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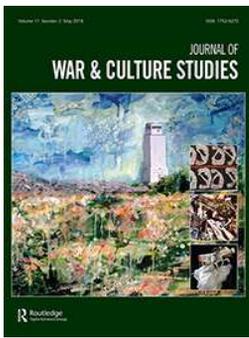
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Jessica Hammett

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‘The Invisible Chain by Which All Are Bound to Each Other’: Civil Defence Magazines and the Development of Community During the Second World War

JESSICA HAMMETT 

School of History, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, Leeds, UK

This article uses local collaboratively produced civil defence magazines to examine how community spirit was developed and represented within the civil defence services during the Second World War. It highlights the range of functions which the magazines performed, as well as the strategies employed by civil defence communities to manage their emotions in order to keep morale high and distract personnel from the fear and boredom experienced while on duty. The article also discusses silences in the magazines — especially around the experience of air raids — and argues that this too reflects group emotional management strategies. The significance of local social groups in developing narratives about civil defence and their workplace communities is demonstrated, and the article shows how personnel were able to engage with and refashion dominant cultural narratives of the ‘people’s war’ in order to assert their own status within the war effort.

KEYWORDS Second World War, the ‘people’s war’, civil defence, community, morale, humour, emotional management

In an early issue of Sheffield’s *All Clear!* civil defence magazine the editor declared it to be ‘the invisible chain by which all the members of ARP are bound to each other throughout Sheffield and its area’, and continued by praising ‘the “family atmosphere” of good fellowship’ which the magazine would help to develop (1940: 3). Statements like this were often written for civil defence magazines and these

aspirations were shared by personnel across the country. This article will explore the range of ways in which the magazines were used to develop a sense of community within local civil defence. It will also show the role that local social groups played in co-producing narratives about their position within the ‘people’s war’.

Civil defence — also known as Air Raid Precautions or ARP — was organized as a response to the expectation that the bombing of civilians would be a prominent feature of any future conflict, and it included the warden, firewatch, rescue, first aid, ambulance, decontamination, and fire services. Recruitment began in January 1938 and most members were part-time unpaid volunteers. Membership peaked in December 1943 at 1.9 million, over seventy-five per cent were male and over eighty per cent served part-time (O’Brien, 1955: 690). The state realized that group cohesion was essential for the successful functioning of the services and the Sub-Committee on Air Raid Precautions — a secret committee established in 1924 to prepare for a future war — compared the need to instil esprit de corps within the organization with the military and the police (The National Archives, 1924–1935). However, due to lack of time and money very little was done by either central or local government to assist in its development. Civil defence personnel themselves were frequently left to devise their own strategies for group bonding, and civil defence magazines became central to this effort in many places across the country.

In their stated purpose of facilitating the development of community, civil defence magazines offer a new lens through which to view the ‘people’s war’. According to the ‘people’s war’ narrative the whole population ‘pulled together’ to ‘do their bit’ in order to secure victory, obeying official instructions to ‘stand firm’ and ‘carry on’. The myth and reality of the ‘people’s war’ and the existence of ‘community spirit’ have been central to debates around the British home front since Angus Calder’s seminal work of 1969, *The People’s War*. Calder acknowledged the complexities of wartime society — moral and immoral, optimistic and defeatist — but argued that there was, nevertheless, solidarity and support for the war. Since its publication most works dealing with the home front have been compelled to engage with this debate and reached a similar conclusion. Most significant amongst these is Sonya Rose’s *Which People’s War?* She highlighted the contradictions and instabilities in the national community in terms of class, race and gender, and explored the many possible meanings that the ‘people’s war’ could be given by different people at different times: ‘They were unified and they did pull together. They understood themselves as being members of the nation, even if they could not agree on how the nation was constructed’ (2003: 290).

Although civil defence could represent many of the key features of the ‘people’s war’ — they served both the local and national community to a greater extent than other groups, and demonstrated democratic spirit, inclusivity and volunteerism — historians have paid this group surprisingly little attention. Where civil defence is discussed, it is usually in order to demonstrate the voluntary spirit of the population or, conversely, to highlight social discord through the popular

hostility shown to personnel, or to emphasize official incompetence (Overy, 2013: 141; Todman, 2016: 489–92). The work of Susan Grayzel and Lucy Noakes is a notable exception here. Both have discussed how air raids targeting civilians resulted in the domestication of warfare, with citizens becoming implicated in the defence of their homes and families as well as the local and national community, and they have explored how expectations for volunteers differed depending on gender, class, and race (Grayzel, 2012; Noakes, 2012; Noakes and Grayzel, 2013). In addition, Helen Jones has stressed the importance of friendship and group identity in civil defence (2012). This article builds upon these insights by examining how those communities were developed and represented by civil defence personnel.

