

Canadian Military Mail Study Group

NEWSLETTER

JULY 2017

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CANADA'S MERCHANT NAVY--SECOND WORLD WAR--
By Jon Johnson

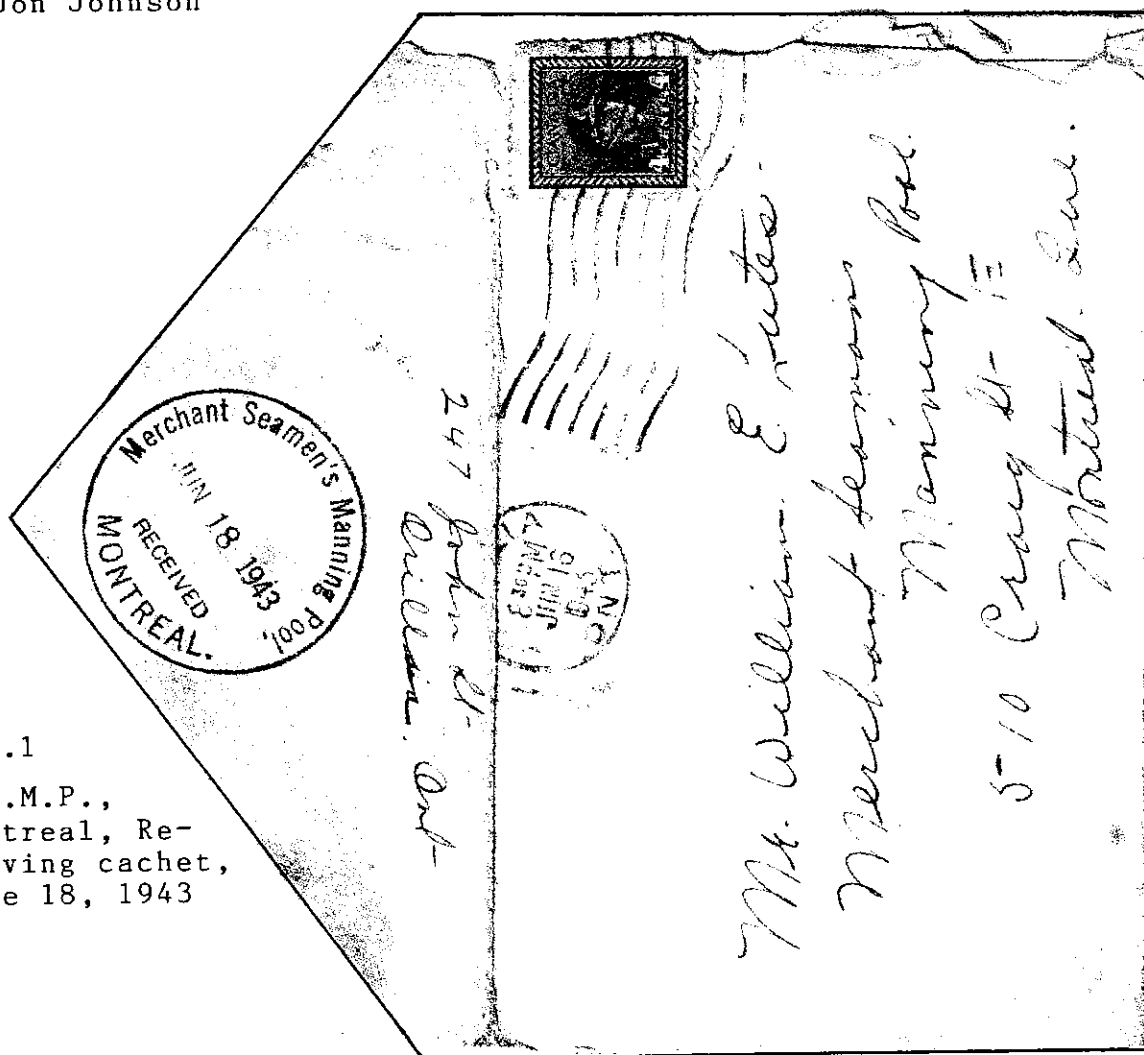


FIG.1

M.S.M.P.,
Montreal, Re-
ceiving cachet,
June 18, 1943

[Cont'd.]

