

NEWSLETTER NO. 68  
MAY 1986

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Welcome to the 'Spring' Newsletter of the Military Mail Study Group. It was doubtful if we were going to be on time due to a lack of material. However, Brian Plain and Colin Campbell were able to come through at the last moment. Our thanks for their efforts! All members are reminded that this is their Newsletter, and they must contribute to keep it going. A great example of the feedback necessary for a newsletter can be seen in the RPO Group Newsletter - they never seem to be at a loss for items from members. This seems a little strange as we think there is a much greater area for feedback in military history than in RPO history.

We had planned to come up with an article on the World War II blackouts used on both coasts of Canada. It appeared that more work needed to be done before going into 'print'. It is hoped that the two parties involved will do this, and come up with their findings before too long.

Our group at present has 46 paying members, and a bank account of C\$206.68 before the expenses of this N.L. The last N.L. cost \$30.71 of which, over half (\$18.41), was spent on postage. This newsletter will cost more as we no longer have complimentary photocopying. In this regard, the best the editor can do is 9 cents per double page. We wonder if there is someone out there who can do better? By the way, \$88 of the above \$206 must be credited to future assessments which leaves \$118 for this last assessment. That will cover this issue, and two more. In the past the dues of \$5 have always lasted for at least two years,, but things seem to be catching up to us and we may need that much for one year soon.

The Military Group also needs a new editor as this one has been, in one capacity or another, involved since we were founded at Calgary in 1973. Please send your 'resume' for this challenging and interesting position to the retiring editor as soon as possible!

At hand is the FORCES POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY's Spring 1986 Newsletter. Several items are of note this time: A piece on a British P.O.W. in Japanese hands during WW II shows some of the varied mail that passed back and forth. In Canada we had the same situation when our Force C was captured at the fall of Hong Kong in 1941. The other item is about a newly released book that may be of interest to some. The title is GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS OF US A.P.O.'S 1941-84. It is reported by the FPHS that this is the Fifth Edition of the book published by the WAR COVER CLUB and it contains new information gathered since the last edition was printed in 1979. The book is available from L. E. Kieffer, Box 173, Jamesburg, N.J., 08831 for US\$15, which may (or may not cover the postage).

And, by the way, the PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGIONAL BNA GROUP had a GREAT meeting in Vancouver last March 15. A part of the program was given over to military interests, and there were 7 of the Military Group in attendance.

We have two articles this issue:

FORCE Q by Brian Plain has been quite awhile in the works. Research sometimes becomes quite involved, and takes much time, especially when one is also very busy as Brian is. Not much in the way of postal history remains of this Force, and one is indeed fortunate to find these items. Brian has done an excellent job here, and it is hoped that you will enjoy reading the article.