Through civil defence magazines we can examine a range of strategies which were employed to develop a sense of community and, still more significantly, they show us how local social groups were able to engage with and refashion dominant cultural narratives of the ‘people’s war’. This article begins with a brief overview of the magazines. The second section explores some of the ways in which communities were represented and developed, and shows that the magazines offered a space where civil defence personnel could fashion a group identity and demonstrate their value within the war effort. The third section highlights the entertainment value of the magazines, with a focus on jokes. Humour could distract readers from boredom or fear while on duty whilst at the same time defining community boundaries. And the final section considers silence in the magazines. Although work during air raids was an important aspect of the experience of civil defence, ‘bomb stories’ were rarely told and were sometimes actively discouraged. This silence, I suggest, reflects community strategies for emotional management.

Civil defence magazines

Civil defence magazines give an unusual and rich insight into local social groups and everyday life inside the civil defence services. They were collaboratively produced within cities, towns and boroughs across Britain; editors worked in civil defence and requested contributions from other local members. They were bottom up initiatives, with local leadership rarely involved, and they often began in isolation without any knowledge that others existed. A Mass-Observation report estimated that ‘at least some hundreds’ were being produced in July 1940, and at least 60 survive.¹ These vary in size from single page bulletins to magazines of 100 pages, some were professionally printed and bound while others were written on a typewriter with pages stapled together, and most cost between one and three pence. Features ranged from training material and official information to social updates, jokes, stories and poetry. They were set up at various points during the war and most ran for a year or two before money, rationed paper and interest were exhausted, although a couple were published for the duration of the war.

¹Most of the surviving magazines are held in the Imperial War Museum and British Library.

Civil defence magazines were widely read within the services. Few indicated their circulation, but the *ARP Magazine* of Wembley and *The Wardens' Post* of Bedford aimed to sell five thousand copies, while Bristol's warden magazine *The Siren*, and its auxiliary fire service publication *The Jet*, both reached 3500 (*ARP*, 1939; *Wardens' Post, Bedford*, 1940b; *Siren, Bristol*, 1940c; *Jet*, 1940). These were large numbers for relatively small communities — there were around 4000 wardens in Bristol at the time (*Siren, Bristol*, 1940b: 2) — and we can assume that each magazine would have had multiple readers. Others were much smaller: *Four Times*, the magazine for a single ambulance station in Kensington, was limited to 150 (1941). The content of the magazines suggests that they were expected to be read since they were used to communicate official information and advertised future recreational events. While a small group of writers tended to feature in each issue, they would usually be joined by a number of one-off contributors, and for a 20-page magazine there would generally be 15–20 different authors.

The magazines could play a central role in the development of group identity and cohesion. Writers were in an unusual position because they addressed their writing to the civil defence group of which they were a member, and by writing they also became representatives of that group. Often the contributor was explicitly writing on behalf of their post. Most would have felt the pressure to produce a contribution that their audience — a reasonable proportion of which we can assume they knew personally — would agree with. There is some evidence that the reading of the magazines was also a group activity, and they were certainly sold and read at the post while on duty. The group setting in which this reading and writing took place was crucial for the development of these narratives — which often challenged public representations of civil defence — and collaboration gave them a power which it would have been more difficult to produce alone.

Although civil defence magazines have rarely been used by historians, similar arguments have been made by Joanna Bornat and Ben Jones in their work on community publishing. Jones has argued that the Brighton publisher *QueenSpark* 'provided a forum in which ... dominant narratives of the council estates could be contested', and which could 'transform everyday, lived experience ... into something coherent, storied and shared' (2012: 126); and Bornat argued that these forums tended to be 'more subversive of myths of community' (1992: 24).

The magazines also have similarities with the trench newspapers of the First World War. These were used to stimulate esprit de corps, help cope with everyday hardships and entertain, and the positive and unified image that they projected of the group helped to negotiate sameness and difference (Fuller, 1990: 13; Audoin-Rouzeau, 1992: 3, 12–14). Graham Seal has argued that they were a 'communal response' to the horror of the front line, representing 'a collective rather than an individual commentary, validated to a large extent by their soldier audience', and because they were co-produced they could offer a forum to challenge and mock representations of the front line experience which featured in the mainstream press (2013: 2).

Civil defence magazines were produced in not dissimilar conditions. One of their key aims — aside from developing community spirit — was to refute a public perception that civil defence was superfluous and personnel were deliberately avoiding more significant and dangerous work; criticisms which persisted for much of the war with the brief exception of the Blitz. In response, personnel used their magazines to stress the ongoing threat of air raids and the continued need for civil defence. This primarily served as a means for members to reassure themselves, although the magazines did have a limited external readership.

