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**SPECIAL EDITION!**

As the reader should be aware, this is a special edition as we do not usually have another NL until September. The reason is that we thought you all needed a little stimulation before summer sets in! (With pardons to our South Africa members.)

**R.A.F. FERRY COMMAND / TRANSPORT COMMAND, WW II**

This Newsletter is devoted to an article which appeared in the FORCES POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER #190, Winter 1986-87. Both Allan Brown, the Honorable Bulletin Editor, and Dr. R. Oakland, the author of the article, have given their kind permission for us to reprint the RAF FC/TC story.

It is presented in its entirety, and if you have any comments or reports, please send them to Dr. R.Oakland, 21, Metchley Lane, Harborne, Birmingham B17 0HT, England. Your editor would also appreciate a copy!

Canadian personel played a large part in this operation and it is appropriate to explore the subject further here. Much FC/TC correspondence survives from Canadians such as Salt, Card, Doner, Porter, etc.

There are other markings that were used and not reported here, so please send in photocopies and we are sure Dr. Oakland will then update his article. Space is at a premium this NL and we don't have room to add a few here. Please respond!! And Best Wishes for the summer.

Figures for article - See over.

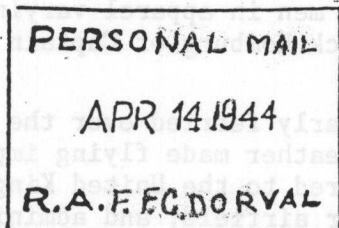


Fig.1



Fig.2

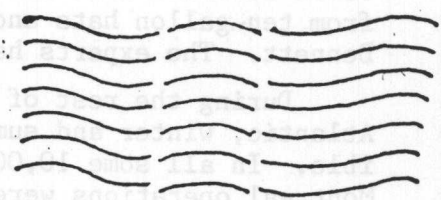


Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

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FROM FORCES POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY, WITH KIND PERMISSION.

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## SOME TRANS-ATLANTIC MAIL CARRYING ACTIVITIES OF R.A.F. FERRY

### COMMAND/TRANSPORT COMMAND AND THE RETURN FERRY IN WWII

by Dr. R. Oakland

#### Introduction

There comes a time in philatelic research when it is useful to set down findings, and share them, before going on. Here follows a mass of loose ends, some of which fellow enthusiasts may be able to untie.

#### 1. Setting the Scene

In the autumn of 1940 inhabitants of the area north of Pembina, North Dakota, were surprised by the sight of two horses dragging a bomber, a gleaming Lockheed Hudson, towards the Canadian border. Lockheed, in Burbank, California, was manufacturing bombers for Britain, but the United States Neutrality Act would not allow them to be flown directly to Montreal, the place from where they would be transported to the United Kingdom. Hence the role of the horses which was to pull the bombers over the border into Canada, where they would take to the air again to complete their delivery flight.

The Canadian Pacific Railway Company had agreed to organise the ferrying of aircraft from North America to the United Kingdom. In the early days bombers had been crated and despatched by ship, but rather too many were reaching no further than the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. The obvious solution was to fly them across "the pond" but the experts said that flying a formation of bombers through the appalling winter weather of the direct trans-Atlantic route was impossible. On November 10th 1940, however, Captain D.C.Bennett led a group of seven Hudsons to Gander airfield, in Newfoundland, where, after refuelling, they took off while a band played "Lead kindly light". Next morning at Aldergrove, in Northern Ireland, the airport staff were somewhat bemused to observe seven aircraft land and disgorge a group of unshaven men in apparel varying from ten-gallon hats and Texan boots to the neat black Homburg of Captain Bennett. The experts had been confounded (1).

During the rest of the war, aircraft were regularly ferried over the North Atlantic, winter and summer, pausing only when the weather made flying impossible. In all some 10,000 heavy aircraft were delivered to the United Kingdom. Montreal operations were soon transferred to a larger airfield, and administrative headquarters at Dorval on the outskirts of the city and the airfield at Gander was considerably expanded and developed.