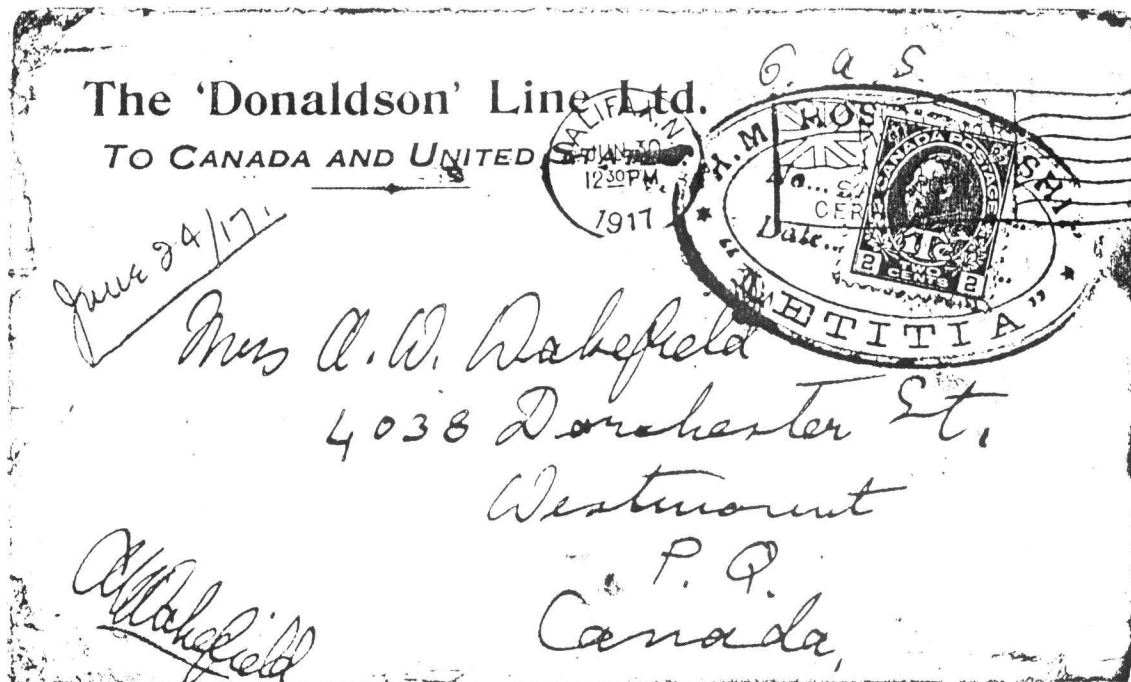
THE SHIPS OF CONVOY by Colin Campbell gives an insight into something we perhaps have not thought much about. This forms part of a series and we hope you like it. Read on for further information!

A PAGE FROM THE COLLECTION OF *Bill Robinson*  
A new series, hopefully, by our members (retyped by editor to fit here)

H. M. HOSPITAL SHIP / LETITIA

In the January/February 1986 issue, the Editor of 'BNA TOPICS' reported the existence of a rectangular marking from this ship, dated March, 1917. Richardson (1983) reported one marking known from 'ARAGUAYA' and none from any other hospital ship used by Canadian Forces in WW I.

This example, dated June 1917, is from the same correspondence as the earlier cover - probably from a Medical Officer on the ship, as he censored his own mail - but it shows a 56 x 37mm oval marking in purple, and a Halifax flag cancel (Richardson Type 21-3) dated June 30, 1917, cancelling the War-Tax stamp applied by the Canadian Post Office. A manuscript notation indicates the enclosed letter was written on June 24, 1917.



Colin Campbell

SHIPS OF CONVOY.						
H.M.S. "MAGNIFICENT."						
H.M.S. "ECLIPSE," C.R.H.U.		H.M.S. "DIANA," G.R.D.H.		H.M.S. "CHARYBDIS," G.Q.R.M. (flagship)		
H.M.S. "ARON"	1. Megantic	HFCF	12. Caribbean	LVCN	24. Tunisian	RNIC
	2. Ruthenia	RPQM	13. Athenia	VQRT	23. Arcadian	RJQF
	3. Bermudian	HBPK	14. Royal Edward	HMDG	24. Zealand	HJLD
	4. Alania	JDKM	15. Franconia	HSDC	25. Corinthian	RQBH
	5. Ivernia	RNJD	16. Onnadh	PLMS	26. Virginian	HCJG
	6. Scandinavian	QDST	17. Monmouth	RTBF	27. Andania	JCPL
	7. Siollian	RKBG	18. Manitou	PWJL	28. Saxonia	RPNQ
	8. Montreal	RSKQ	19. Tyrolla	RLVM	29. Grampian	HLKW
	9. Lapland	LQSN	20. Scotlan	HSKG	30. Lakonia	RGJC
	10. Cassandra	HJHG	21. Laurentic	HNML	31. Montezuma	RHKW
	11. Florizel	HNLT			32. Royal George	HLTW

Rear Cruiser: H.M.S. "TALBOT," G.V.C.L.

H.M.S. "GLORY," G.R.P.T.

For some time now a number of collectors have been assembling post cards and pictures of the transports which carried the First Canadian Contingent to England in October 1914. The convoy left Gaspé Basin October 3rd.