Collaborative publications produced in peacetime and during war have shared many common features. The women of the Cooperative Correspondence Club (which ran from 1935 to 1990 and has been studied by Jenna Bailey) developed a shared identity but also valued diversity — in terms of age, location, religion and politics — and, in the same way as civil defence magazines, they offered a space for writers to express different views while at the same time reaffirming their membership of the group (2007: 11–12). Collaborative publications have also frequently been written for posterity. Lucy Robinson has explored how contributors to zines have used them to build a ‘collective sense of pride’ and write themselves into history for the present and the future (forthcoming), in the same way that civil defence writers asserted their value for both contemporary and future audiences.

Yet the significance of citizenship within the civil defence magazines and trench journals give the wartime publications a different emphasis. The soldiers contributing to trench journals during the First World War stressed that they were making the ultimate sacrifice for the nation and their views, therefore, had greater legitimacy than those of civilians. Civil defence personnel, on the other hand, stressed their high status within the war effort by framing their behaviour within the ‘people’s war’, and asserting that their contribution to the war on the home front was paramount.

Civil defence magazines, then, highlight the everyday concerns of personnel, reveal how work and leisure patterns at the post were used to develop community, and show that the production of group narratives and identities was a collective endeavour.

Representing community

The chief warden of Bedford was typical in his desire that *The Wardens’ Post* magazine would ‘succeed to the full in achieving the object which you have at heart, namely the promotion of esprit de corps and cohesion’ (1940a: 1). The magazines facilitated community by allowing individuals to continually imagine themselves as part of the group even when face-to-face interaction with other members was not possible (see Anderson, 1983), and this was achieved by keeping readers up to date with civil defence news as well as through creative efforts to represent the community.

Literary contributions were usually encouraged by editors, and magazines regularly featured character sketches, both humorous and serious in tone, or

‘personalities poems’ in which each post member appeared. *The B Twenty-One Magazine* of Lewisham, London, featured ‘Personalities?’ in September 1940, which began:

First Mr Nimmo, he’s our boss, we all treat him with awe,
 He’s got a troubled “Tummy” from the 14–18 war,
 If he hasn’t got a tummy, he has a heart instead,
 And 21 are lucky to have him at the head.
 Now Mrs Kirby who can say her value to the post,
 Her cheery smile and helpful words endear her to the host.
 Well, there you have our Ma and Pa, we’ve got two of the best,
 And having paid our tribute, we get on with the rest.

And so it continued, describing a further 43 wardens (30 men and 13 women) who all had their place in the post ‘family’. Equating the post with home and family emphasized the intimacy of the community, and this was often reinforced by affectionately teasing other members. In ‘Personalities?’ for example:

But hush! Please do not wake him, our Mr Laughton sleeps,
 When once he blew his whistle, it laid him out for keeps.
 As for Mr Lewis however hard I try
 I cannot understand the cause – when with the girls – he’s shy (1940: 3).

Literary efforts could take the form of a mock history, situating civil defence in a long line of service. *The Wardens’ Post* of Edinburgh declared ‘That the wardens service is new is a fallacy if we delve into history ... service to the community comes down through the ages’ (1939: 7). Both Sheffield’s and Middlesbrough’s magazines commented on the introduction of firewatchers in 1677 to be stationed ‘on top of the highest Steeple where he may look all over the town’, probably inspired by a letter published in *The Times* which quoted from the ‘Rules to prevent fires in the City of London, and in the great cities in England’ (*Times*, 1942; *All Clear!*, 1943a: 5; *Middlesbrough Wardens’ Post*, 1943: 11). These creative connections to the past might be understood in terms of Eric Hobsbawm’s work on ‘invented traditions’, which he explained as:

a set of practices, normally governed by overt or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (1983: 1).

The coats of arms which were designed by some posts similarly rooted them in an ‘invented tradition’, and simultaneously told a story about the identity of the small group. The magazine for Wembley urged all posts to design their own coat of arms, arguing that it would ‘build up esprit de corps, and ... decorate their quarters’. But the author also reminded would-be artists that there were rules, handed down from

when ‘knights led their followers into battle’: it was not obligatory to follow them, but it was ‘obviously much better for it to honour the ancient traditions, and for the wardens to be unreservedly proud of it instead of having to apologise for errors’ (1940a: 12). The designs tended to be quite similar and most featured tools used in civil defence work, but they usually had an individual twist which linked the group to the locality or the specific circumstances of the post. One ambulance station, for example, chose symbols from the Wembley shield and the national ambulance organization alongside a winged wheel for speedy service. A personal touch was provided by the inclusion of a phoenix, chosen because when the group’s depot burnt down they ‘rose from the ashes’, and their motto was ‘ruinis servere surgimus’, or ‘we rise from the ruins to render service’ (Figure 1, top left). In other areas the exercise was more light-hearted, and a fire station in Ilford included beer taps and rats on their shield (Figure 1, top right).

