



LIPSTICK & HIGH HEELS: WAR, GENDER AND POPULAR CULTURE

BY EMILY SPENCER

KINGSTON
CANADIAN DEFENCE ACADEMY, 2007
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Review by Anne Pennington

Emily Spencer's *Lipstick and High Heels* carries a provocative title, but the content is more apt to make feminists cringe. I have to admit that I winced more than once or twice while reading Spencer's book, though not because of the quality of the author's work. The graphics on the cover of the book are evocative of both Harlequin Romance covers and Bonnie Parker. The front cover illustration depicts a uniformed woman being embraced by a uniformed man. Her high heel shod leg, if not quite raised in the air in suggestion of surrender, is at least ready for the reflex. The back cover includes a photograph entitled "The Bren Gun Girl." The "girl" is a full grown woman, cigarette in hand, smoke billowing from her lips, sitting beside the gun in a casual, but familiar manner. Her posture and facial expression mimic Bonnie's legendary demeanour. Upon further reading, I realized that the juxtaposition of the cover graphics is not the only mixed metaphor or contradiction offered in Spencer's work.

The author has a Ph.D. and Master of Arts in War Studies from the Royal Military College of Canada. Her bachelor's degree in psychology is from Dalhousie University. At the time of publication, she was employed as a researcher at the Canadian Forces Leadership Institute.

Lipstick and High Heels is a study of how women were portrayed in popular Canadian

culture, mainly by *Chatelaine Magazine*, during World War II. Spencer claims that her study is unique in that her work includes an almost 30 year span (1928-1956), whereas many similar studies do not include both pre- and post-war periods.

An important assertion that Spencer makes early in her work is that the images *Chatelaine* projected of women during the Second World War years were unlike those the magazine offered in the 1920s and 1930s. Those earlier images were of a woman who could conduct herself with assurance in both "public and private spheres and her competence was not a direct measure of her femininity."¹ The advent of the war caused a significant about-turn in values. At the dawn of the Second World War, importance was placed on women's role in the home as well as maintaining her femininity and beauty at all times. Women were expected "to marry as part of the war effort."² Women (especially white Anglo-Saxon, middle-class women) were made to feel obligated to become mothers to offset the declining birth rate of their group, and counteract the "rise in birth rates amongst other racial groups."³ Says Spencer, "these ideologies raised the status of motherhood to not only a cultural ideal, but also a racial duty."⁴ Pre-war, it was not assumed that any woman would naturally be a "good" mother. With advent of the war, women were

“considered innately good at mothering.”⁵ At the same time, men began to be depicted as poor fathers.

The reader is informed that in November 1942, the Department of Munitions and Supply for Canada sponsored an advertisement, which was published by *Chatelaine*, that urged women to do their part for the war effort by keeping “that man of yours fit and happy for his job.”⁶ The advertisement included the catchphrase “Brave men shall not die because I faltered.”⁷ *Chatelaine Magazine’s* articles and editorials laid similar heavy burdens on female readers’ hearts during the Second World War.

The editor of *Chatelaine Magazine* during most of the period that Spencer studied was Byrne Hope Sanders (1929–1952). Sanders herself was a contradiction. While she advocated the role of women as homemaker and encouraged that they leave jobs to the men, she was the main breadwinner in her home. Her husband was an artist whose trade left him without a means of steady cash flow for the family. On at least one occasion, Sanders described the motives of married women who worked as “selfish reasons – nice clothes, luxuries.”⁸ Her own situation, however, told a different story. Spencer cited many other instances when Sanders contradicted herself in print. I smiled at Spencer’s narrative when she described the era after World War II as a “schizophrenic period for Canadian women”⁹ and stated that “Sanders’ editorials were characterised by paradoxical shifts in attitude.”¹⁰

Of particular interest to readers of this journal, perhaps, is how Spencer describes the image of enlisted women who formed the women’s divisions of the armed forces. She restates

“Brave men shall not die because I faltered.”⁷

“we are the women behind the men behind the guns,”

“we serve that men might fly,”

“we serve that men might fight.”

others’ assertions that “traditional attitudes towards women were ultimately reinforced during the war”¹¹ and that evidence was provided of this by the wartime mottos of the women’s services such as “we are the women behind the men behind the guns,” “we serve that men might fly,” and “we serve that men might fight.”¹²

She describes a “whispering campaign”¹³ against the Canadian Women’s Army Corps and the advertising campaign put into place to counterbalance the notoriety that ensued.

