

The different sectors of “old Gander”

(by Robert G Pelley, 2016/12/20)

Articles about the old airport area as constructed during World War II speak very frequently about the “sides”, such as the American side or the Army side.

Recent conversations have led me to believe that many people are unsure as to what these “sides” mean. The objective of this short article is therefore to explain the layout.

There were five basic areas:

- the Railway-administrative area : this is where it all started, with the railway station as the main point of entry to Gander. It included the Administration building which in the late 30s contained the offices, the meteorological service, the control tower and some accommodation. Next to it was the first hangar, then the largest in the British Empire
- The “RAF” side: the first trans-Atlantic flights of Hudson bombers in November 1940 were made as a completely civilian operation. However, because of pressure from the American government to deal only with a military organization, this operation was taken over by the Royal Air Force Ferry Command. The buildings and hangars were a gift of Canadian Pacific Airways and constructed by Belmont Construction Company.
 - The American side: By 1941, the US was becoming increasingly involved in military operations in the North Atlantic. The augmentation of ferry activities and anti-submarine operations meant that the United States Army Air Force and related units would require much-expanded separate facilities. This came to be the American side, in the south-west corner of the airport.

- The Canadian side: this should more correctly be called the RCAF side, on the west side of Gander, between the runways and the railway tracks. in 1941 the Royal Canadian Air Force became the “owners and operators” so to speak of Gander.
- The Army side was basically the sector north of the railway tracks. It was the main accommodation, training and headquarters area for the infantry and similar ground units involved in the defence of Gander and outlying access routes.

There developed over the years a number of official and sometimes unauthorized living areas, notably Caledonia Camp (BOAC), Radio range apartments, Macnamaras and Union East.