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The Canadian Merchant Navy consisted of two unrelated maritime components:

1) Freighters and passenger ships registered in Canada (Canadian flagged)

These vessels encompassed those in coastal waters, inland waters (Great Lakes), and foreign-going. Foreign-going ships included freighters and tankers as expected but also passenger and troop ships. Fifteen of these Canadian flagged ships were foreign owned. The size of a crew varied depending on the size and type of each vessel. Of the 184 Canadian flagged vessels during the Second World War, most common was the 10,000 tonne Park class freighter (127 ships) and the 4,700 tonne Gray class freighter (43 ships). A Park class ship had a crew of about 50 where the Gray class ship had a crew of about 41. Some Park ships were Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships (DEMS) and carried gunners to man the 4" deck gun on the stern. Canadian National Railways' RMS Lady Nelson (sunk March 10, 1942 and refloated; becoming hospital ship HMCHS Lady Nelson with an RCAMC hospital staff of 100) had a merchant marine crew of 75. The largest Canadian flagged vessel, Canadian Pacific Railway's RMS Empress of Asia (requisitioned as the armed troopship HMT Empress of Asia) was sunk off Singapore February 5, 1942 with 391 merchant mariners aboard.

On April 8, 1942 the Canadian Government created the Park Steamship Company to manage construction and operation of freighters and tankers owned by the Canadian Government. All but two of these ships were named after municipal, provincial, or federal parks. All Park ships were built in Canadian yards with 45% produced on the west coast. From 1946 to 1950 most of the Park ships were sold to various shipping lines. Fifty-eight Canadian flagged vessels plus six British flagged vessels (but Canadian Government owned) were lost due to enemy action.

2) Canadian citizens who "volunteered" to work on Allied freighters and passenger ships regardless of the ship's registry

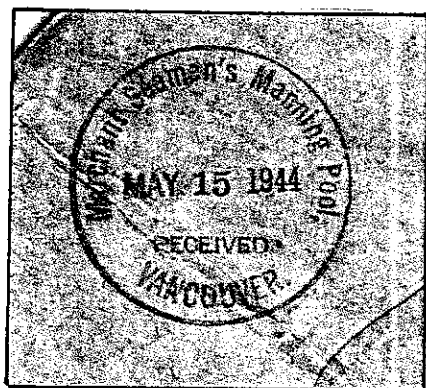


FIG. 2
M.S.M.P.,
Vancouver,
May 15, 1944.

These Canadian officers and crew were all volunteers insofar that they were not conscripts and were not required to serve on these ships. With the war production of new vessels there was a dramatic need to increase the number of qualified men to operate Canadian freighters across the Atlantic so two training schools were established. At Hubbards, Nova Scotia, St. Margaret's Sea Training School offered courses on seamanship. At Prescott, Ontario, the Marine Engineering Instructional School specialized in training engine room ratings. Students were paid while they were in school.

To provide a readily accessible pool of qualified merchant mariners, both men and women, Merchant Seamen Manning Pools were established by the Mer-

[Cont'd.]

chant Seaman Order of 1941 [see FIGS.1-3]. This meant that a ship missing crewmen could find replacements quickly and not miss their scheduled convoy. Merchant mariners could stay at the manning pool and be paid while waiting for assignment to a ship. Four Canadian manning pools were established:

- Halifax September 1941
- Montreal January 1942
- Vancouver May 1942
- Saint John July 1942

The Canadian manning pools were open to Allied merchant mariners with reciprocal arrangement at manning pools in other countries. A crewman was assigned to any Allied ship that needed his services regardless of matching citizenship and ship registry.