The rhetoric of the ‘people’s war’ profoundly affected the way that civil defence personnel represented their work and their communities. Individuals and groups engaged with messages around the ‘people’s war’ and reshaped them in order to explain their particular value within the war effort in specific ways. They represented themselves as active participants doing an important job as well as encapsulating key national characteristics. And through sharing qualities with civil defence across the country, and enacting these quintessentially British qualities more conscientiously than other citizens, personnel could imagine and represent themselves as key players in the nation at war and the epitome of Britishness.

In these representations civil defence mirrored the liberal democratic values of an idealized Britain. Bristol’s warden magazine called the organization ‘The greatest experiment in democracy ever tried’ (1940a: 14), while the *UXARP Respirator* of Uxbridge emphasized that it was ‘strictly democratic and non-partisan’ (1940a: 1). A contributor to *The Warden* magazine of East Bowling, Bradford, wrote that ‘Perhaps never before have the people of our Empire been called upon to make such a sacrifice for an ideal, the British ideal of liberty’, and identified civil defence as integral to this effort: ‘in this patriotic duty the ARP is doing its part’ (1939: 8).

Posts also prided themselves on the diversity of their personnel. Wembley’s Post 53 claimed that none was ‘richer in character’ as it was made up of ‘as varied and as cheery a crowd of fellows as they are ever likely to meet’ (1941b: 10). In Holborn, one writer dubbed civil defence ‘the “foreign legion” — because it must contain nearly as interesting assortment of men and women as can be found anywhere’ (1941b: 15). The opportunity for class mixing was commented upon too; in Wembley, for example, ‘the insurance agent from the bottom of the street going out in the intense barrage, midst falling bombs with the clerk and the plumber and the local tradesman to try to extract some poor family’ (1941c: 3). Friendships flourished despite different backgrounds and outlooks, and one contributor to *The Warden* of East Bowling wrote that their post contained men and women of all classes, who ‘quarrel about our politics, find fault with our government, and



FIGURE 1 ARP (1940a: 9); Pumper (1940: 9); *B Twenty-One* (1940): cover; ARP (1940a: 12); ARP Gazette (1940: 8); Warble (1942: 34). Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

grumble about everything we meet’, but nevertheless performed their ‘duty to unite against the common foe’ (1940: 17).

Civil defence magazines gave personnel an important space in which to develop these narratives, and they allowed personnel to imagine themselves as a member not only of their post community but also of the local and even national civil defence organization. Although the magazines were usually begun in isolation, without any knowledge that others existed, they are extremely similar both in their content and their representation of civil defence. There was also very little change over the course of the war. In the victory edition of the *B Twenty-One*

magazine of Lewisham, for example, the chief warden mirrored earlier statements by praising the ‘spirit of comradeship’ and the ‘understanding and friendship between us and our public’, and commenting that going into peacetime ‘every one of us will be a better citizen, and find happiness in giving service and help to our neighbours’ (1945: 1). Since personnel across the county were drawing on the same national culture in order to assert their status within Britain at war this should not be a surprise.

Geoffrey Field has argued that, ‘Like all such slogans, the “people’s war” was effective because it was vague’ (2011: 55–56). Civil defence volunteers emphasized some values and ignored others. Although the idea of ‘equal sacrifice’ often appears as the crucial element of the ‘people’s war’, this was ignored within civil defence and personnel instead claimed that their war work was of the highest importance, and, moreover, that they were enacting key national characteristics to a greater degree than other groups. And this shows that the ‘people’s war’ was not purely a narrative imposed from above, but was engaged with, modified and even in some respects created from the bottom up.

Humour

A key purpose of civil defence magazines was to entertain, and to this end they included stories, poetry, quizzes and comedy. As Peter Bailey and Andy Medhurst have emphasized, laughing at the same thing can develop a collective identity and a sense of group membership, but jokes can also mark the boundaries of exclusion (Bailey, 1994: 145–46; Medhurst, 2007: 18–19). This section will examine how a range of comic styles helped to build community and define boundaries within civil defence, as well as offering another means of connecting personnel to the attributes of the ‘people’s war’.