In March 1941 the Atlantic Ferry Organisation (ATFERO) of the Ministry of Aircraft Production took over the ferrying operations, but a little later in the same year it was thought appropriate that the RAF should assume control, and RAF Ferry Command (RAFFC) came into being on July 15th, 1941. In April 1943 there was a change of name to RAF Transport Command (RAFTC), and the Atlantic ferry became No.45 (Atlantic Transport) Group of that Command.

Soon after ferrying began the availability of ferry pilots became a problem, which was exacerbated by the lack of fast transport from the UK back to Canada. So, in May 1941 the Return Ferry Service was inaugurated to fly aircrew back to base. This year-round service, which was operated by British Overseas Airways with seven Consolidated Liberator bombers, flew back and forth over the Atlantic for the rest of the war, an amazing achievement.

In January 1941, the UK terminal of the Atlantic ferry became Prestwick, in Scotland.

Thus, from early 1941 aircraft in their thousands were journeying from North America to the UK, and they did not fly empty. They were packed with urgently needed war supplies, personnel, and Government mail. In 1941 the ferry organisation's routine flights carried 98,000 lbs of mail, increasing to over 200,000 lbs in 1942, and approaching 300,000 lbs in 1943. Mail was channelled through either the mail room of the British Embassy in Washington, or the Director of Postal services in Ottawa, and was under constant guard and surveillance until delivered (2).

The Return Ferry Service, of course, carried mail in both directions. 200 lbs of diplomatic mail was conveyed on the first eastbound flight on May 4th 1941. Mail carried on the first westbound flight, also on May 4th 1941, is said to bear postmarks of both Britain and Newfoundland of this date (2).

## 2. Diplomatic and Official mail

Virtually all mail carried was official or diplomatic, and, since it was not handled by any post office, did not bear stamps or postmarks. Consequently the little that has survived is difficult to identify. Dated despatch and receiving marks are often seen (covers 1,2,3) but the method of transport designation is the most interesting. Examples, which were usually typed on the envelope, are "OFFICIAL AIR BAG", and "BOMBER MAIL" (3). Evidently, so much mail was carried by the bombers that a handstamp "VIA BOMBER MAIL" came into use (cover 3). The existence is reported of an airmail envelope with the printed cachet "FOR DESPATCH BY BOMBER" but I have not seen one (4).

Some parcel freight bore RAF Ferry Command labelling (cover 4).

Mail which was intended for normal postal delivery would sometimes be carried officially. Cover 5, destined to North America from the UK, was so carried, probably by the Return Ferry Service in spite of the RAF Ferry Command manuscript notation. Note the cachet "M.A.P. BY BAG" over the stamp (M.A.P. denotes Ministry of Aircraft Production).

## 3. RAFFC and RAFTC Personal Mail

Once RAF Ferry Command came into being, increasing numbers of RAF personnel, both technical and administrative, were stationed in Dorval, Gander and Goose to operate the ferry services (Goose Bay, in Labrador, was developed as the first airfield on the northern trans-Atlantic route, Goose-Reykjavik-Prestwick, used by small aircraft). They included aircrew and maintenance, code and cypher, meteorological, medical and administrative staff. In the early days the personal mail of RAFFC staff had to be sent by normal postal channels, but friendly aircrew would be willing to carry letters and post them on arrival at Prestwick. The following quotations are from letters sent by a WAAF in Signals at Gander to her parents in England (5).

"This is only another short note to go over via private mail, i.e. Pilot's safe hand....I'll try and write a proper letter soon - but it's worth getting a note through when someone's just off".

"You should get this within the week as a ferry pilot is taking it over to England for me hence the English stamp and postmark".

Although cover 6 clearly derives from Canada it bears a Prestwick cds over a British 2½d stamp and is not censored. It could well have been carried by a "safe hand". This was strictly against regulations, and in order to attempt to stop the practice, and as a convenience for RAFFC personnel, a personal letter service was authorised (6). This service, which was only available to staff at RAFFC and RAFTC stations, continued until the end of the war. As far as I



COVER 1.

Officer i/c Records,  
Canadian Military Headquarters,  
Records Office,  
Bromyard Avenue,  
Acton, London W. 3,  
England.