Posters of adventurous women were replaced with images of “feminine, patriotic girls.”¹⁴ Spencer reports that the “image of women in uniform seems to have been particularly jarring”¹⁵ to *Chatelaine*. An advertisement seeking female volunteers to enlist in the

Navy read “they want eager ambitious young women who enjoy homemaking and housekeeping.”¹⁶

Whether or not gender and popular culture studies are of a particular interest to the reader, Spencer’s work offers a unique and significant historical perspective. It is important to remember though, that Spencer’s work does not describe a female voice, but a hegemonic voice that influenced Canadian females. Byrne Hope Sander’s editorial work was a reflection or extension of the same hegemonic voice. Just the same, *Lipstick and High Heels* describes an important facet of Canadian women’s history and experience. Emily

Spencer’s work serves to remind readers that they can become pawns to popular culture whenever they allow themselves to be, and warns them of the potential for manipulation disguised as patriotism. It prompts them to read not only academic works, but any media, with a keener awareness of the writer’s motive or with what has been coined a “hermeneutic of suspicion.” ■

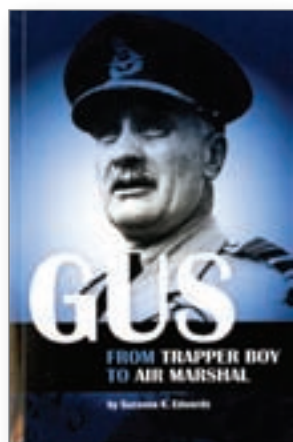
Anne Pennington is Production Manager at Canadian Forces Aerospace Warfare Centre and is presently Civilian Chair of the 8 Wing Defense Women's Advisory Organization. Her mother was a member of the RCAF Women's Air Division in the Second World War and a peace-time member until her career was ended because of pregnancy in the late 1950s. She remembers her mother's stories of the time span Spencer's work covers including how she missed the Air Force and often wonders how different her mother's story might have been in another era.

Notes

- 1 Emily Spencer, *Lipstick and High Heels: War, Gender and Popular Culture* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy, 2007), 4.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 125.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 125.

- 5 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 56.

- 11 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 179.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 180.



GUS: FROM TRAPPER BOY TO AIR MARSHAL

BY SUZANNE K. EDWARDS

RENFREW, ONTARIO:
GENERAL STORE PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2007
234 PAGES ISBN 978-1897113745

Review by Major Bill March

Suzanne Edwards' book is a rarity in Canadian military history circles; a full length examination of a senior Canadian airman. That this airman happens to be her father, and that the book is not a full-fledged scholarly publication, does not detract from either her accomplishment or the importance of the subject. Although, arguably, Air Marshal (A/M) Harold "Gus" Edwards is a pivotal figure in the history of the Canadian Air Force, it is equally true that he deserves study as a leader whose attributes cut across service boundaries.

petitioned to join the fledgling Canadian Air Force (CAF). For most of the next six years, he would pilot flying-boats on mapping and forestry patrols from various locations in Manitoba. Between 1926 and 1933, he held various staff appointments in headquarters in England and Ottawa before returning to flying operations in the Maritimes. Promoted to the lofty rank of

A/M Edwards' early career could be used as a primer for the study of air power in Canada. He joined the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) as a pilot in 1915 and flew bombing missions in France. Shot down in April 1917, he was taken prisoner by the Germans and despite attempting to escape several times, he remained their "guest" until the end of World War I. As a Captain in the Royal Air Force (RAF), Edwards joined 47 Squadron supporting the Allied intervention against the Bolshevik government in Russia. Finally demobilized in July 1920, he returned to Canada where he

Wing Commander (W/C) in 1936, he was one of the most experienced permanent force officers serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) prior to World War II.

As the RCAF rapidly expanded during the early years of the war, Edwards found his leadership and management skills put to the test as the Air Member for Personnel. He was responsible