Teasing colleagues and superiors was a sign of affection and belonging, and helped to develop the local civil defence community. Many magazines featured a ‘What do you Think?’ page of one-liners, and Holborn’s was typical in the highly personalized jokes included, such as: ‘George Baldock’s inventions will certainly win the war for us — if we can only get Hitler to use them’ (1941a: 6). Jokes might mock the nature of civil defence work more generally, in particular the scarcity of air raids and the amateurish nature of the services. In *Humours of ARP* one warden joked: ‘Civil Defence workers in a small village in Somerset reported that they had so little to do that they spent their time covering up glow-worms with dock leaves, to hide them from enemy aircraft’ (1941: 45). Stirrup pump training was another favourite comic trope, and in Wembley a demonstration was ‘eagerly looked forward to by the delighted onlookers, whilst by the stirrup pump squad themselves, always with qualms and a certain amount of misgivings’ (1940a: 5). The cartoon from the *Fire Bulletin* of Wolverhampton is one of numerous comic depictions of the misuse of the equipment (Figure 2).

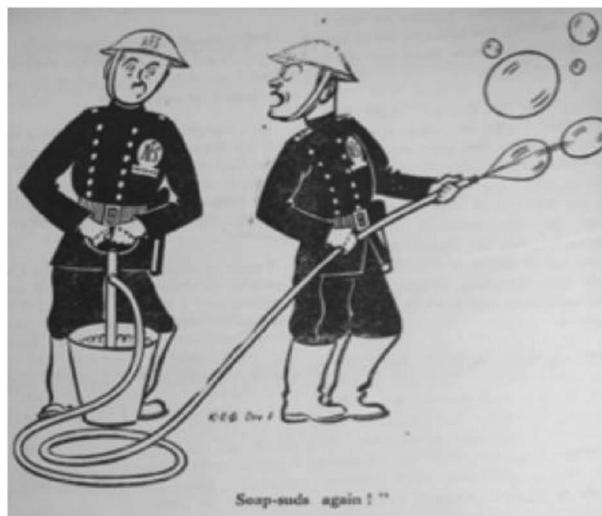


FIGURE 2 *Fire Bulletin* (1940: 2). Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

In Summerfield and Peniston-Bird's work on humour and the Home Guard they found that representations of the men as underprepared and relying on improvisation, with a focus on domesticity and the pub, were firmly linked to an affectionate view of the nation (2001: 414–15). Civil defence could be mocked in similar ways, but it is significant that in civil defence magazines personnel were producing comic depictions themselves for internal consumption, in contrast to the Home Guard cartoons which were printed in the national press. Civil defence personnel were prepared to laugh at themselves if the joke was produced by an insider; they did not always respond in the same way when mocked by outsiders.

Humour was a significant feature of the 'people's war' and the ability to laugh at oneself was thought to be a quintessentially British attribute, distinct from the humourless Nazi military machine. It also made personnel better at their jobs, helping them to keep amused during lulls and endure the horror of bombing. In Uxbridge the head of the control room wrote that:

Having a sense of humour is still considered to be one of the Britisher's strong points and one that enables him (and her) to stand up to, and endure, trials and tribulations that lay low so many other races lacking this national asset. (1940b: 16)

The wardens of Wembley were keen to emphasize that although they were frequently teased by other civil defence services in the borough, 'it goes without saying that we can take it' (1941a: 14).

Another popular topic was the romantic encounters which were facilitated by civil defence work. Sexual innuendo has its own social functions: Vic Gatrell has discussed upper-class humour of the eighteenth century in which innuendo

demonstrated resistance to new conventions of gentility (2006: 5), and, in his work on working-class comedy of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, Bailey argued that it scorned middle-class ideas about respectability (1994: 163). But innuendo was constrained by conventions of politeness as much as it pushed against them, and these jokes were ‘rooted in an era when sexual activity had to be laughed about because it could never be discussed more openly’ (Medhurst, 2007: 69, 131).

In civil defence magazines jokes about love and sex often served a similar purpose. The ‘Gas School Song’, a comic poem accompanied by risqué drawings, was published in Southgate’s *Blackout* magazine in December 1939 (12–13). It depicted a friendly community, bound together by mutual affection and good cheer. Decontamination centres were set up to clean the clothes and bodies of anyone caught in a gas attack, and the song highlighted the potential for sexual encounters through the work. ‘Stately Party’ blushed next to a naked man as ‘She removes their nether garments/ And prepares them for a wash’, and Joanie gave a suggestive wink while ‘she washes down real blokes’. This flirtatiousness continued after the men were clean, and they were invited to ‘Come up and see us sometimes boys’ (probably a reference to Mae West’s propositioning of Cary Grant in the 1933 film *She Done Him Wrong*). The song acknowledged that this was a new, and potentially sexualized, site in which men and women could come into close contact. However, while it implied the possibility of corruption, the song simultaneously mocked the moral sensibilities which deemed this work inappropriate for women. In spite of their blushes and winks, the women were good at their jobs and they made a good team.