BOMBER MAIL

THE BRITISH MINISTRY OF SUPPLY  
227 SPARKS STREET  
OTTAWA - CANADA

OFFICIAL AIR BAG

RM 12/12

BY AIR MAIL—PAR AVION

R.T. Webb, Esq.,  
Ministry of Supply,  
Paper Control,  
Great Western Hotel,  
Reading,  
Berks, England.



2.

**AIR MAIL**

BY BOMBER MAIL  
770-1-19

**VIA BOMBER MAIL**

**O.H.M.S.  
R.C.A.F.**

AIR MINISTRY S.7: (4)  
KASTRAL HOUSE,  
KINGSWAY,  
LONDON, W. 2,  
ENGLAND.

**BY HAND.**

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
With: \_\_\_\_\_  
Received: \_\_\_\_\_  
**19 APR 1944**  
Initials if Acknowledged: \_\_\_\_\_  
File No.: \_\_\_\_\_  
To: \_\_\_\_\_

R.C.A.F. G-71  
1,008M-G-11(300)  
N.C. 888-G-71

3. On reverse is handstamp  
"Don't be extravagant with words or stationery"  
"DIRECTORATE OF PERSONEL SERVICES, OTTAWA"

ROYAL AIR FORCE FERRY COMMAND

**Flight To**

BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES  
30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, NEW YORK CITY

4.

DRUM ESC.  
CLARENCE STAFFS,  
LONDON, ENGLAND.

3.

am aware, very few official documents referring to this service have survived. The reason for this is not difficult to find. The Secretary of the Ferry Command Association (who worked in Radio personnel with RAFFC from March 1941 to June 1943) states that "All files, etc. were destroyed at Dorval after the war...." (7). A search of the archives at the RAF Museum, Hendon, and the Public Record Office, Kew, revealed only one reference to the service. In June 1943 "Administration and Personal Duties" within No.45 (Atlantic Transport) Group, Dorval, were decentralised. Amongst other things, Wing-Commander H.Maynard was given responsibility for "Supervision of Personal Mail Dept." (8). In 1944 a receiving handstamp was in use at Dorval for incoming personal mail. The only example I have found is very indistinct. It is rectangular and contains the words "PERSONAL..?.. APR 14 1944 RAF DORVAL" (fig.1 and cover 7). A circular receiving handstamp was in use in July 1945 (fig.2 and cover 8).

Philatelically, the personal mail service can be considered in three phases.

i. Phase 1 (1941 - 1942)

Mail would be handed in, without any reference to the Canadian postal service, and flown to Prestwick. Once in the UK it would be censored using civilian closure labels and, finally, stamps would be affixed and postmarked. According to Powle (5), the mail was franked "official" before posting, but I have no evidence for this. The postmark, an unusual machine dumb variety, consisted of sectioned wavy lines, i.e., the normal British machine postmark but with the date and place "slug" removed (fig.3 and cover 9). It is certainly not of the type used in Canada at that time. In cover 9 the postmark can be seen over the censor label on the reverse.

ii. Phase 2 (approx. April 1942 - January 1944)

(a) Canada

It seems that the Canadian Post Office objected to this procedure, stating that RAFFC were "mail carriers" without proper authority. To placate them it was agreed that Canadian stamps would be affixed to all mail, the minimum surface rate being allowed as a concession, and that a specially provided handstamp would be used to cancel the stamp (5). The circular postmark contained the wording "MONTREAL A.M.F. P.Q." and the date and A.M. or P.M. A.M.F. denotes Air Mail Facilities fig.4 and cover 10). It was common practice for the sender to give the route indication "By RAFFC AIR MAIL", or some variant of this, on the front and to state name and section on the reverse. As before, censoring would take place in the UK (but see section iii (b)).

The earliest use of this A.M.F. handstamp which I have seen is 15th April 1942 (cover 10) and the latest 17th January 1944.

One unusual cover, probably of this phase, has managed to avoid the A.M.F. handstamp and has, instead, a Glasgow cds over the Canadian 4c stamp (cover 11). Could this suggest that the censoring was carried out at Prestwick before the mail was put into the British postal system?

