

Identifiable Mail To and From Naval Personnel serving in Minesweepers, Corvettes and Destroyers During World War II: 1939 – 1945

Synopsis

On September 10, 1939 Canada Declared war on Germany. At the time the Royal Canadian Navy was made up of thirteen ships, six destroyers, four minesweepers, one trawler, one sailing ship used as a training vessel for officers and one fishing boat from the Fisherman's Reserve also used as a training vessel for naval personnel

Canada went on a shipbuilding program and ended up with one hundred and twenty-three corvettes, sixty-six minesweepers and forty destroyers. Many minesweepers had been built for the Royal Navy but manned by Canadians. The same held true for corvettes and destroyers. Corvettes, by the way were named as such by Winston Churchill. Corvettes had also been transferred from the Royal Navy to the Royal Canadian Navy. Although other types of ships were part of the force, Corvettes and minesweepers were the mainstay of the Canadian Navy and it became one of the best anti-submarine navies in the world. Destroyers were the princesses of the seas

Corvettes averaged 205 feet in length with a beam of 33 feet. They were armed with a four inch gun, three 50 caliber machine guns and in some cases two oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, two depth charge throwers and two depth charge rails with forty depth charges and were manned each with a complement of 85 officers and ratings

The Bangor class minesweeper was built along the same lines as a corvette except it was 180 feet in length, 28 feet on the beam. They were armed with a 12 pound gun, 2 oerlikon anti-aircraft gun and 40 depth charges. Not all minesweepers were equipped with minesweeping gear. They were also used as convoy escorts. They had a complement of 83 officers and ratings each

The Algerine class minesweeper came out in 1942 and was bigger than a corvette being 225 feet in length with a 36 foot beam. They were armed with a four inch anti-aircraft gun, four twin 20mm oerlikon guns hedgehog anti-submarine devices and they were used as escorts only They also had a complement of 85 officers and ratings.

Destroyers on the other hand were heavily armed with an assortment of heavy guns, anti aircraft guns, torpedoes, and depth charges. They also had a compliment of approximately 250 officers and ratings.

Security was extremely tight with all mail to and from naval personnel having to be censored, with the exception of a sailor writing a letter while ashore and adding postage and dropping it in a mail box or taking the letter to a post office. About the only thing a letter could contain was, how the individual was doing, the health of the people back home, how was the family pet. The description of convoys, submarines, torpedoing of ships, recovering bodies from the sea, dead or alive, the stress and the tensions were not to be included in letters.

The identifiable mail from a ship has to do with censor markings for the most part. At the beginning of the war, each Canadian warship that entered a British port was assigned a

tombstone marking. It had a space for the censor's initials and the date. These are seen for the most part on mail from the destroyers that went to Great Britain at the beginning of the war and Canadian land bases overseas. In 1940 Canada issued its own rectangular or oblong censor stamps. It also had space for initials and date. The job of censoring letters went to the lowest ranking officer aboard. In the case of land bases, it was the WRCN (*WRENS*) that carried out those duties. There is a site, 'For Posterity's Sake' that lists among other things all naval officers that served in the first, second and Korean wars and the ships they served on, . By comparing initials to names, one can identify a ship a letter was sent from. It is time consuming but rewarding.

Great Britain had a censor code for each empire country. Canada's censor code was DB The navy added a forward slash followed by the letter N. From early January onward censor stamps read FROM H.M.C. SHIP / EXAMINED BY.... (*number*) Each ship was issued with a different number and there were different sizes and straight lines. These stamps were the responsibility of the commanding officer and were kept under lock and key. To this day there is no record of DB/N number listing. Therefore the only way of identifying a ship number is if it is part of the return address. Therefore very little mail is identifiable as to the ship it comes from. The author of this exhibit has compiled probably the best DB/N censor number data base that exists based on the research done by Percy G. Colbeck and Maurice F. Hampson titled Royal Canadian Postal History 1939 – 1945. Many secret documents were destroyed once restrictions were lifted at the end of hostilities.

Military mail in general was granted free postage on surface mail. In the case of the navy one had to be serving on a vessel or in an overseas land base. The exception was mail sent by air, special delivery or registered. In those cases, full postage was paid. Newfoundland at the time was a British colony so those serving at HMCS Avalon also had the privilege of free surface mail. Mail from Newfoundland including ships based there received a triangular stamp reading POSTAGE PAID G.P.O. indicating the proper amount had been collected. These triangle stamps come in various sizes. Those serving on Canadian shore bases were obliged to pay the postage rate of the day on all mail.

There are no unique items highlighted in this exhibit because every piece is unique. Close to seventeen thousand officers and ratings served in minesweepers and corvettes during World War II and yet this 48 page exhibit is considered a major exhibit. There are many covers available but identifying where they come from is a continuous work in progress.



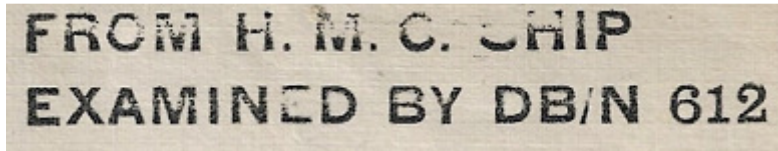
Tombstone



Rectangular censor stamps



Most commonly seen of rectangular marking in this exhibit



DB/N censor marking most commonly seen in this exhibit



GPO Triangle used in Newfoundland

DB/A Gibraltar	IB Leeward
DB/C Canada	Islands
DB/H Barbados	IC Bermuda
DB Canada	ID Jamaica
DC Newfoundland	IE Trinidad
DH India.	

Censor code

Bibliography;

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For Posterity's Sake, a Royal Canadian Navy Historical Project.

This site is dedicated to the men and women of the Royal Canadian Navy and the ships they lived and served in. This is a personal website and is not affiliated with the Government of Canada nor the Department of National Defence. <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/RCN.htm>

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