

# An unusual WWII Gander token

(V2)

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As most people know, numismatics is the general word for collecting coins and similar items. Within that general classification, there is a sub-classification called exonomia which relates to numismatic items other than coins and paper money. This includes "Good for" trade tokens, badges, souvenir medallions, tags, wooden nickels and many other similar items. Many coin collectors are also exonomists. (The Brits tend to call this paranumismatica.)

There is a grey zone where trade tokens meet coins, as both can be used to obtain goods and services. This includes notably value-based items, such as *Good for (amount of money)*, *Good for one ride*, etc, while others were specifically linked to commerce of a store or place of issue, for example, a company town.

What could be called "trade tokens" have existed for thousands of years and all over the world. Coin-like objects from the Roman Empire called "spintria" have been interpreted as a form of early tokens and appear to have been even used as brothel or gaming tokens. Medieval English monasteries issued tokens to pay for services from outsiders. These tokens circulated in nearby villages where they were called "Abbot's money."

From the 17th to the early 19th century in the British Isles and North America, tokens were commonly issued by merchants in times of acute shortage of official coins. The token was in effect a pledge redeemable in goods but

seldom for currency. These tokens never received official sanction from government but were quite widely accepted and circulated.

The idea of a special “currency” during military operations developed especially during World War II, when the use of a local currency by troops could well have been problematic. For example, in certain cases, the use of American money, with its greater buying power, was a source of inflation and facilitated a black market. It was impractical in combat zones, where governments were hostile, or simply non-existent. In a pre-Euro Europe, the Allied Powers issued Allied Military Currency to troops entering newly liberated or occupied countries that was then declared legal tender by local commanders. When the war ended in 1945, these notes were discontinued and lost their value.

It would appear that US forces in Newfoundland basically continued to use US currency in official and personal transactions. However, in at least one case, a form of trade token was used in Gander by US forces.





After considerable searching over the years, I have not yet seen any other amount than 5 cents, nor from any other facility such as enlisted men's or officers' club. Most information available about NCO club tokens refers to deployment in a conquered enemy country where a different language is spoken. They were also seen frequently on bases in the United States. Newfoundland was a different case in that it was a friendly country – but considered as being “overseas” during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

In a place like Newfoundland, there may have been a number of theoretical reasons for using tokens:

° If Newfoundland had been captured by Nazi forces, tokens would have had no value to them. However, the Americans

still used US dollars and very few tokens, so this reason would not apply.

° another possible reason could be to break the “price-differential problem”. If, as a fictitious example, cigarettes cost Newfoundlanders 5\$ a carton, but cost Americans only 50 cents a carton, there would be a great black-market temptation. But if cigarettes could be bought principally with tokens and the number of tokens restrained, this would limit the possibilities.

° on many military bases, certain civilians may have access to military facilities. For example, the heads of contracting companies or senior government officials might go to the Officer’s Club, while lower-ranking civilians might use the NCO’s Club. To avoid problems with money exchange, these civilians could well use tokens instead of cash.

° there could however be a much simpler reason for these tokens. Gander during the war years was not necessarily the best posting in the United States Army Air Force. Some thought it was not as meaningful as going off to a combat zone. Especially in the winter, there was not a whole lot to do. Spending time-off sitting on a bar stool could be very tempting. Having a limited quantity of tokens could a way of controlling the problem.

The USAAF already had a Post Exchange for most personal sundries, so there would be limited use for the tokens. Most likely it would be limited to drinks, cigarettes, candy and gum at the NCO Club.

Today the US military uses similar tokens in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. However, given that metal coins are heavy to ship, they are now made of cardboard and are known as “pogs”.