It was part of the agreement with the Canadian Post Office that only Ferry Command personnel would use the service. Non-RAFFC persons could use it but only with the permission of a very senior officer who had to countersign the cover. One such cover was countersigned by Air Commodore R.L.G. Marix and was sent by Powle's wife to her husband while he was back in the UK (cover 12). At this time Marix was "Air Officer i/c of Administration" at Dorval and was responsible for mail services (7).

(b) Newfoundland

The only covers I have seen were all from the same WAAF, Monica Swinburne, to her mother in West Hartlepool. All have 5c Newfoundland stamps, are cancelled

505

LOCKHEED HYDRAULIC BRAKE CO. LTD.,  
TACHBROOK ROAD, LEAMINGTON SPA,  
WARWICKSHIRE.



EXAMINER 957

BY AIR MAIL.

RAF. FERRY COMMAND

0.606

J. G. Turton, Esq.,

C/o Messrs. P. R. Behring Co.,

8/10, Bridge Street,

NEW YORK,

N.Y.

5.

AUG 15 1942

Routed Via:  
THE BRITISH AIR COMMISSION  
Washington, D. C.



IF NOT DELIVERED, RETURN TO  
ROYAL AIR FORCE FERRY COMMAND  
BRITISH AIR MINISTRY  
NEW FOUNDLAND



BY AIR MAIL  
PAR AVION

*The Swinhoe.  
Rift House.  
West Hartlepool.*

6.

OPENED BY EXAMINER



BY AIR MAIL - PAR AVION

*L.A. Thomas, Lt. C.*  
*1201361*  
*Signals, HQ #45 St. Transport Group*  
*Dorval, Que,*  
*Canada.*

7.

*P.O. Br 72  
Campbelltown  
Cobalt*



PERS.  
APR 14 1944  
RA.

8. Front- Addressed to 45 Group Dorval;  
And postmarks of Campbelltown, N.B.

5.



with a Gander cds of varying size and colour (black or red), and bear identical Newfoundland civilian censor closure labels (British type), "P.C.90 OPENED BY EXAMINER DC/49" with morse code for "V" at the bottom. In addition envelopes show the manuscript or typed routing "BY RAFFC AIRMAIL" and have the lady's name, rank and number on the reverse.

(c) Goose

Once again, the only covers I have seen deriving from Goose Bay are from Monica Swinburne. They bear the minimum surface Canadian postage rate (4c at the time) cancelled with C.A.P.O.No.10 cds (C.A.P.O. denotes Canadian Army Post Office and No.10 is Goose Bay) (cover 13).

iii. Phase 3 (approx. January 1944 onwards)

(a) Dorval

This phase commences with the disappearance of the Montreal A.M.F. postmark (cover 11) which was replaced by the dumb cancel described in Phase 1, i.e., sectioned wavy lines of the British type (fig.3). In all other respects covers resemble those of Phase 2.

It appears that, in this phase at least, RAFTC Headquarters at Dorval was the central processing point for mail deriving from most RAFTC bases in the Americas, with the exception of Gander, Newfoundland. Almost invariably, users of the personal mail service put their name, rank, number and location on the back of the envelope. Thus one can identify the place of origin of each cover, and I have seen mail from Goose Bay, Elizabeth City in North Carolina, Trinidad and Nassau Bahamas (cover 14), which, as far as stamps, postmark and censoring is concerned is indistinguishable from Dorval mail (cover 15).

To summarise, it seems that personal mail destined for the U.K. would be handed in at any RAFTC base and transported to Dorval where minimum surface rate stamps would be affixed. Then it is likely that it would be flown to Britain to be censored, via civilian channels, and postmarked before being handed to the British Post Office. On many covers the wavy line cancel can be seen over the censor label as well as the stamp.

(b) Newfoundland

The only exception to the above scheme appears to be Gander, Newfoundland, but I only have two covers as evidence. The first is a specimen identical to the mail described in Phase 3(a) with the exception that the stamp is a Newfoundland 5c (cover 16). Curiously, the sender, Barbara E. Jobson, has written on the censor label that she did the censoring. I managed to trace the lady who confirmed that the handwriting was hers (9).

