

An unusual WWII Gander token

(by Robert G Pelley 15 November 2016)

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 exnumia 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 exnumists. (The Brits tend to call this paranumismatica.)

There is a grey zone where tokens that can be used in trade meet coins having legal tender, 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 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 not necessarily 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 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.

As far as I have been able to find out, 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.





I have not yet seen any other amount than 5 cents, nor from any other facility such as enlisted men's or officers' club. Any additional information, especially why it was used at the Sargeants club or if it was used elsewhere, would be very appreciated.

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".