

## “It’s a Man’s Life”: Masculinity and the Marketing of Post-war Military Employment

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**Research Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to analyze the way in which military employment was marketed by the Canadian state in the early Cold War period. A key finding is that appeals to masculinity were fundamental to recruitment strategies, though other sorts of strategies were also used.

**Source material:** This paper is based primarily on advertisements appearing in Canadian daily newspapers including one national paper: *The Globe and Mail* and two, smaller regional papers: *The Winnipeg Free Press*, and *The Coast News*.

**Keywords:** masculinity, military, marketing, postwar, work, youth, Canada

In March of 1947 a *Globe and Mail* editorialist lamented the “sorry state of affairs” and the “unsatisfactory plight” of Canada’s military. What especially worried this observer were the apparently lackluster results of the military recruitment campaign launched just one year previously. No doubt with memory of massive WWII mobilizations still fresh in mind – more than 700,000 Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen active at the height of the conflict - some must have found the less than 50,000 enlisted members counted in the late 1940s as pathetic. In fact, though not yet evident to this observer, the real story of the early postwar years was that the Canadian state would build up the largest peacetime standing army the country had ever known. Though never reaching the numbers mobilized during WWII, between 1947 and 1961, the strength of the combined forces more than tripled, from 35,000 to over 115,000 members. (DHH, Personnel Members Committee Fonds)

The social historian might wonder: how was this massive, (largely) peace-time growth achieved? While the state took several approaches to expanding its military strength, this paper explores just one of these, the use of newspaper recruiting ads. These provide a fascinating look at the marketing of the military. While the analysis of ad copy has long been used as a methodological tool for historians of consumption and marketing, intent on discerning the fates and fortunes of particular consumer products, here advertising is analyzed for its use in “selling” what was, in effect, a new employment option, namely peacetime military service. My argument is that the way in which the state appealed to potential recruits reveals much about popular understandings of masculinity in early post-war Canada. Simultaneously, ads reveal that youth were the prime targets of the state’s campaign and - since youth itself was a category of shifting definitions (Owram 1996; Gauvreau 2002; Wall 2014), this sometimes inspired marketing strategies attuned to this reality.

As recent scholarship has shown of the Great War, the state was discriminating in its acceptance of recruits (Clarke, 2015); in postwar years, age operated as one of the central filtering mechanisms. Even the most cursory survey of postwar recruitment ads reveals that the state sought youthful members above all. By 1949, most ads stated explicitly that army, navy, and air force recruits as young as 17 were welcome to enlist. Other ads used images of youthful faces and bodies to make clear the same point.

How did the state entice young Canadians to commit themselves to full-time military employment? For one, it offered the same inducement that had motivated “boy soldiers” for generations: the chance to prove one’s manhood on a national, even international stage. (Tim Cook, 2008; Hurl-Eamon, 2015) Typical and recurring ad slogans urged teens, though not legally adult, to think of themselves, unequivocally, as “men” and military work as an assured strategy for enhancing masculine identity. “Life at sea is a challenge. It’s a man’s life” naval ad copy read. (*Globe and Mail*, 1955) Other ads spoke in similar terms, with references to “men” and allusions to manliness sprinkled liberally throughout both text and images.

While the state used gender as a tool to motivate male youth, the imagery invoked was not the reflection of some timeless notion of masculine identity. Instead, ads provided an intriguing reflection of masculinity as refracted through the changing socio-economic conditions of postwar Canada, as scholars have argued in other realms. (Rutherford, 1999; Dummitt, 2007). One way this was apparent was in the continual emphasis on the “modern” nature of the postwar military. Situating the masculinity

they promised clearly within the postwar love affair with progress, science, and technology, ads exhorted young men to “be modern,” since they'd be called upon to “handle modern scientific equipment: electronics, radar, radio, [and] telephone.” Potential communications recruits, for instance, were flattered with the notion that with their “wireless, telegraphy” and other “electronics,” “a single message could be the deciding factor of victory or defeat.” Potential postwar gunners, for their part, were assured that the accuracy of new “complex radar equipment” literally allowed them to “turn their backs on the target.” (*Coast News*, 1950, 1951).

Recruitment ads reflected the tenor of the times in others ways, in particular as they reframed military service as stable career choice, rather than valiant sacrifice, as was typical during wartime. While heroic and nationalistic appeals were not absent from postwar recruiting, what is most striking is the marketing of military service as career, a wise economic choice, and youth's pathway to education and steady work. Images which accompanied ads were chosen to reinforce the new depiction of military service. Though a tough, physical masculinity was clearly projected in many ads, in others a slightly different “brand” of masculinity was also on offer. In one, men were pictured on the telephone, filing paper work, and typing documents (of all the presumably unmanly activities!) The message seemed to be that the domesticated, less than macho “organization man” also had a place in the new, modern forces. In the same vein, the list of job benefits, regularly described in detail, gave the impression that postwar masculinity could co-exist with, indeed might boast, certain material comforts. The latter included: “free clothing, excellent food... attractive accommodation, free recreational and sports facilities,” free medical and dental care, lifelong pensions, and thirty days paid leave per year. Leaves, for their part, facilitated another “perk” of the job, namely, travel and tourism. “Go Places! Go Navy!” may have been the slogan of choice to attract sailors, but all three Services promised “foreign travel” as a clear advantage of employment. Repeated highlighting of these benefits, insinuated what one ad urged explicitly: “Serve Canada *and Yourself* in the Army” (emphasis added), words one could hardly imagine being used during the recent war.

Finally, aside from “direct marketing” to youth, a smaller number of ads targeted parents, reflecting, again, the social realities of the times. In one, fatherly pride was appealed to three times, but significantly, parental worries were also addressed. As scholars of postwar childhood have shown, worries about children's security - indeed parental worries in general - seemed to proliferate in postwar years. (Gleason, 1999; Hulbert, 2004) In efforts to counter these, ad copy assured fathers that their sons' educational, employment, and financial futures were guaranteed. In the shorter term, the state assured parents who consented to teens enlisting in apprenticeship programs that their “boys” would “live together under planned supervision in special wings” and would not be posted immediately to regular army units. (*The Globe and Mail*, 1952) To borrow Jeanine Hurl-Eamon's turn of phrase regarding the motivations of eighteenth century boy soldiers, a “manly independence” this was not, whatever the rhetoric of becoming “men” used when targeting youth directly.

To sum up, the state's marketing of military employment was facilitated by their appeal to masculine identity, to economic advantage, and to parental concerns. Though never easy to measure the influence of marketing precisely, the manner in which it is approached certainly has much to tell us - in this case as in others - about what is valued, what is feared, and how it is that marketers believe we wish to see ourselves.

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