

Gander Postal System During the War

Many people passing through Gander and even many living there now do not realize that during the 2nd World War, Gander was considered to be real live war zone. In fact, for Canadians living on “the Mainland” or for Americans, Newfoundland was considered to be “overseas”.

Given the critical importance of Gander to the war effort, every effort considered necessary was made to protect the area from German raids that could sabotage runways, installations or personnel. This was the reason for the Hurricane fighters, the anti-aircraft emplacements and the infantry regiments.

These same security considerations led to control of the postal system, exactly the same as in any other war zone. The objective was to make sure that the enemy or their spies could obtain no information through the interception of mail.

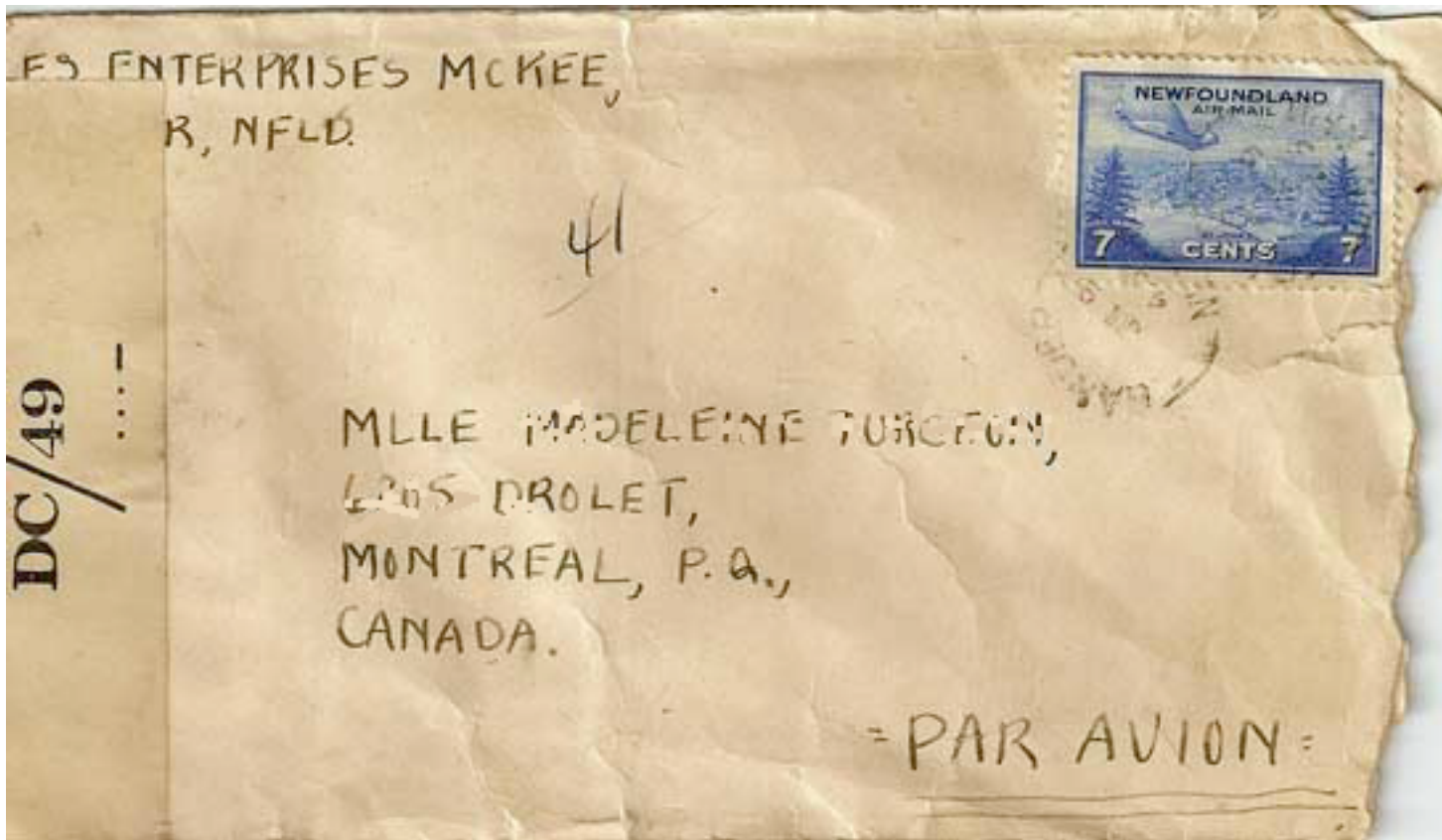
In June of 1940, the 1st Battalion, Black Watch arrived in Newfoundland to protect the area, working initially from Botwood. All early mail was censored by them and sent through ordinary civilian post offices. This regular mail required a 5 cent Newfoundland stamp.

This changed when the Canadian Army Postal Corps started to operate in Newfoundland around the end of August 1941. Surface mail was exceedingly slow, going via train, the Newfy Bullet, and if going to the mainland by boat...but was free. Airmail on the other hand required a 6 cent Newfoundland stamp.

In Gander there were two Canadian Army Post Offices. CAPO No.2 was in operation from 01 September 1941 to 27 June 1945. As the wartime population grew, another one, CAPO No 4, was added on 10 August 1942 and was generally known as the "RCAF CAPO". It ceased operations on 20 November 1945. There also a post office in the RAF area and one in the BOAC/McNamara area completely on the southern end of the airport, though it is possible that this did not actually start operating until after the end of the war.