Bailey has discussed ‘knowingness’ in music hall humour which helped to develop a collective identity amongst audiences (1994: 152–53). Jokes could help to build community, with shared laughter and a common disdain for moral concerns about the potentially corrupting influence of civil defence work. But, Bailey argued, ‘knowingness’ also served to dissipate unease about the hazards of city life with its newness and complexity, and to minimize anxiety. Humour in civil defence could familiarize the audience with life in civil defence and dissipate unease about the danger of the work. Wartime conditions were remodelled as a novel aid to courtship rather than being a source of fear. A joke in the *Hampstead Wardens’ Bulletin* described one man using his civil defence training as a rather weak excuse when found in a compromising position: ‘One of the District Wardens found two wardens of the opposite sex embracing in a pill box. “What are you doing?” he enquired. “Practicing First Aid” replied the man, “I’m just looking for her pressure points”’ (1939: 10).

If dispelling the fear of air raids was one motivation for jokes, coping with the position of women within civil defence was another. Many jokes cast women as a corrupting influence on their male colleagues and questioned their capability for the work. Summerfield and Crockett have suggested that sexual harassment of women in factories during the war could be a technique to tell them that they should not be there (1992: 440). Although less aggressive, many of these jokes do imply that women were not very good at their jobs. Belittling women could be a

means of coping with the perceived threat to the masculinity of men outside the armed forces, a particular problem for civil defence because men often served alongside women and their work was of equal status (Noakes, 2012). In Portsmouth, for example, *The Alert* magazine featured a series of dumb blonde cartoons featuring ‘Silly Sally’ (Figure 3). Both in dress and behaviour Sally was ill suited to her role as an air raid warden, but though sexualized she was not represented as promiscuous and was actually rather naïve.

Conversely, women were sometimes depicted as the sexual predators. In the ‘overheards’ section of *The Alert*, for example, we are left to guess the response when a female warden commented to her patrol partner ‘I think you were very wise to evacuate your wife now that my husband has been transferred to London’ (1942: 10). A more negative portrayal appeared in Sheffield: in ‘the lady warden’s wedding’ cartoon (Figure 4), she might look powerful but she has failed in her attempt to take control as the priest is unlikely to acquiesce to her demand to wed her to an unconscious man. Her character is unattractive, she has been unable to get a husband except through coercion, and the man she has picked can surely not be a ‘real man’ if he has fainted.

Although jokes might question the competence of women, they only very rarely excluded them from the civil defence community. Gatrell has argued that ‘woman-hatred was one of several reactions to women’s increasing cultural visibility and idealisation’ in the eighteenth century, but few were offended by the unflattering comic depictions of their gender (2006: 376, 387). Likewise, in the twentieth-

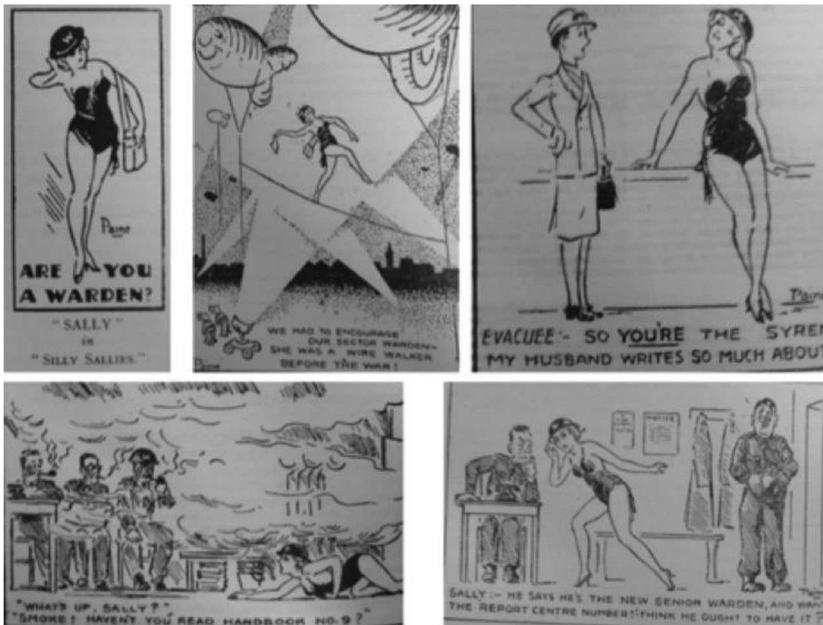


FIGURE 3 Alert, 1941–1942. Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.



FIGURE 4 *All Clear* (1943b: 31). Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

century comic productions discussed by Medhurst women were cast as bimbos, nagging wives, or interfering mothers-in-law, but the intended audience was made up of both women and men. Furthermore, he argued, being laughed at does not necessarily amount to exclusion (2007: 81; see also Roth, 2017: 58–62). The jokes which appeared in civil defence magazines were usually produced by men, some of whom were disconcerted by the role of women within the organization and sought to represent them as less capable. But although they may have undermined the authority and self-belief of some women, it is highly likely that other women enjoyed the jokes and they were often members of the intended audience. Furthermore, although women were the focus of many jokes men often played a role too. In ‘the lady wardens’ wedding’ (Figure 4), for example, the audience is invited to laugh at the feminized groom who faints as well as the bride.