Through a series of Newsletters it is planned to illustrate as many of the 32 transport ships that formed the convoy as possible plus the Royal Navy escorts. One additional ship, MANHATTAN, followed a couple of days later. Help from readers in reporting a few missing cards would be appreciated.

One of the hazards in presenting the above is to ensure the ships illustrated were in fact the ships which did the job. Ship's names for ages have been handed down from one generation of ship to another. We'll do our best to keep things straight.

Military postal history and the 1914 convoy are closely linked. With some 32,330 Officers and men who travelled in the convoy plus 7,011 crew there must have been a considerable amount of mail prepared. The troops, no doubt, were cautioned against writing and posting just prior to leaving Valcartier Camp, and, during their stay at Quebec City during the loading of the ships which occupied seven days. Letters and cards however would have been written. Once on board there was one last chance as a few ships, perhaps, offloaded mail at Father Point, Que., although the quantity of mail must have been quite small. Mail was prepared during the voyage, no doubt, and posted as soon as practicable in England with the possibility of interesting postmarks being applied before the mail was sent to Canada. In the course of this article we hope to highlight a few cards which were linked to the convoy, or specific ships.

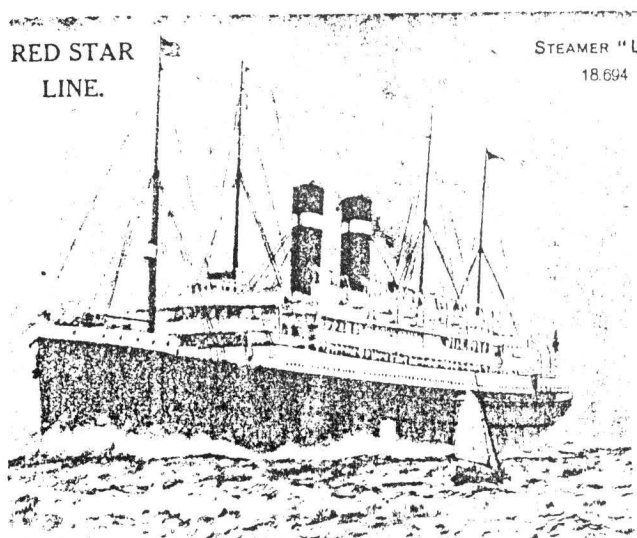
To save repeating some details it is noted here that 7,500 horses were taken to England as well as quantities of field guns, horsed vehicles, motor cars, trucks and bicycles. These were spread throughout the convoy.

The principal reference we will use is:

Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War  
- 1914-1919. Compiled by A.F. Douguid and published 1938.

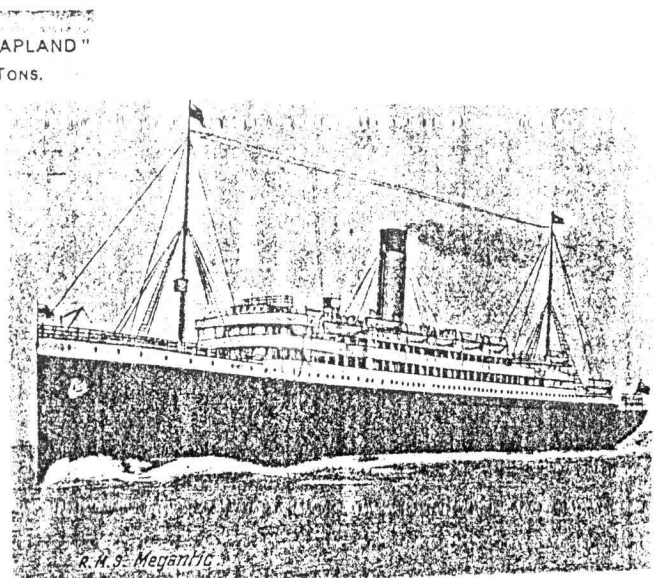
The steamer LAPLAND (Red Star Line) was built in 1908. She carried 2,328 troops of the 2nd C.I.B., H.Q., 5th and 6th Battalions only. See item 170, Newsletter #27 re card written on board during passage. Also aboard were rifles, ammo, Red Cross supplies and 13,550 sacks of flour. Completed loading at Quebec September 29 and disembarked Plymouth October 20.

