first term of enlistment ended.

The restrictions that the RCAF placed on women extended beyond their working lives. As discussed in Chapter Three, through a variety of means, the Air Force tried to instill traditional feminine virtues in the women, and to compel them to behave with a strict demeanour. However, airwomen did not necessarily adhere to the Service's standards. They tried, rather, to live as closely as possible to their own codes of behaviour. But they paid a price. If airwomen married civilians they were dismissed from the Air Force. If they became pregnant, they were let go. If they behaved in a "deviant" manner, such as engaging in homosexual activity, they were discharged. If they did not adhere to the code of discipline imposed by the Service, they were sent to court martial at a much higher rate than were men.

We have seen how many enlisted women responded to the RCAF's inflexibility. They left at a high rate, although not necessarily due to their own choice. Most of the women interviewed stated that they would have remained in the Air Force, that they would do it all again if they could, and that they would recommend Service life to women today. However, with only two exceptions, they all left in order to marry or have children.

For its part, the RCAF used women's attrition rate after the radar technology changed

to reduce its personnel. At first glance, it appears that the RCAF had used the women as a reserve army of labour once again, and that women were powerless against such a policy. However, as seen in Chapter Four, the RCAF did not have to put in place all kinds of restrictions to lower the number of women in the Service. A large number of women were leaving for various reasons. The RCAF thus simply took advantage of airwomen's already high attrition rate to attain its goals.

The ease with which the Service was willing to let go of women is rather perturbing, although not really surprising. In effect, its policy was changed because of government intervention. However, the federal government itself was not moving towards women's equality with men in the forces. Rather the Department of Labour's Manpower Study claimed that women's presence and role in the paid labour force were increasing and that the Armed Forces' policy had to reflect this new reality. However, the Manpower Study also restricted the role of women and also perceived them as temporary workers, who could eventually leave for marriage and motherhood.

Studying the women in the RCAF, by considering their point of view as well as the interplay between their social, personal and work lives has demonstrated two major themes in women's history: that women's work pattern is very different from men's; and that women do have a certain amount of control of their lives. Women are not necessarily always "victims" of prevailing gender constructs. Often the choices that they make have little to do with those that may be made for them in and out of the workplace. Still today, the Canadian Army is having trouble recruiting women. Polls show that women are still less interested in joining up, and that they are less inclined to believe equal career opportunities

are open to them. In addition, the attrition rate for women compared to men is four hundred percent higher. Yet, officials are still not sure why this is the case, and they cite physical demands being too great, or an inhospitable work environment and harassment on the part of the men . However, women only make up 1% of the combat positions, and it is still in combat trades that promotions come most quickly.¹ Women thus are still not being promoted, and are not welcomed, in spite of all but two trades in the Air Force being open to them.² But the Armed Forces do not realize that recruiting women and retaining them will always be difficult, simply because of the nature of the military structure and culture.

¹Jeff Sallot, "Canada wants a few good women," in the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 24.03.1998

²The two trades are submarine duty in the Canadian Navy, and Roman Catholic chaplain in all branches.

Appendix I

Reference form questions:¹

Name, employment, etc.?
Father's and family's character?
Does she respect elder and parents?
To what extent has she displayed intelligence?
What are her attitudes to school and job?
What is state of discipline in the home?
Is she self-supporting?
Does she have hobbies?
Does she have average self-confidence?
What is her personality type?
What is her maturity level?
Does she smoke?
Does she drink?
Is she honest and trustworthy?
Are her associates older? younger? same age?
Does she go to church?
Does she belong to any church organization?
What type of people does she associate with?
Are her male friends of high morale standing?
Does she have high morals and unquestionable character?

¹D.M. MacPhee (Doctor) F/L MORU Edm, NA RG24, Acc. 83.84/049, box 297, file 304.100.98, pt.1, Enrollment - Female Members of the RCAF, Memo to RU Edmonton, 09.03.1953.