Comedy was an important bonding tool within civil defence and having a sense of humour was a significant feature of the ‘people’s war’. But analysing these jokes is not without problems: as Lucy Delap has pointed out, comedy is highly context specific and it is not easy to decipher either what the humourist intended or how the joke might have been received by audiences, especially when it offends our own moral sensibilities (2010: 628–29). Although women were often depicted in an unflattering manner it seems likely that these jokes performed a similar function to those which mocked the nature of civil defence work, and, rather than excluding female colleagues, invited them to laugh together as a community.

Bomb stories

Thus far this article has explored what civil defence magazines included and how those features were used to develop and represent communities. The final section will focus on an aspect of civil defence work that the magazines were largely silent on: the experience of working during air raids. It may seem surprising that this work was not discussed because, first, it was the main purpose of civil defence and, second, this work provided evidence of the need for the services which could be used to refute the perception that civil defence was superfluous. But this silence might also suggest a further area in which civil defence communities played a significant role, that of emotional management.

Bomb stories did sometimes appear, and these focused on another characteristic of the ‘people’s war’: ordinary heroism. In Sheffield’s *All Clear!* magazine a first aider stressed the ‘exacting’ nature of the work, with shells bursting and bombs falling all around, but wrote that she did not intend to paint a ‘heroic picture’ as the workers were ‘ordinary men and women, drawn from the very homes they are serving’ (1941b: 32). A telephonist who walked to work during an air raid and then apologized for being late was said to demonstrate ‘the courage that is typical of all services’ (1941a: 1). These were not ostentatious acts of valour, but the gracious performance of an important job in challenging conditions, and it was suggested that ‘ordinary heroism’ was a characteristic shared by all civil defence personnel.

Modesty was also expected, thus the ambulance driver author of ‘Women in the Blitz’ in Holborn’s *The Siren* praised the courage and competence of her colleagues, paying homage in particular to the women who had been killed in action, but wrote nothing of her own work (1941a: 11–13). This magazine published a series of Blitz stories in early 1941 which, while not ignoring fear and horror, focused equally on the more light-hearted moments. In one account the narrator described the ‘baptism of fire’ on a ‘strange and terrible night’, but reflected that alongside the horror ‘There were moments of comedy, or sheer absurdity, lighter threads interwoven here and there’ (1941a: 3–5).

Yet these accounts were rare and were sometimes actively discouraged. When Holborn introduced a short story prize in February 1941b for prose entitled ‘My narrow escape from death’, the organizers instructed budding writers that ‘bomb stories are not banned, but they are boring and the less said about them the better’ (15). Similarly, *The Listening Post* of Coulsdon and Purley recommended shouting over anyone who told a bomb story (1940: 4), and an Ilford fire crew reported that their station had been bombed before reassuring readers that ‘we are not bomb bores’ (Pumper, 1941: 9). A Mass-Observation report claimed that during the Blitz ‘bomb stories peter out in boredom and ridicule ... In its place there grew a sort of dogged defensive toughness that sufficed to carry us through’ (1944: 80).

There are a number of reasons why Blitz stories may have been silenced. As already noted, modesty was a key feature of the ‘people’s war’ and was generally

encouraged over tales of heroic deeds. But this tendency might also reflect group strategies for emotional management. William Reddy has argued in his discussion of ‘emotives’ that ‘Community life must ... include a collective effort to prescribe, or at least establish models of, emotional management’ (2001: 331), and Barbara Rosenwein has described ‘emotional communities’ as ‘groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value — or devalue — the same or related emotions’ (2006: 2). Within civil defence certain emotions were expressed and others ignored in a group effort to manage the emotional responses to the war. As Reddy has argued, ‘emotives’ can ‘be used as tools for arriving at desired states’; claiming an emotional state might confirm it, although it may equally expose its falsity (2001: 322).

Civil defence work itself was thought to be a good way of controlling one’s emotions and the psychologist Wilfred Bion recommended in 1940 that almost the entire civilian population should play a role in civil defence as, he argued, the ‘call to duty’ and the sense of community (or ‘corporate feeling’) experienced in the services would both improve morale and reduce fear (187–89). The features of the magazines which have been discussed thus far all aided emotional management: helping to keep morale high; supporting the development of community; building pride in the work; and providing entertainment and distraction. This could help members control fear and panic, as well as the boredom and war-weariness which were at least as great a barrier to the maintenance of high morale as fear during the war.