Civilian mail was generally sent firstly from a local pick-up in the different barracks. All mail, from civilians and military personnel alike, was closely censored.

Here is the front cover of a letter sent during the summer of 1943. By now it took at 7 cent stamp. We can that the envelope has been opened on one end to get access to the contents and that a censor's sticker has been used to re-close it. Every censor was identified by a number, usually a junior office, generally – but not always! - known for his judgment.

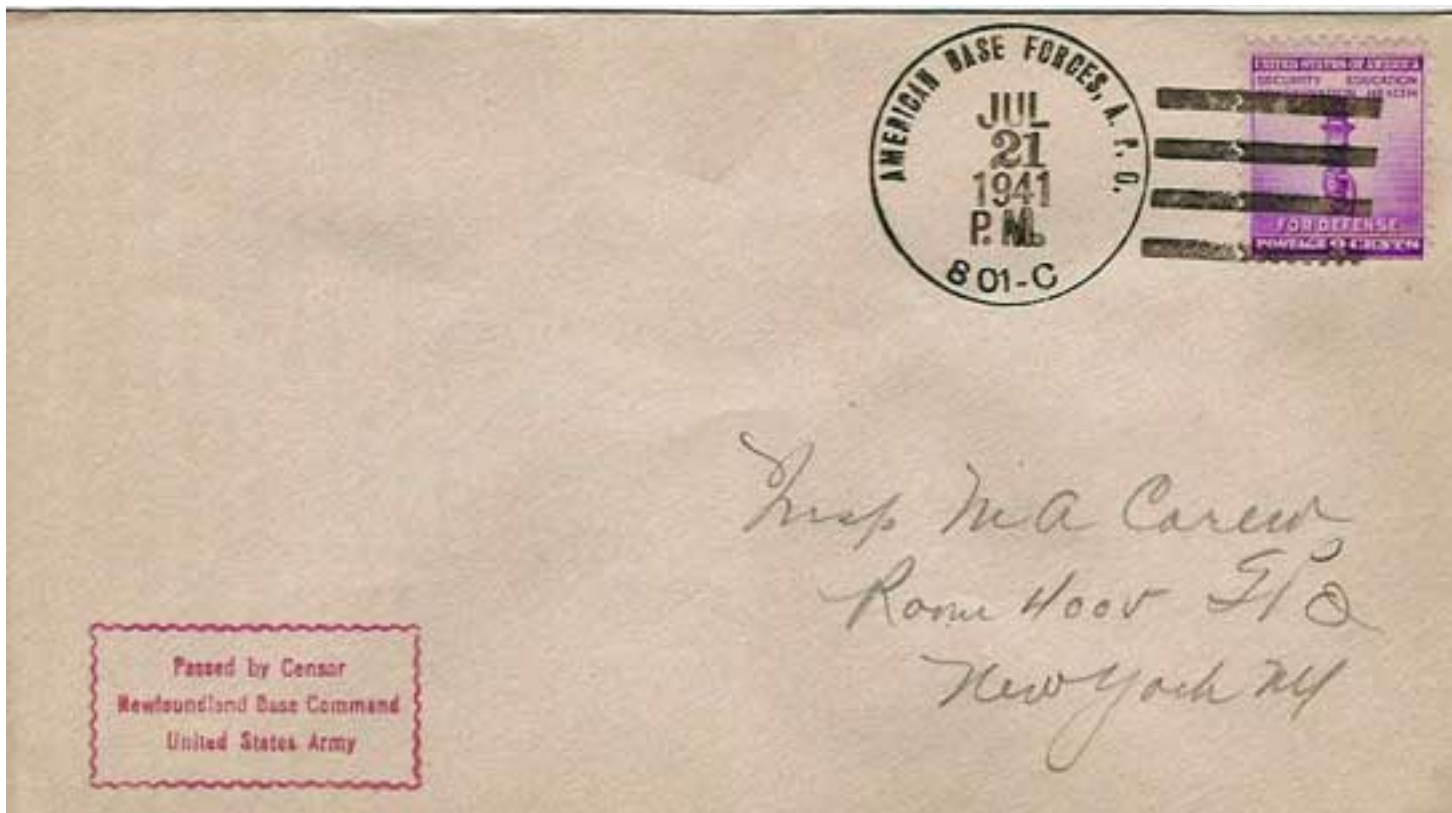


The back of the envelop shows the other side of the censor's sticker, showing clearing that the letter had passed muster.

In this case, the residence from which the envelop originated was the "Eastbound Inn", which would have been on the road that now goes to Hangers 21 and 22, close to where the train station once stood.



On the American side there was a similar system, where the postal stations were called US Army Post Offices, but with numbers unrelated to those used by Canadians. It may seem strange at first glance that an army post was used on an aviation base. However in those days, it was not the US Air Force but rather the US Army Air Force.



As can be seen, the number of the Gander APO was 801-C and the censor's stamps can be easily seen. Sometime in 1942-43 the American military chain of command in Newfoundland was slightly modified and the APO numbers were modified. The new APO number became 865.

It is to be noted that the stamp used by the USAPO is American rather than a Nfld stamp. This I have been told apparently reflects the difference between US, British and Canadian reference points with respect to Newfoundland. The US at the time viewed Nfld quite naturally like any other military base in Europe, the Pacific or anywhere else – to be used only to fight the war and get back home.

The British and Canadian were more concerned by Newfoundland's long term economic difficulties and therefore used local stamps. I sometimes wonder if a slightly different approach by the Americans might have led us to be a 51st state rather than a tenth province.