Appendix II

Trades Open to Women

1951 (RCAF):²

Meteorological Observer	Fighter Control Operator
Supply Technician	Clerk (Accounts, Administration, Typist)
Communications Operator	Aircraft Control Assistant
Dental Assistant	Medical Assistant
Tailor	Safety Equipment Technician
Armament System Technician	Communications Technician

by 1955 (RCAF), these were added:³

Driver (Light Vehicles)	Electrical Technician
Operator Punchcard	Instrument Technician
Laboratory Assistant	Radar Technician (Air and Ground)
Radiographer	Photographer
Security Police	Physical and Recreational Training Instructor
Parachute Rigger	

as recommended by the Minister's Manpower Study, 1966 (for all three services), these were the trades that remained:⁴

Nursing Assistant	Flight Attendant (Specialty of Nursing Assistant)
Switchboard Operator	Stenographer
Naval Operations	Operations Room Assistant
Fighter Control Operator	Data Processor
Teletype Operator	Communications-Message Centre Clerk
Dental Assistant	Medical Assistant
Operating Room Assistant	X-Ray Technician
Transport Operator (Light Vehicles)	

²S.I. Evans S/L for Chief of Air Staff, Ceremonies and Celebrations - Anniversary of Women in RCAP, NA RG24, vol. 17862, file 853-13, Memo, 07.03.1961.

³Research Branch, Library of Parliament, *ibid.*, pp. 3-4. Apparently, (although there was no list found), there were sixty-three trades open to women in 1959, which had shrunk to thirteen, by 1963.

⁴"Minister's Manpower Study," *op.cit.*, pp. 149.

Appendix III

Trades available to women in World War II:⁵

Administration	GD Batman
AEM	GD Standard
AFM	Hairdresser
Aircraft Helper	Fingerprint Classifier
Aircraft Recognition Instructor	Hospital Assistant
Armourer (Bombs)	Instrument Mechanic
Bandwoman	Laboratory Assistant
Canteen Steward	Laundry Woman
Clerk Accounting	Link Trainer Operator
Clerk Engineering	Meteorological Observer
Clerk Administrative	Motor Mechanic (MT)
Clerk C & C	Optometrist
Clerk Education	Operator Medical Audit
Clerk General	Operator Telephone
Clerk General Special	Osteopath
Clerk Library	Parachute Rigger
Clerk Medical	Pharmacist
Clerk Operations BR	Photographer
Clerk Fighter (Ops)	PT & D Instructor
Clerk Fighter	Radar Mechanic
Clerk Flying Control	Radiographer
Clerk Postal	Radio Telephone Operator
Clerk Stenographer	Safety Equipment Worker
Chef	Safety Equipment Assistant
Chef Hospital	Service Patrol
Dental Assistant	Specialist Medical
Dispenser	Standard Tradeswoman
Draughtsmen	Tailor
Driver Transport	Teleprinter Operator
Electrician	Ward Mistress
Equipment Assistant	Welder
Entertainer	Wireless Mechanic
Fabric Worker	Wireless Operator
General Duties	

⁵"Establishment of Women in RCAF (Reg), RCAF (Aux), and RCAF (Res)," NA RG 24 Acc. 83.84/049, box 438, file 362.100.98, vol. 2, Employment Airwomen, 21.08.1950.

Appendix IV

WOMEN AND WORK IN THE RCAF, 1950-1966

QUESTIONNAIRE

PART A - PROFILE:

PARENTS

1) Place of Birth:

Mother: _____ Father: _____

2) Education: Did they complete grade school?

Mother: Yes _____ No _____ Father: Yes _____ No _____

3) Did they complete high school?

Mother: Yes _____ No _____ Father: Yes _____ No _____

4) Did they complete university?

Mother: Yes _____ No _____ Father: Yes _____ No _____

5) What level of study did they complete?

Mother: _____ Father: _____

6) What was their area of study?