MEGANTIC was built in 1909 for the White Star Line with tonnage 14,878. She carried 1,647 troops comprised of the Div Ammo Column, A Div Signals Co and the 15th Inf Batt. In addition, ammo, food and lumber. Completed loading September 30 and disembarked October 16 at Plymouth.



RED STAR LINE.

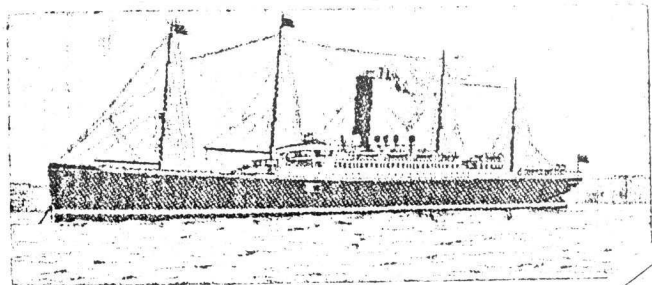
STEAMER "LAPLAND" 18,694 TONS.



R.M.S. Megantic

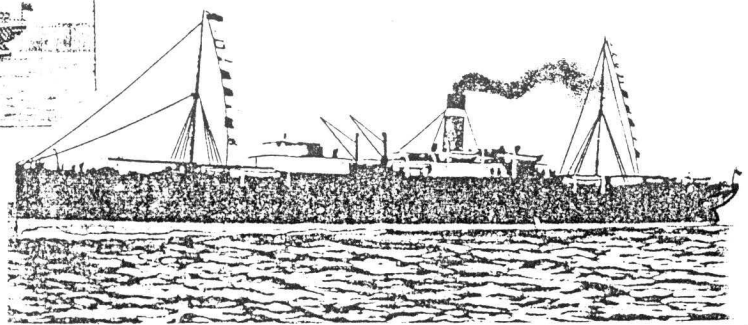
IVERNIA was built in 1900 for Cunard at 14,278 tons. She loaded ammo, arty. stores and carried HQ personnel 2nd Bde., C.F.A., 4th, 5th & 6th Batteries, two Ammo Columns and 917 Officers and men. Completed loading Sept 26 and disembarked October 20.

SICILIAN was built 1899 for Allan at 7,328 tons. She carried ammo, grain and lumber as well as 1st Bde C.F.A. Ammo Column, 2nd Bde details and Reserve Park personnel for total 341. Also ammo, grain and lumber. Completed loading Sept 24 and offloaded October 18.



WOVEN IN SILK.

R.M.S. IVERNIA.



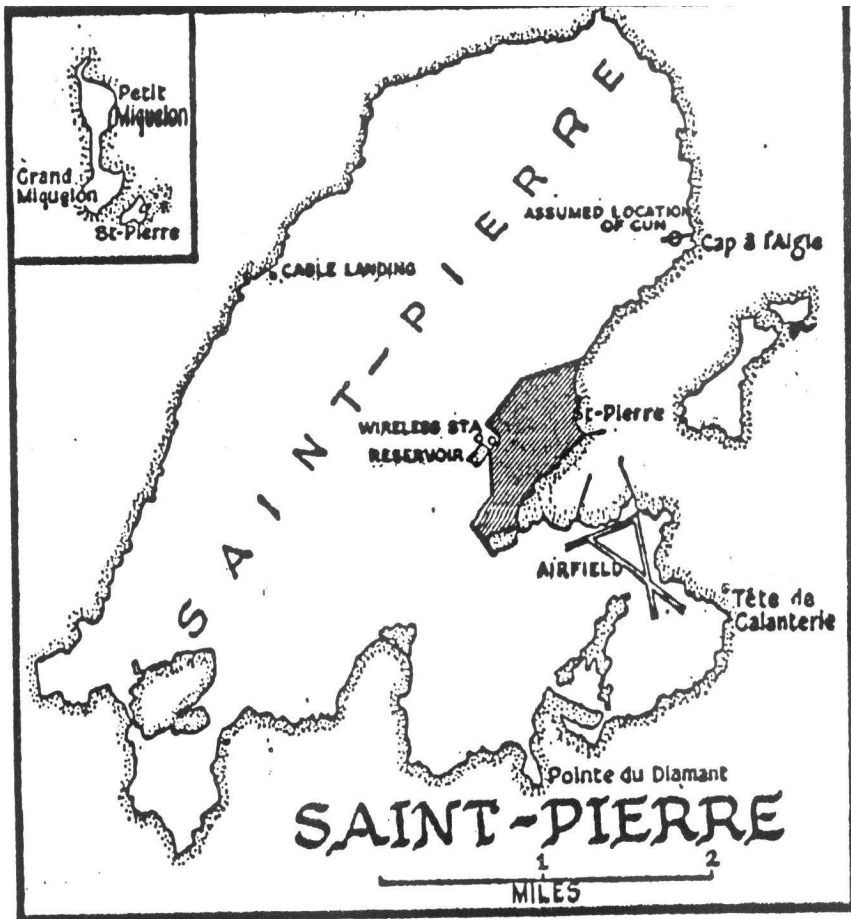
ALLAN LINE ROYAL MAIL STEAMER "SICILIAN"