In July 1943 Lieut-Commander John A. MacDonald, in charge of naval censorship in Ottawa, created a mail forwarding service for Canadian merchant mariners. Known as "Box 9000", this unit forwarded mail (letters, parcels, and telegrams) to intercept merchant ships all around the world. Commander Fred Davis, Naval Control of Shipping Office (NCSO), Montreal, was in command with a staff of WRCNS (Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service) [personnel] mostly from the censorship branch. By combining information from the British Ministry of War Transportation, shipping companies, manning pools, and DEMS, the WRCNS tried to predict where a merchant mariner would be in four weeks or less, then forwarded the mail to them by air. Sometime after Christmas 1943 a "Box 9000" office was opened at Vancouver, British Columbia.[see FIGS.4-6].

Canadian merchant mariners staying at the manning pools used "Box 9000" Montreal or Vancouver as their return address. The only naval personnel permitted to use "Box 9000" were the DEMS gunners who were serving on the merchant ships. Merchant mariners who were employees of a shipping line had the option to have their incoming mail sent care of their shipping line who forwarded the mail to the mariner. Both "Box 9000" offices closed in September 1945.

Merchant mariners did not have the right to send their mail postage free like Canadian military service personnel overseas. This changed August 7, 1945, when Order-in-Council P.C. 4157 directed that merchant mariners could send mail free **providing** the item was mailed at a Canadian military or naval post office. As V.E. Day (Victory Europe) was two months earlier and V.J. Day (Victory Japan) was only four weeks away, this privilege did not last long.

Supplemental notes:

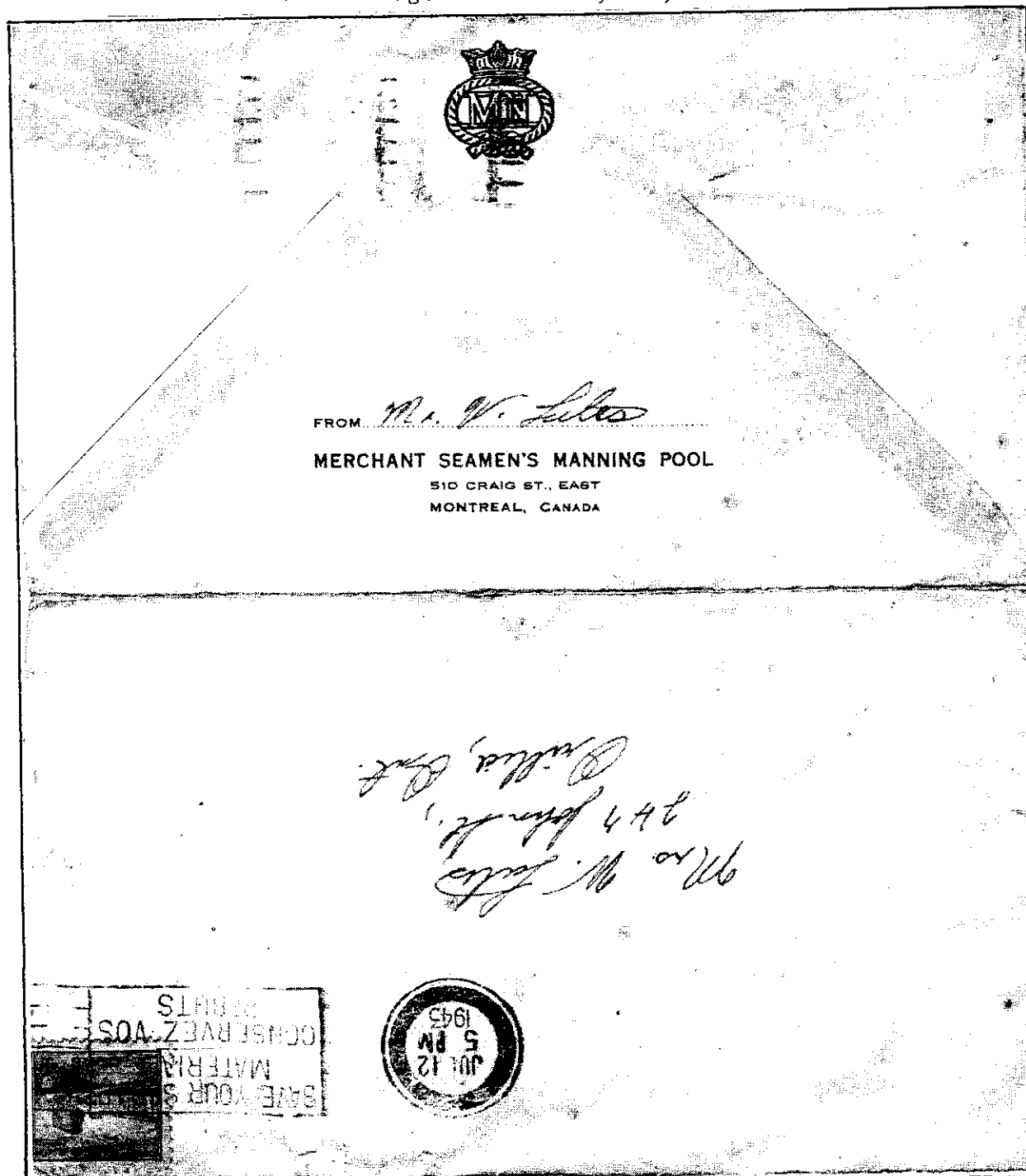
En route to Montreal, Quebec, the British passenger liner SS Athenia was sunk September 3, 1939 west of Ireland by U-30. Stewardess Hannah Baird, of Verdun, Quebec, became the first Canadian merchant mariner to die during the Second World War. For the scope of the merchant navy losses review the table below:

[Cont'd.]

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	Pre-War	During War	Killed	Percent
Canadian merchant mariners	1,400	12,000	1,451	12.1%
American merchant mariners	55,000	215,000	9,300	4.3%
British merchant mariners	144,000	185,000	36,749	19.9%
Canadian army overseas (*in Canada)	4,261*	374,000	24,870	6.6%

FIG.3 Merchant Seamen's Manning Pool stationery
with MN logo dated July 12, 1943



[Cont'd.]

FIG.4 Cover addressed c/o SS Wildwood Park, c/o P.O. Box 9000, Montreal.

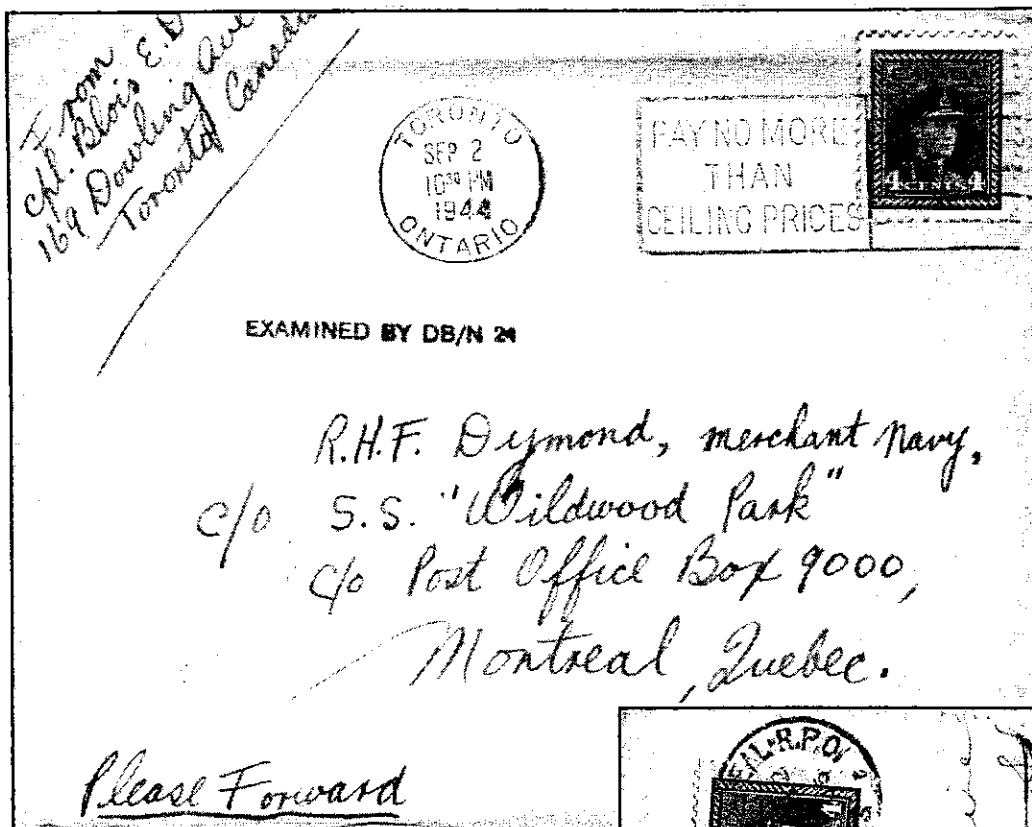


FIG.5 Cover forwarded to SS Winnipegosis Park, Box 9000, Vancouver, dated February 12, 1945

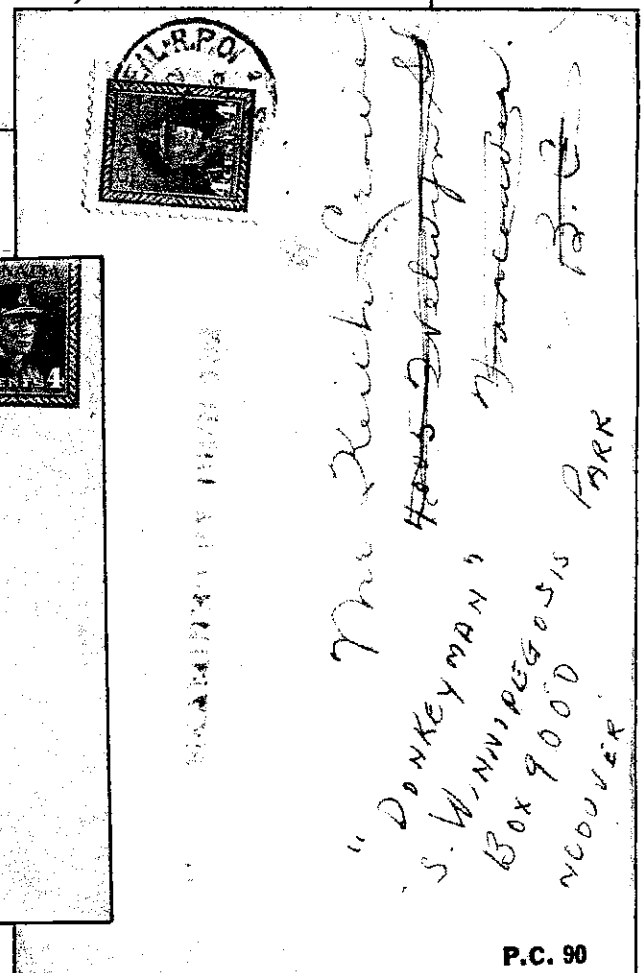
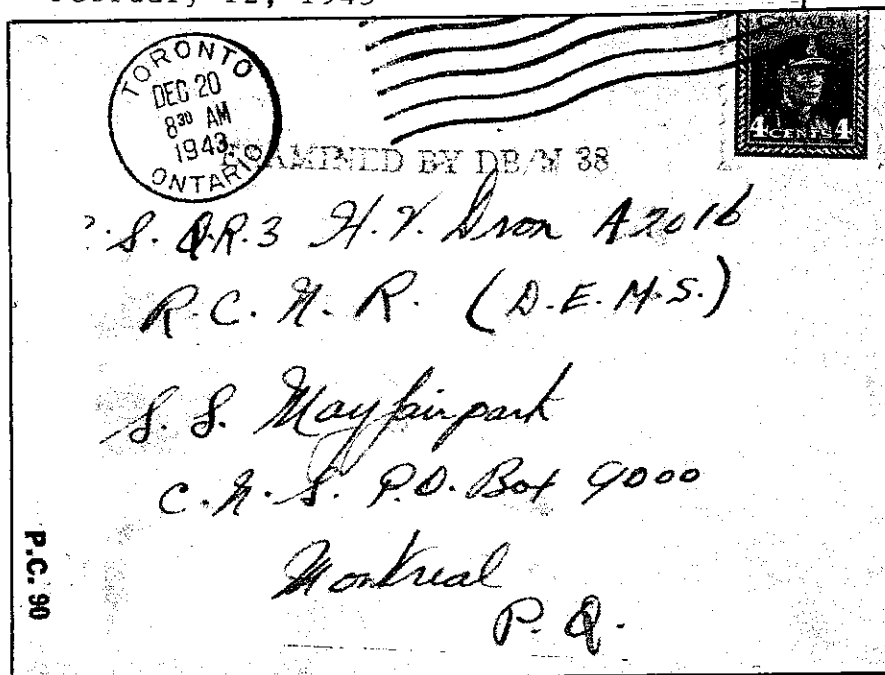