To return to the question of censoring, it is the fact of civilian type censorship, which was carried out before the application of the British type machine cancel in phases 1 and 3, and Powle's letter (6), which has led me to suggest that this took place in the UK. However the Jobson cover argues against this theory as does a statement from the Secretary of the Ferry Command Association, namely that "Next to the mail room there was another room (very secret) and we suspect that this was where the censorship was done for all outgoing mail". But wouldn't RAF censors have processed the mail at Dorval? This needs further research.

The second cover did attract RAFTC censorship (fig.5 cover 17) of the type already described by Guertin (3). As with all other Gander covers I have seen it bears a Gander cds over a Newfoundland 5c stamp. Note the routing "RAFTC AIRMAIL".

Reverse of 9. 10. - "From Monica Swinburne WAAF"

EXAMINER 1979

By RAFFC AIR MAIL.

10.

Mrs Swinburne.

Rift House

West Hartlepool.

Co. DURHAM.

ENGLAND



Swinburne.  
Rift House.  
West Hartlepool.  
RHAM.

VIA AIR MAIL

CORREO AEREO

9.

EXAMINER 9876

EXAMINER 9876

IF NOT DELIVERED, RETURN TO  
HEADQUARTERS FERRY COMMAND, ROYAL AIR FORCE  
MONTREAL AIRPORT, DORVAL, P. QUE.

By RAFFC AIR MAIL

Mrs. SWINBURNE.

RIFT HOUSE

WEST HARTLEPOOL.

11. Front- Glasgow 30 ? 1943 cds;  
Reverse- "From Monica Swinburne  
WAAF 927 RAFTC"



EXAMINER 9613

EXAMINER 9613

ROYAL AIR FORCE STATION

HEMLOW

12. 12.

BEDFORDSHIRE



Mr J. H. Powse  
7790 Cds des Jeps  
Montreal  
Canada

Authorized by  
A. V. M. R. Harris  
AOC 45 Group  
Montreal

IF NOT DELIVERED, RETURN TO  
HEADQUARTERS FERRY COMMAND, ROYAL AIR FORCE  
MONTREAL AIRPORT, DORVAL, P. QUE.



Mrs Swinburne.

Rift House.

13. Reverse- "From Monica Swinburne WAAF Goose"  
West Hartlepool.

Co. DURHAM.

7.



4. Personal Mail from the UK to RAFFC/RAFTC Bases in the Americas

It is reasonable to assume that a personal mail service also operated in the East - West direction by means of the Return Ferry. Guertin (3) has mentioned the processing of personal mail from the UK to RAFFC/RAFTC aircrew in operations. The sender had to address mail c/o RAF Ferry Command, C.L.O. (F) Air Ministry, Bush House, London W,C.2. There each cover would be marked with a large circular handstamp containing "CLO/F" and the date followed by "PERSONAL LETTERS AIR MINISTRY" (fig.6). Civilian censoring would then take place before the cover was sent on to find the addressee. One such cover is addressed to W/Cdr John Alexander D.F.C. (cover 18). It contains a copied note which states "This envelope addressed to me bearing a rubber stamp of the Air Ministry was flown from England to Canada in a bomber aircraft and then to Labrador by the same means. J.A.Alexander W/Cdr, RAF Ferry Command". The cover bears in manuscript "Goose" and "54".

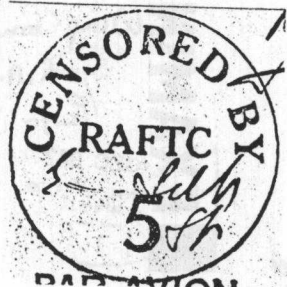
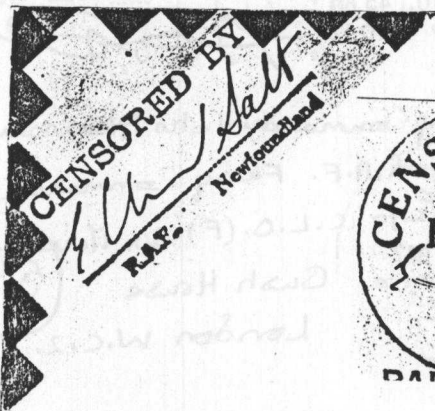
5. In Conclusion

In producing this paper I have, with trepidation, ventured into many branches of philately, and may have overlooked what is glaringly obvious to the experts. Corrections or enlightenment will be gratefully received as will further evidence in the form of covers or references. If sufficient material is forthcoming I will produce a supplementary paper.

