

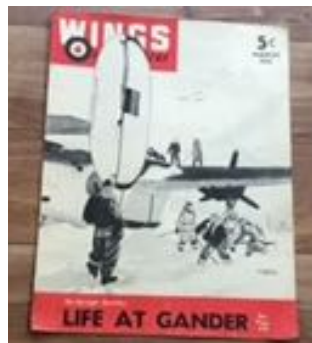
## Welcome to Gander - 1944 style

(by Robert G Pelley 2021-07-26)

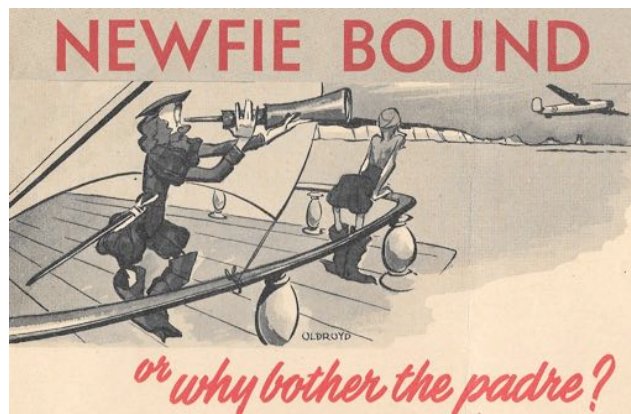
[bobsganderhistory.com](http://bobsganderhistory.com)

As most know by now, Gander during the Second World War was an armed camp. Infantry from the Canadian Army protected the airplanes and the vulnerable points. Anti-aircraft artillery was deployed in case the Germans tried a ship-borne Pearl Harbour type of air attack. Hurricane fighter planes were gassed up and checked for take off at the ring of a telephone in the pilot's ready-room. Bombers from Gander scoured the North Atlantic for U-boats. The Americans and British ferried thousands of aircraft to England.

There were in Gander a few ladies in the RCAF Womens Division and others worked as Morse code operators with the RAF Ferry Command, but it was really a "man's world". Articles about Gander tended to reflect the male point of view. One such article was published in the RCAF magazine "Wings" of March 1944.



The article in question spoke to the apprehensions of Canadian airmen on the mainland who feared a posting to Newfoundland. Was it just a forlorn rock on the Atlantic with nothing but stunted spruce and muskeg, where social life was limited to an accidental grut from an unfriendly moose? And weren't those Newfys just some backward folk with no manners and no history worth talking about? The truth of the story, the facts of the case, were given by LAC Ron Rewbury, who was by now a Gander veteran.



by LAC RON REWBURY

"Heaven's to Betsey, I'm posted to Newfie! Where can I find an M.O. who will put a cast on my leg for twenty-five bucks; or shall I jump the fence at Y Depot and break my neck and the suspense at the same time?"

Well, don't be so grumpy, Bub, you're not being original at all. Airmen by the baker's dozen have abused their brains with such thoughts as these, and have lived long enough to "eat 'em mitt a spoon".

Anyway, if you are ever posted to Newfoundland don't take it too hard, because it's not such a bad place. Why, here we have no insurance collectors, tax collectors, taxes on cigarettes, candy or chewing gum; we have no glittering main streets, dance halls, variety nut shops, street cars, amusement parks, or A&Ps. Now don't ask me what we have got, because boys and girls, that's another story.

So that you won't be a green-horn when you arrive here, let's talk about history; the history of this rugged island. We know you feel a bit tarty about the subject, but even the early explorers experienced your fears and jeers. Why, when John Cabot in 1497 first sighted Newfoundland through his spy glass, his first desire was to pull the cork out of the bung-hole at the bottom of the ship and let nature take its course. However, after more serious consideration he decided not to terminate the voyage so suddenly, and set sail south to see



if he could see the new world through a more rosy colored glass at a different spot. Eventually Cabot landed at Bonavista, and claimed the rocky wilderness for Henry VII, who immediately developed a severe case of gout.

### VANISHING RACE

Well, at the time King Henry was having his troubles, this wild island was sparsely populated with a sturdy brown race known as Beothucks. They weren't Indians or Eskimos, because neither side would recognize relationship. However, the Beothucks tried hard, but by 1829 the last of their number passed out of the picture, and Newfoundland was handed over to the fisher folk of the old world, who, taking the bull by the horns, or their better judgment by the seat of the pants, settled along the coast.

For many years these settlers wrestled with codfish until they could stand it no longer, and according to orthodox history books, many migrated to the United States, settling in and around Boston. In fact, there are so many Newfoundlers in Boston today, a special paper known as the *Newfoundland Gazette* is published for them. Their number in Boston is greater than the population of St. John's, Newfoundland's capital.

Newfoundland is the tenth largest island in the world, is one-sixth larger than Ireland (begorra t'is a lie), and one-fifth smaller than England (jolly good show, what?). Approximately one-third of the surface of the island is water, but you only



realize this fact when mud, bits of grass and twigs overflow into your collar while making your way to the mess hall on a typical dewy Newfie morning.

The people of Newfoundland are a friendly, hard-working folk, and today they are playing host to a new species of being. These new inhabitants wear blue uniforms, and are generally known as airmen. At various times they are known by many other names, depending upon the time and place. They dashed to Newfoundland when Hitler dashed to Poland. Apparently there must be some connection.

Most of the stations manned by airmen on the island are rather isolated spots. In spite of all this, the airmen lead a busy life. Most stations being on operational duty, means that there are times when excitement runs high. For instance it's quite the time for a "small shambles" when some of the boys battle it out with a Nazi submarine. The isolation also means that airmen must make their own fun, which they do with considerable dispatch and "bug-juice". However, we do have some luxuries. We have our rec halls, theatres, lounge rooms and libraries, as in Canada. Also the potential Daniel Boone has ample opportunity to tear off into the woods and get himself lost, looking for moose and caribou, no less.

## CO ON FATIGUES

No boys, things are not so grim. For instance on our station we have such a democratic CO that a short time ago he caused eyes to pop when he pitched in and helped clean up the admin building. "Good exercise," he called it. We called it King of Hearts without a club.

There is one great thrill the newcomer to an RCAF station in Newfoundland will experience after he has settled down to his appointed task. It will come gradually, without being noticed, until it finally blossoms forth. It is the thrill of genuine comradeship. It comes to all who are thrown together on their own resources in the hinterland. Simple pleasures suffice where once they were ignored. The music of an accordion, even through inexpertly played becomes a sparkling gem, a game of badminton, pool, cards, checkers, or even an argumentive bull session, become all important pleasures. Life can be seen in a new perspective from our wilderness home. Newfoundland is doing much for Canada, for it is making us better Canadians for the peace to come.

When the old "Newfie Express" screeches through the spruce forests, clangs in the canyons, and over the rocky barriers to stop at our wilderness station, you'll be sure of a cheery, full-lunged hello. And we mean it. You're back will be heartily slapped until you are red in the face. Even the huskies will refuse to "mush" until they've barked a welcome.

Well, Bub, now you can see your fears of Newfie were unfounded. We're ready to welcome you when you get here, but definitely, 'cause boy, oh boy — we're looking for a posting, POSTING, POSTING . . . !