Mother: _____

Father: _____

7) Occupation:

Mother: _____

Father: _____

SELF

8) Name:

9) Birthdate:

10) Birthplace:

11) Education: Did you complete grade school?

Yes _____ No _____

Year completed: _____

12) Did you complete high school?

Yes _____ No -----

Year completed: _____

13) Did you complete university?

Yes _____ No _____

What level of study did you complete? _____

What was your area of study? _____

Year completed: _____

14) What was your marital status upon joining the RCAF?

Single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Separated _____ Widowed _____

15) Did you hold an occupation previous to joining the RCAF? Yes _____ No _____

If so, what was the occupation?

If not, what were you doing prior to joining?

PART B - RECRUITMENT

- 1) How were you recruited into the RCAF?

- 2) Why did you join the Air Force? In other words, what were your aspirations in joining up?

- 3) During which years were you part of the Air Force?

- 4) What was your rank at the beginning of your Air Force career?

- 5) What was your rank at the end of your Air Force career?

This ends the short answers part of the questionnaire. From now on, most of the answers you will be giving will be longer, and in your own words. If you feel that there is not enough space for your answers please feel free to continue on another sheet, or on the back of the questionnaire. Because the theme "women and work" in the Air Force is central to my thesis, I am very interested to know the different aspects of work in which women were involved. Therefore, many of the following parts asking questions about your training and about your job will include questions about the sex of the persons with whom you trained and with whom you worked. As well, I am aware that dates and length of times in some stages of training and in some jobs may be hard to remember. If so, approximate times would be appreciated.

PART C - TRAINING

There were most probably two or more levels of training involved before you commenced working at an actual trade or post. Although I have endeavoured to be as specific as possible in regard to these levels, I am aware that I may have missed some stages of training. If so, there is a question at the end of this part pertaining to any levels that I may have left out. If a level of training mentioned is not applicable to your case, please write "N/A". As well, I am aware that officers may have had different types of training than enlisted personnel. If this is true in your case, please correct the terminology used when answering the questions.

Boot Camp:

- 1) How long were you at boot camp?
- 2) What sort of training did boot camp entail? (Physical Exercise, Drill, Classwork, etc.)

Please be as specific as possible.

- 3) What rank did the person or persons training you hold and what was their sex?

Language training:

- 4) Was it necessary for you to take language training? If so, why?

- 5) How long was the language training period?

- 6) What did this training entail? (Classwork, tests, on-the-job training, etc.)

- 7) What rank did the person or persons training you hold and what was their sex?

Job Training:

8) For which job were you trained?

9) How long was the training period?

10) What did this training entail? (classwork, tests, marking scheme, on-the-job training, etc.)

11) What rank did the person or persons training you hold and what was their sex?

Other Training:

12) What other training was involved in your years in the RCAF?

13) Why did this training take place?

14) How long was the training period?

15) What did this training involve? (classwork, field work, on-the-job training, etc. This answer should also, if possible, include how much emphasis was placed on theory, and how much on practical work)

16) What rank did the person or persons training you hold and what was their sex?

As you are probably aware, before 1951, women had never been part of the permanent force of the RCAF. Therefore, as women who worked in the period from 1951-1966, you can rightly be considered as pacesetters for the women who would be part of the service in the future. It is important, therefore, not only to know what work you did, but it is also necessary to know how your contribution to the Air Force was regarded by yourselves, the people with whom you worked, the people for whom you worked, the RCAF, and society in general. As a result, many of the questions in the next two sections deal not only with the work you did, but how that work was perceived, and how you were treated as members of the RCAF.

In addition, in the past twenty years, much has been said concerning women's equality and the road taken to achieve this equality. According to RCAF press releases in the 1950s, women who were being recruited were treated equally to the men in the RCAF. The only exceptions that these press releases indicated was that women would not be able to train as pilots, and that, upon marrying, women would have to leave the Air Force. Other than that, the RCAF said that women would have the same pay and benefits as the men, and be treated completely equally in other circumstances. This having been stated by the Air Force, it would be interesting to see how true this is by the answers to the following questions. If you feel, however, that these questions limit your point of view, please feel free to add whatever comments you wish to the questionnaire, as I would not like any viewpoint to be imposed on yours. Please answer these questions from your own point of view.