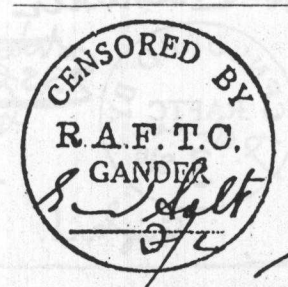
References

1. "Merchant Airmen", the Air Ministry account of British Civil Aviation 1939-1944, HMSO, 1946.
2. "Atlantic Bridge, the Official Account of RAF Transport Command's Ocean Ferry", HMSO, 1945.
3. "The Wartime Mails and Stamps - Canada, 1939-46", H.E.Guertin, Toronto, 1976.
4. "The Air Mail Entire Truth, Official Newsletter of the International Study for Aerogrammes", issue no.21, December 1967.
5. In 1984 I met Miss Olga Ward who served with RAFTC in Dorval, Gander and Elizabeth City during 1943-1945. As well as recounting her recollections of the mail services, she allowed me to read the letters she sent to her parents at the time, and to photocopy the relevant passages. In addition she gave me some of the few covers she had retained.
6. Copy of a private letter from Group Captain J.H.Powle to a more senior officer in September 1942. I have this courtesy of Francis J.Field who allowed me to search his archives for reference material. J.H.Powle was in Technical Branch (Engineers).
7. Private letter, of May 26, 1943, from Mrs.L.Wheeler, Secretary of the Ferry Command Association, to the writer.
8. Public Record Office, Reference AIR 38/21.
9. In 1982 I met Barbara Jobson (now Mrs.Cusack) who served with RAFTC in Dorval, Goose, Gander and Elizabeth City during 1943-1945. Her memory was hazy, but she was in no doubt that the handwriting on the censor label was hers. Apparently she was a senior WAAF officer and entitled to censor mail.

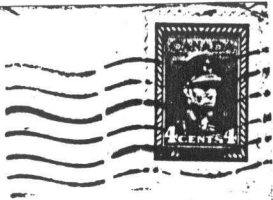
Misc. RAF FC/TC Markings - From the editor's desk.



10.



RAFTC air mail.



←←←←

14. Reverse- "P. Wahltinch  
Flt/O 113 Wing Nassau"

*Mother was Cepho  
Convent H.C.  
Wienckly  
Pres Wm.  
England.*

P.C.90  
9805  
P.C.90  
9805

IF NOT DELIVERED RETURN TO  
HEADQUARTERS  
45 (ATLANTIC TRANSPORT) GROUP, RAF  
MONTREAL AIRPORT, DORVAL, QUEBEC.

BY R .A.F.T.C. AIR MAIL.



MRS. SWINBURNE.  
RIFT HOUSE.  
WEST HA-RTLEPOOL.

COUNTY DURHAM.

15. Reverse- "From Monica Swinburne  
WAAF 927 No. 45 (AT) Group RAF"

**EXAMINER 64:**

*Command  
Dr. T.B. Johnson,  
Netherwood,  
Epsom Road,  
Guildford  
England. Surrey*



16. Front and reverse.

**by AIR MAIL**

*From: Flt/O B.E. Tolson 638.  
Code & Cypher - RAFTCU Newfoundland*

**P.C.90**  
*Censored  
Australia  
E 10/11/42  
1-1-18*

RAFTC AIRMAIL.

*Cpt. Tught  
2026810  
W.A.A.F. Section  
R.A.F. Station  
Earls Colne*

*Miss D. Pugh,  
N. Colchester  
Hatfield Gardens,  
Essex  
Bottesbury  
Somerset.  
England.*



17.



18. Reverse- "Alexander, Queenswood,  
Hatfield, Herts., England.

**EXAMINER 9167**

HATFIELD  
HERTS.  
10.1 45 AM  
DEC 42



*Hoose*

*Wing Commander John Alexander D.F.  
R.A.F. Ferry Command (and)  
E to C.L.O. (F) Air Ministry  
Bush House  
London W.C.2.*

**54**