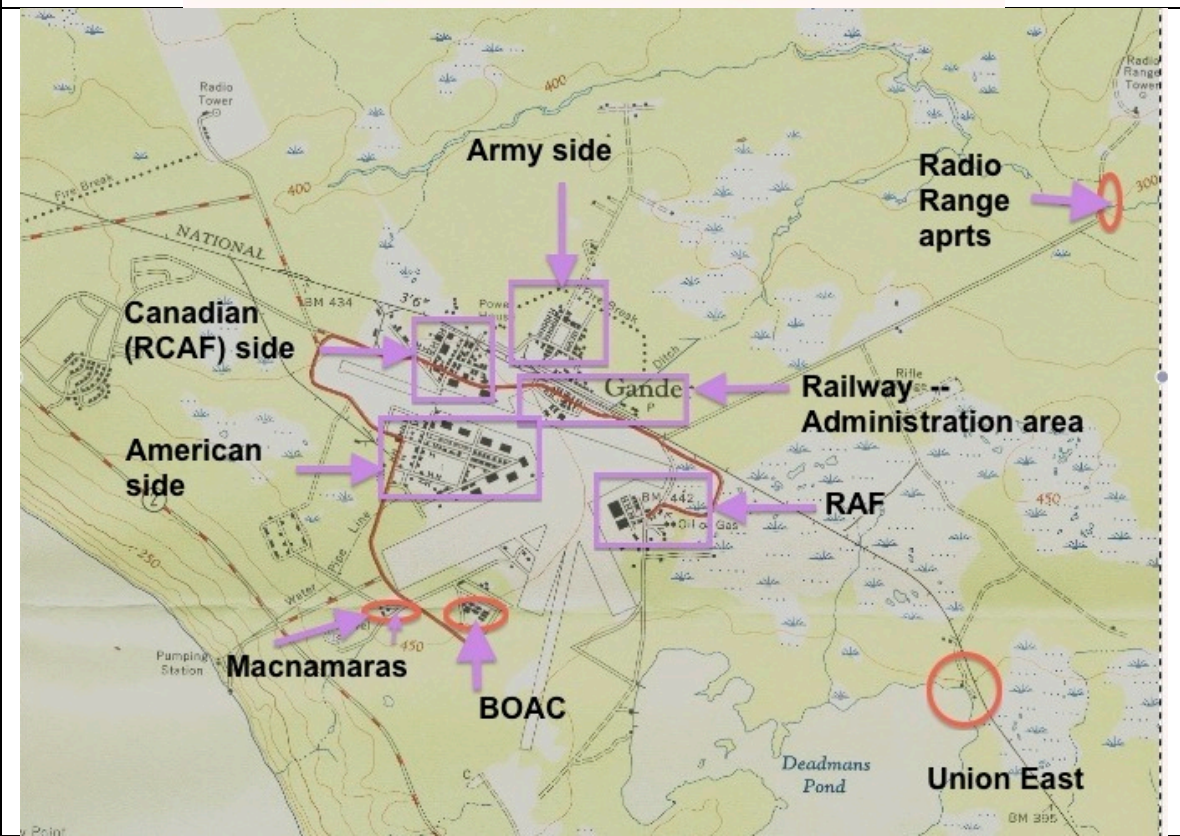
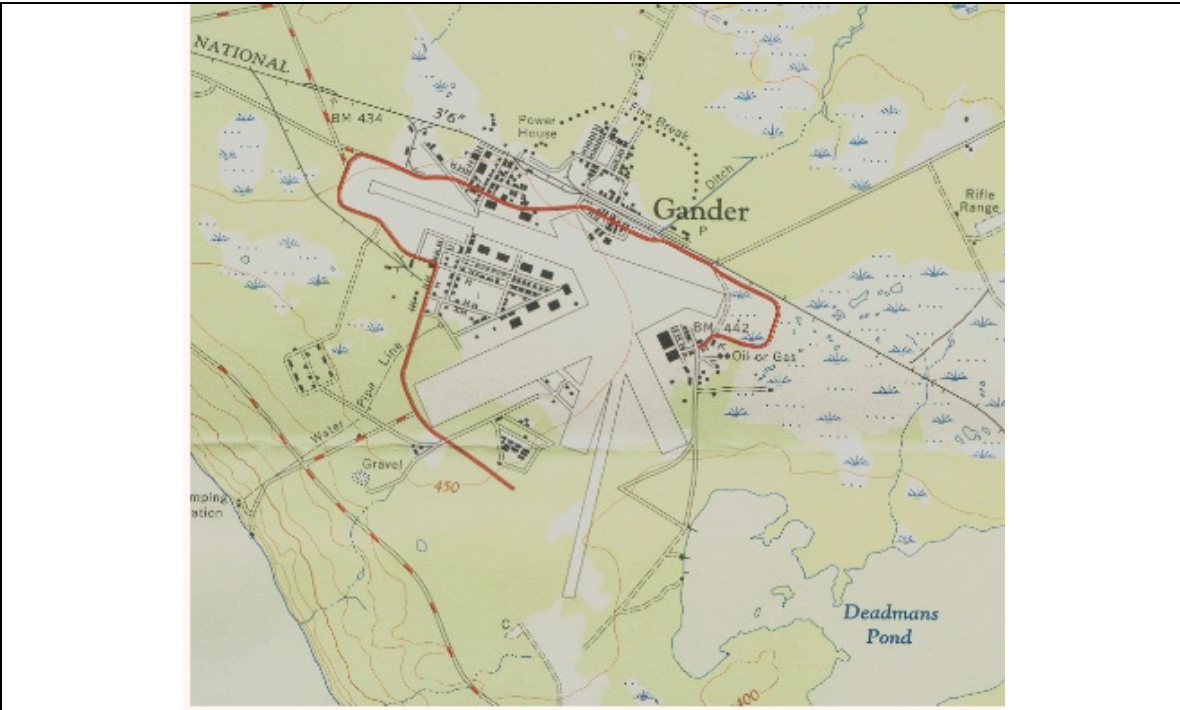
Caledonia was the main wartime quarters of the unit manning the 40 mm Bofors guns around the airport. After the war this area was allocated to the staff of the British Overseas Airline Corporation. It included the Caledonia Club, a popular spot in post-war Gander,