FIG.6 Cover addressed to DEMS gunner on SS Mayfair Park, C.N.S., P.O. Box 9000, dated December 20, 1943

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FIG.7 Cover from Montreal, December 15, 1943 to merchant crewman c/o Captain Scott, c/o Huggens & Co., Trinidad, B.W.I. (Victoria Park)

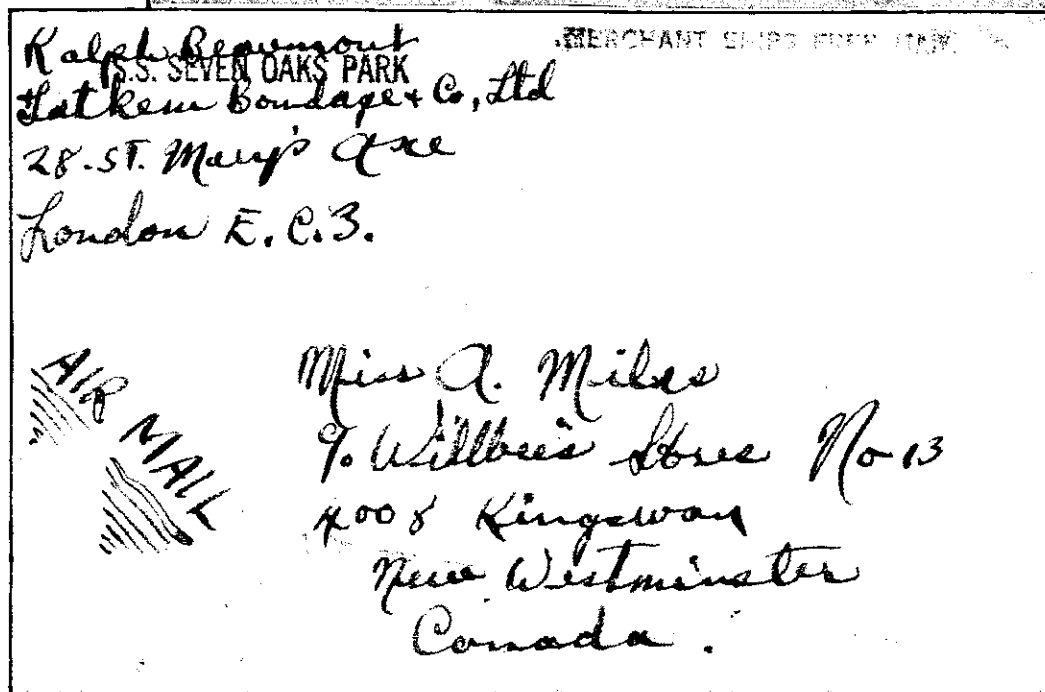
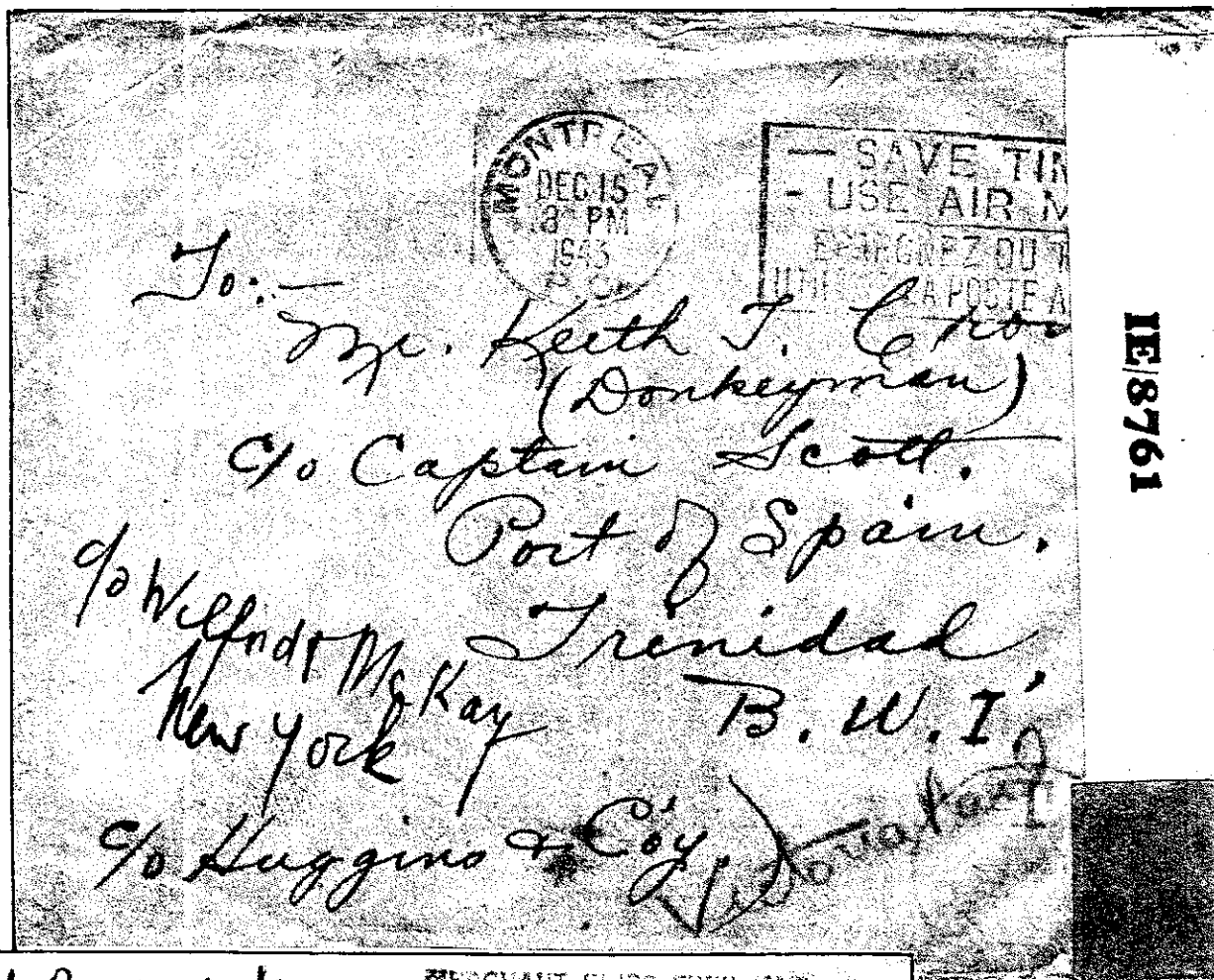


FIG.8 Undated cover with cachet "MERCHANT SHIPS FREE MAIL", from SS Seven Oaks Park

[Cont'd.]