The islands of St.Pierre and Miquelon are France's oldest and smallest colony.The territory lies some twelve miles off the coast of Newfoundland near the entrance to the Gulf of St.Lawrence.Its total area,including that of several nearby smaller islands and large rocks, is only ninety-three square miles.The colony is noted for its high,craggy coastline,its skimpy vegetation,its fierce blizzards and damp chilling fogs that enshroud the island for most of the year.

With the fall of France in 1941,it became evident to the British,Canadian and American governments that the administration of the islands was sympathetic to Vichy France,and considerable fear arose that they might be "invaded" by the enemy and used as a submarine base from which to harrass shipping in the Gulf of St.Lawrence and the North Atlantic.In addition,the administration of the islands had under its control a powerful radio transmitter which, by broadcasting messages either in code or in the clear,was likely to give valuable intelligence to the enemy submarines operating in North Atlantic waters.The Americans,fearful as always of the motivation of their allies, wished to see the islands neutralized (under their own auspices) but they had no wish to occupy the islands themselves unless they were unable to encourage some non-American country to do it.

Although publicly deciding on May 27,1941 to "reject any immediate consideration of Canadian intervention in the islands",the Joint Planning Committee of the Chiefs of Staff had already (May 22,1941) instigated a study on "Action Necessary for the Occupation of St.Pierre and Miquelon".Furthermore,in spite of their public posturing,by early June 1941,Canadian military leaders were meeting in Halifax to draw up plans for the occupation of the islands. It was considered desirable that no word should leak out to Vichy France that such a proposal was being studied,and equally important that the unpredictable General Charles DeGaulle should likewise be kept in the dark.As a result of these strictures,the troops designated for the invasion of the islands,masked under the name "Q" Force,were allowed to think that their real purpose was the defence of Halifax in the event of a sudden enemy landing on the Nova Scotia coastline.

On August 21,1941,Atlantic Command issued the Operation Order for the formation of "Q" Force.It was designated as a small,self contained expeditionary force.It was comprised of "C" Company of the Lake Superior Regiment,plus a number of ancillary troops,mainly from closely allied regiments such as Toronto's Irish Regiment of Canada,and the Grey and Simcoe Foresters from the Owen Sound district.The total force of 189 men was under the command of Lieut-Col.Herbert Cook and Major Miller Marshall.Most of the officers directly involved with the force were veterans of the First War,and were too old for active service overseas in the Second.For many of them,the prospect of an occupation of the French



~~CENSORED~~  
*Robert McNeil*  
*Friend*



*Miss Helen Catty,*  
*485 Windermere*  
*Ave.,*  
*Toronto,*  
*Ontario.*



Canadian Active Service Forces  
 c/o *P.F.E.H.D. PINK*  
*B.T.S.F.*  
*B-50251*

islands was the highlight of their Second War service. In addition to the military component of the force, the Secretary to the Canadian Chiefs of Staff proposed that, as in the planned (and unexecuted) invasion of Greenland, a small detachment of R.C.M.P. should accompany the invading forces to assist with civil administration. A breakdown of the force is shown below.