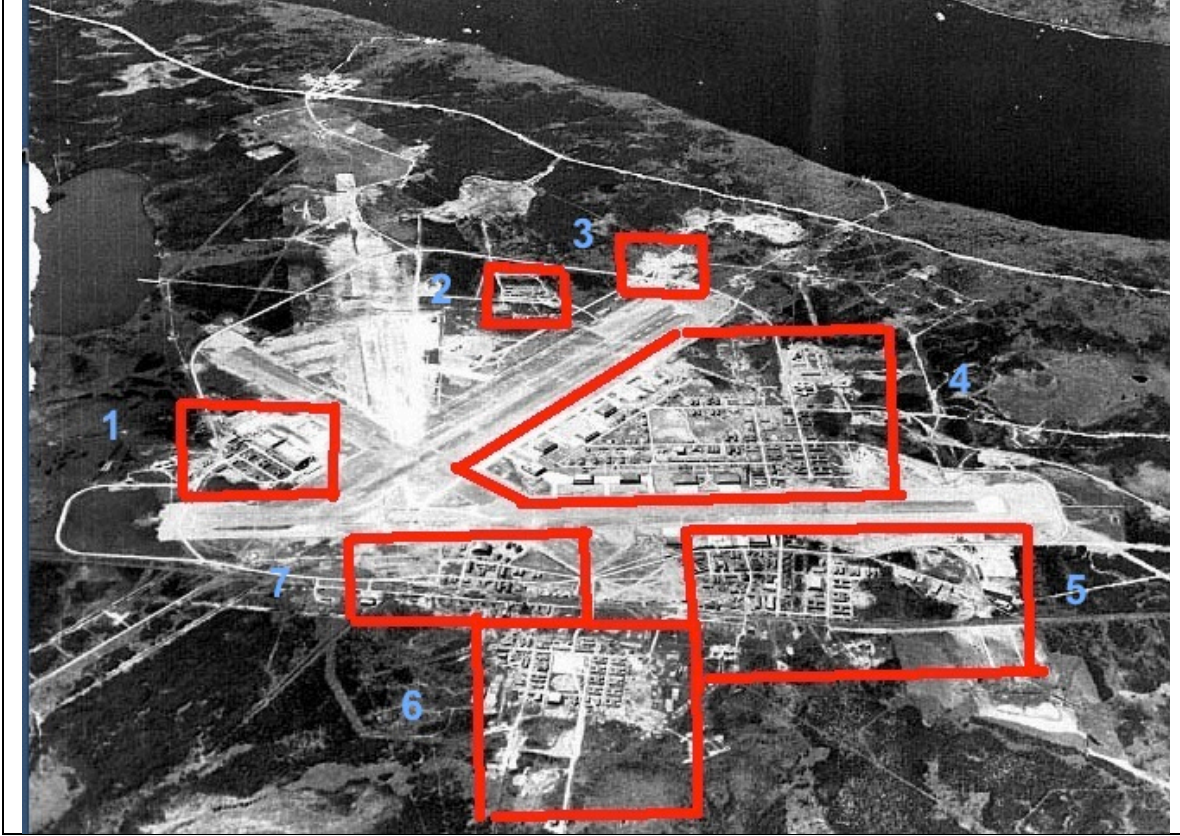
Macnamaras became a busy living area because of overcrowding in Gander. Workers operating the stone crusher had lived there in temporary tar paper shacks without facilities, but at war's end they unfortunately had to be used “temporarily” by civilians for several years.

The Radio Range apartments were several miles outside Gander but were occupied, like many other very small sites, because of absence of housing. Many former Bofors gun sites were used the same way.

Union East was a small group of families at the junction of Deadmans Pond and the railway line. It started as a lumber mill but close to 20 families lived at one time. It was a “short” three mile or so walk up the tracks to the grocery store.

To ensure clarity, the maps and photos are shown twice, once without and once with the markings.





In the air photo shown above, here is the clockwise listing, starting at the left side 9 o'clock position.:

1. RAF side
2. BOAC (Caledonia Camp)
3. Macnamaras camp
4. American side
5. Canadian (RCAF) side
6. Army side
7. Railway-Administration area

The un-retouched photo is shown on the next page.