Similarly, the absence of bomb stories from the magazines is likely to have reflected emotional management strategies employed in everyday life, in particular the belief that traumatic memories were best repressed. Lucy Noakes has argued that during the war grief ‘was closely managed; in an emotional economy that privileged stoicism and the public restraint of feeling ... elaborate public displays of emotion were seldom seen’ (2015: 83). Similarly, Amy Bell has explored the repression of fear ‘according to Britain’s strict emotional regime in which expressions of fear were bad for morale and a public embarrassment’ (2009: 175). Indeed, a whole range of troubling emotions were restrained due to the ‘emotional regimes’ of wartime, and this is reflected in civil defence magazines where the possibility of feelings such as fear, grief and defeatism was rarely recognized.

Yet Bell also found that moments of ‘intense terror ... cracked the facade of civilian bravery and allowed momentary expressions of fear to leak out in civilian writings’ (2009: 115), and, as we have seen, bomb stories featuring fear and horror did occasionally appear in the magazines. Moreover, in response to Reddy’s and Rosenwein’s focus on expressed emotions, Michael Roper has warned that this ‘assumes a relation to emotion in which unconscious or irrational motives are beyond the historian’s view, which begs the question: is emotion only present when it is the explicit subject of communication?’ (2014: 173). Roper answers this question by highlighting the different ways in which pain in the stomach was used by First World War soldiers to express their emotional and mental state (179–80).

Civilians during the Second World War also used physical complaints to discuss emotional responses as Hazel Croft has shown in the context of ‘war neurosis’, where many patients diagnosed with mental disorders had originally complained of physical symptoms (2016: 105–06). Contributors to civil defence magazines mirror other wartime writers in using ‘exhaustion’ to explain physical and psychological responses to the war. One warden from Wembley, for example, wrote that ‘excessive zeal’ resulting in loss of sleep ‘is to be deprecated, not praised’ (ARP, 1940b: 2), and a civil defence worker wrote to *The Times* to stress the importance of ‘the rest pause’, arguing that ‘to remain within the vulnerable area continuously and to be deprived of sleep invites both physical and moral collapse’ (1940).

If discussions of illness or exhaustion allowed personnel to discuss emotional and mental strain, referring to bomb stories as ‘boring’ could lead to repression. Jay Winter has argued that ‘silence is a socially constructed space ... Some people codify and enforce norms which reinforce the injunction against breaking into the inner space of the circle of silence’ (2010: 4). We can see this process occurring through civil defence magazines when bomb stories were dismissed as ‘boring’ and consequently silenced. And the use of ‘boring’ is notable here too as it suggests another layer of emotional management, masking the range of reasons why individuals might not want these stories to be told.

An unusually revealing account of silencing can be found in the Mass-Observation diary of a young female Ambulance driver. She wrote in September 1939, before having experienced air raids, of ‘a wordy battle’ which she had with a number of her colleagues who were First World War veterans ‘who insist on bringing up the subject of the last war occasionally’. She argued that ‘our imagination is lively enough, and we have no desire to have our nerves worn any sooner than is necessary by dwelling on things’. Hearing these stories undermined her emotional control. For the veterans, by contrast, it is likely that they were using their ‘bomb stories’ from an earlier conflict as an alternative method of emotional management, reassuring themselves that they had the skills and experience needed to cope during the air raids to come.

Conclusion

Civil defence magazines offered an important space in which community spirit could be developed, and they highlight a number of ways in which local social groups engaged with dominant narratives and cultural expectations during the Second World War. Through the collaborative production of the magazines we can see how identities and codes of behaviour were worked out: who was included in the community; what qualities and values civil defence represented; and what aspects of the experience could be discussed. Through the writers’ command of the rhetoric of the ‘people’s war’ they were able to develop alternative narratives about the status of civil defence and place themselves and their colleagues at the centre of the war effort. Through these magazines a group identity was developed which helped

members to cope with the reality of warfare and maintain high morale, although, as Noakes has recognized regarding grief, the long-term effects of suppressing certain feelings and foregrounding others could be disruptive (2015: 84). Near identical representations were developed in magazines across the country, from heavily bombed city centres to towns that saw no action. Thus, in contrast to the vast body of research which takes the Blitz to be the defining moment of the war on the home front in terms of both experience and identity, civil defence magazines highlight the significance of community in everyday life.

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Notes on contributor

Jessica Hammett is a Public Engagement Fellow at the University of Leeds. She is currently writing a monograph on civil defence, community and the ‘people’s war’.

Correspondence to: Jessica Hammett, School of History, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK. Email: j.m.hammett@leeds.ac.uk

ORCID

Jessica Hammett  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3564-5143>

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