PART D - WORK PROCESS:

1) Could you request a specific job to hold in the Air Force? Yes _____ No _____

If you could, did you get that job? Yes _____ No _____

If the answer is no, please state the job in which you were interested:

2) What job(s) did you hold in the Air Force and for what period of time did you hold that job(s)? (If you held more than one job, please try to include which years you held each of those jobs.)

3) What rank and job title did your supervisor(s) hold and what was their sex?

How much authority did your supervisor have over you and your job?

4) Please give a concise job description. (What did this job entail?)

5) How was this job perceived by the Air Force at the beginning of your tenure at that job? (Skilled, semi-skilled, or unskilled work? If other terms were used, please use those.)

6) From your own experience on the job, was that a fair assessment? Why?

7) Did this assessment by the Air Force change during your tenure of that job? If so, what reasons were given for this change?

The following questions compare men's jobs with women's jobs in general:

8) Were the jobs that men held perceived equally to women's jobs? (in regard to skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled labour?)

9) If a man and a woman were supposed to be performing the same job, was the content of the work identical? (ie. would the man be given a more technical part of the job?) If they were different, how could that be explained?

10) Did women receive comparable pay to men?

Yes _____ No _____

If not, how was that justified?

Technology:

11) Part of this project is interested in the type of technology with which women worked during this period of time. Therefore, if you worked with *any* technology (from washing machines to radar scopes) during your years in the RCAF, please name it, describe the work you did when working with the technology.

Did you feel that the technology with which you worked easy or difficult to master?

Did the women with whom you worked feel the same way?

Did the men with whom you worked feel the same way?

Were there any changes in the technology during your time in the RCAF?

If there was change, what was that change?

What were the consequences of that change?

.../13

Many of the following questions assume that you had both male and female supervisors and co-workers. If that is not the case simply answer N/A (not applicable).

1) Briefly describe your work space.

2) Did you share this space with anyone else? Yes _____ No _____

If so, was this other person a co-worker or a supervisor?

3) In your job, did men and women share the same workspace, or were they segregated?

When it comes to the term, "women's equality", the meaning of that phrase has changed since the 1950s and 1960s. Questions 4 and 5 are concerned with the concept of equality, and ask you for answers that demonstrate the attitudes for both time periods. In other words, when you were part of the RCAF, did you consider the working reality to be equal for men and women? Perhaps you feel that equality was an irrelevant issue at the time; the second part of the questions then ask you whether you would feel the same way today.

4) As far as the way you were personally treated, would you say that the hierarchy in the RCAF treated women and men equally? Why do you feel that way?

Would you say that your supervisor treated men and women equally? Why?

Would you say that the men with whom you worked treated you the same way as they treated men with whom they worked? Why?

5) Would you say that you treated male supervisors equally to female supervisors? Why?

Would you say that you dealt with female co-workers the same as male co-worker? Why?

6) During the 1950s and the early 1960s, would you say that, as a woman, you found obstacles to doing your job? What kind of obstacles? (If so, and you worked beyond 1966, would you say that this improved in later years?)

PART F - LIVING ENVIRONMENT

1) Describe briefly the housing arrangements made for you by the RCAF both during your training and working periods, and whether they were adequate.

2) To your knowledge, did these living arrangements equal the housing arrangements for men? Yes _____ No _____

If not, how did they differ?

Did the rules of conduct for men and women differ outside of the work environment? If so, how? (You may wish to use examples).

PART G - DEPARTURE

1) What were your reasons for leaving the RCAF?

2) Having had the experience you did in the Air force, would you join again if circumstances permitted, and why?