Headquarters-----	9
R.C.E.-----	3
R.C.C.S.(3 M.C.'s)-----	17
Infantry----One Company Lake Superiors-----	127
No.1 Pl.Signals(2 bicycles)-----	7
No.4 Pl.(5 M.C.'s)-----	10
No.5 Pl.Pioneers-----	3
No.6 Pl.Cooks, Sanit'n, Water-----	6
R.C.A.M.C.-----	3
R.C.A.S.C.-----	2
R.C.A.F.-----	2
R.C.N. with 2 Corvettes-----	=
R.C.M.P.-----	6

The operational orders for "Q" Force had it standing by at Debert to dash to Sydney and ostensibly attack and destroy a "hostile landing force". Once there, it was to board the 2 Corvettes (although none had been assigned) and cross to St. Pierre. It was planned to "land at the coal dock at dawn, (see illustration) and then to seize the radio station, the telephone station, the Administrator's office and the other government buildings, and overrun the defences of the island thus paralyzing any possible resistance". It was designed that once the military objectives had been secured, the R.C.M.P. would assume the responsibility for law and order. It was felt, that as with most military operations, speed and surprise were of the utmost importance. To this end, the force was equipped with eight motorcycles with sidecars, and two bicycles to enable No.4 Platoon to speed through the town and secure vulnerable installations before they could be sabotaged. The proposed operation was thoroughly tested by frequent and unannounced day and night exercises that called for practice operations against any one of a number of abandoned farms that dotted the Annapolis Valley.

Fortunately, neither the officers nor the men knew that their exertions were in vain. The decision to dispatch a Consul to the islands rendered "Q" Force unnecessary even before it received its Operation Order. On August 30, 1941, the War Cabinet Committee formally decided that no military action would be undertaken. In spite of this, "Q" Force, was kept on four-hour call for nearly a month, and then on three days notice until it was formally disbanded on February 2, 1942. Even though disbanded, the Force continued to have a life in military minds. On January 27, 1942, General Crerar was still contemplating a military occupation of the islands by "any available units" on seven days notice.

Harry Guertin in his monumental work on the mails of the Second War, states that postal reminders of "Q" Force are quite uncommon. Military postal students feel that this may be due in part to the lack guidelines for the identification

and designation of such items. Based on the information presented in this article, even the item assigned by Guertin to "Q" Force in his research does not seem to meet the requirements for inclusion. Based on this article, and from other covers examined, I believe that in order for a cover to be tentatively classed as from "Q" Force, certain criteria should be met:

Stationary: All covers examined show the use of Auxiliary Services stationary.

Cancellations: All covers show the DEBERT N.S./M.P.O.603 machine cancellation.

Dates: Based on the above article, the dates would have to be between August 21, 1941 and February 2, 1942.

Censor Markings: Either hand censored by signature, or more commonly a signature accompanying a 10mmx35mm rubber stamp as shown in the illustration

Ideally, some indication of the Regiment of the sender would help, and might occasionally be found. The illustration shows one such cover with a return address indicating that the sender, Pte H.B. Pink was with the G+S.F. (Grey and Simcoe Foresters)

The author of this article would appreciate photocopies of any covers that the readers think might be from "Q" Force.

### References:

ANGLIN, Douglas G.; The St. Pierre and Miquelon Affair of 1941 (A Study in Diplomacy in the North Atlantic Quadrangle); University of Toronto Press (1966)

GUERTIN, Harry; The Wartime Mails of Canada 1939-1946; Private Printing

STACEY, Col. C.P.; Arms, Men and Governments; The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945

STANLEY, Col. George F.; In The Face of Danger. The History of the Lake Superior Regiment. Pub. by The Lake Superior Scottish Regiment, Port Arthur Ontario.