

Two interesting bombers in Gander

(Robert G Pelley, 2018-07-09)
<http://bobsganderhistory.com>

Everybody knows that 11000-plus warplanes went through Gander en route to Europe during the Second World War. There were many types including the ubiquitous B-17 bomber, the Flying Fortress. These were usually associated with the United States Army Air Force. However the Royal Air Force also used a small number. This article mentions two different models.

The first was the B-17 "C" as shown below. The British called it the "Fortress1". Because the US was still neutral, it secretly offered five of them to the British in September 1940. After Franklin D. Roosevelt was re-elected president in November, the offer increased to twenty.

During April-June 1941, the Atlantic Ferry Organization, ATFERO, which preceded RAF Ferry Command, sent over these twenty B-17C's through Gander. The RAF gave them serial numbers AN518 through AN537.

The number on the side of the British B-17C below is partially obscured by a person standing next to it. This could have been done for wartime security purposes but most likely a simple accident. This number reads AN53x.

The first B-17C to land at Gander was AN534, which arrived on 10 April 41. Perhaps this was the occasion for taking a photo of this aircraft, especially as the snow would correspond with that date.



Here is the crew/passenger list of that flight. The Mrs Ross listed was quite probably the wife of Capt IG Ian Ross, the ATFERO boss in Gander at the time.

BOEING "FLYING FORTRESS"		
AN-534	F/LT. BULLOCK	RAF.
9APK	F/O PATTERSON	-
	F/O WATSON	"
	SGT. DOUGLAS	-
	SGT. LANNING	"
	CAPT. WALSH	
	SGT. WATSON	MRS. ROSS

If it was indeed AN-534, it did not last long, as it broke apart in midair in extreme turbulence over Willbarson, UK, and crashed 18 July 1941. But none of these lasted very long, with eight of these B-17C's lost within the first two months and withdrawn from operations over Europe.

The British weren't happy with these early B-17C's in the first place. One RAF officer had written a scathing report on the B-17C in 1938. The cupola in the nose, he said, was "more appropriately located in an amusement park than in a war plane." He also criticized its bomb load and performance. But given Hitler's plans to attack Britain, well, beggars can't be choosers.

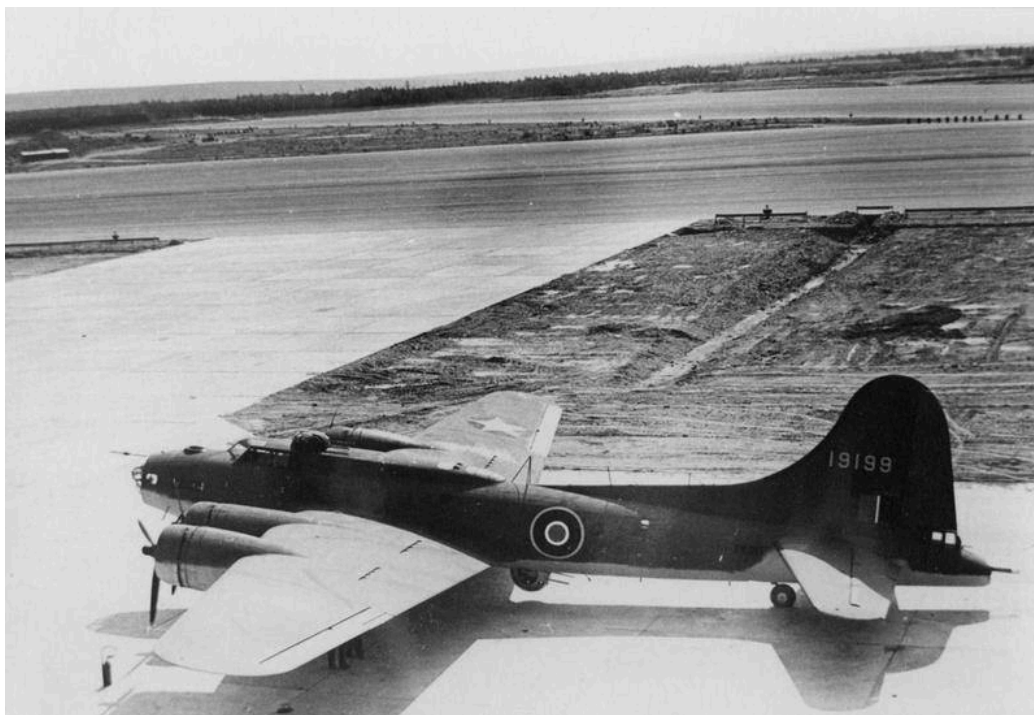
In RAF service the B-17s was designated as follows:

B-17C	Fortress I
B-17E and F	Fortress II
B-17G	Fortress III

The RAF received 20 Fortress I, 19 Fortress II and 85 Fortress III.

The photo below is of a B-17E, Fortress III, in Gander, waiting to be ferried over the Pond. It went to the RAF as serial number FK211.

The colour scheme and markings are somewhat unusual at first glance. While the bomber in the first photo has British markings and a British serial number, this one has a British paint job but still has American serial number (1-9199) on the tail. Who knows, maybe they were hoping to confuse attacking German fighter pilots!



It was flown Gander-Prestwick on 08 March 1942 with Pilot George Oberdorf at the controls. Two different squadrons, 206 and 519, flew it on maritime patrols off Scotland. This one lasted through the war!

It is interesting to note that while the second aircraft, the B-17E appears to have complete armament, the first, the B-17C, appears to have none, except possibly one up front. The C model was fitted with .303 machine guns in England, while the newer ones were pre-fitted with bigger - and better-.50. It was possibly a weight reduction effort, as the C model had less range.

-

NB. Darrell Hillier provided the list of the twenty B-17C airplanes and suggests the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhpJv1eTsLs>