3) With your experience in mind, would you recommend the Air Force as a career to other women?

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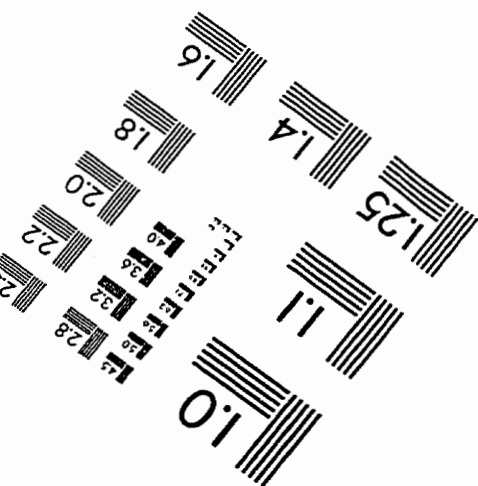
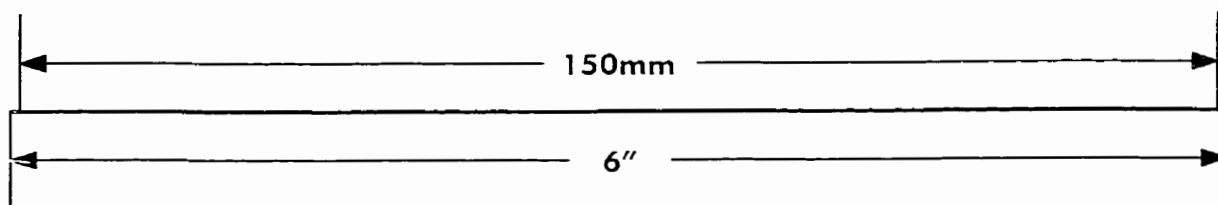
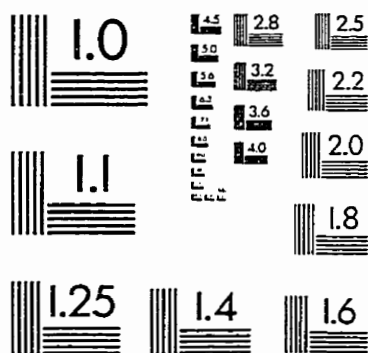
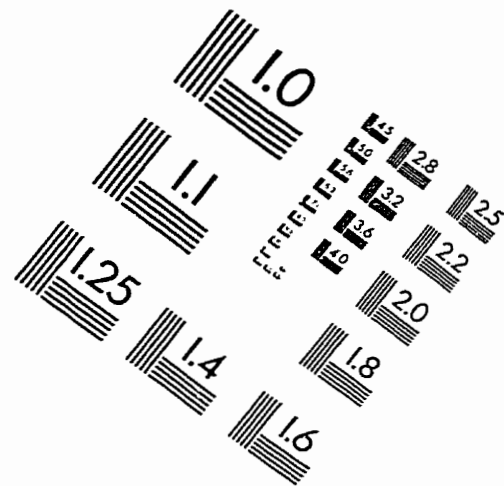
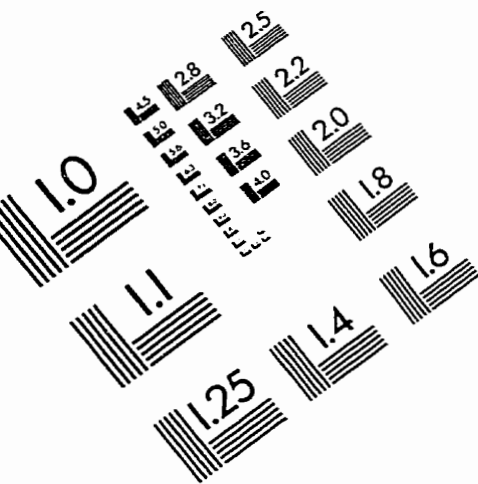
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