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Merchant_Navy

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[For more on P.O. Box 9000 see Colin Pomfret's "P.O. Box 9000: The Canadian Merchant Seaman's Post Office," NL#164 (March 2004), pp. 729-732. Given Jon's cover in Fig.8 and the straightline "MERCHANT SHIPS FREE MAIL" handstamp identified perhaps with the S.S. Seven Oaks Park, has Kim Dodwell's query been solved? See his "Merchant Ships Free Mail Query," NL#165 (May 2004), pp. 744-745. Kim's cover was addressed to a different recipient but, like Jon's, was in B.C. (Vancouver). See also NL#166 (August 2004), p. 761 for more on Canada's Merchant Navy.Ed.]

UPDATING THE GREAT WAR CANADIAN FIELD CENSOR MARKINGS DATABASE--
By Wayne Schnarr

The most comprehensive database of field censor handstamps used by Canadian units in the Great War is contained in the article by the late John Frith entitled "Allocation of Field Censor Handstamps--WWI" in the BNAPS publication A Canadian Military Postal History Anthology (1991). The author had a great resource and starting point in the book The Field Censor Systems of the Armies of the British Empire, 1914-1918 written by F.W. Daniels and published by the Forces Postal History Society.

The Frith database contains all the data on the censor handstamps of type CM2 through CM6 for the Canadian Corps Infantry, Artillery, Machine Gun, and Medical Units during 1914-1918. The allocations were primarily based on finding the censor's name on the nominal roll of a unit. The unit information in the National Archives was sparse and the various regimental histories were rarely available or complete. The Frith database does not include any allocations to units of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade or Canadian Army Service Corps units.

We now have an additional resource with the digitizing and uploading

[Cont'd.]

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of many service files for Great War soldiers to the following internet site: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/search.aspx>. The service file usually shows dates when the soldier is "taken on strength" or "struck off strength" of the various units. This information could be used to link the censor's name to the unit(s) in which they served.

For use with my personal Great War collection, I transferred the information from the Frith database to an Excel workbook. To make the database more user-friendly, I slightly modified the confidence levels used by Frith for the allocations of censor numbers to specific units. I would be happy to supply this Excel workbook to anybody who emails me at gwschnarr@rogers.com and to receive any information which can be used to update the database.

AN INVITATION TO ORAPEX 2018--By J.M. Powell, ORAPEX Chair and Member

ORAPEX is the national philatelic exhibition held in Ottawa on the first weekend in May each year. We have a designated theme for these shows and, in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Armistice, the 2018 theme will be "The Military". We are hoping to attract military collectors and exhibits dealing with military mail, thematics, and postcards. Of course applications to exhibit on any subject are also welcome.

Each year we also honour a philatelist who has made a significant contribution to our hobby. We are most pleased to announce that our show honouree for 2018 will be Mike Street. Any BNAPS member will certainly recognize his many qualifications for such recognition.

So why not consider a visit to the nation's capital for ORAPEX 2018 to be held on May 5 and 6? Details will be available in due course on the ORAPEX website.

W/O CHARLES E. WALKEY, MERCHANT MARINER CORRESPONDENCE--By Colin Pomfret (Deceased)

[I had planned to publish Colin's following material in an issue this year but his unfortunate passing gave me second thoughts. However, in light of Jon's previous article, and to honour Colin with a tribute to his wonderful support of the CMMSG's Newsletter, I will run a few of his submitted illustrations related to Charles E. Walkey who served as a Wireless Operator on the SS Leaside Park, the SS Winona Park, and the SS Mohawk Park. None of the following covers were contained in his previously noted March 2004 article.

FIG.1 dated March 28, 1944 shows a cover to Walkey c/o the Fathom Bromage and Company, Limited. It is uncensored. FIGS.2-4 are covers to Walkey with different naval DB/N censors while aboard SS Leaside Park and care of Box 9000. FIGS. 5-6 are airmail covers to Walkey now on the SS Winona Park. Both have the censor DB/N 90.

[Cont'd.]

FIG.7 illustrates a cablegram from Canada to Walkey aboard the SS Mohawk Park at Lyttelton, New Zealand dated October 11, 1945. The message reads "Am eagerly awaiting your arrival Darling. Please come over soon. Love, Billie".Ed.]

FIG.1

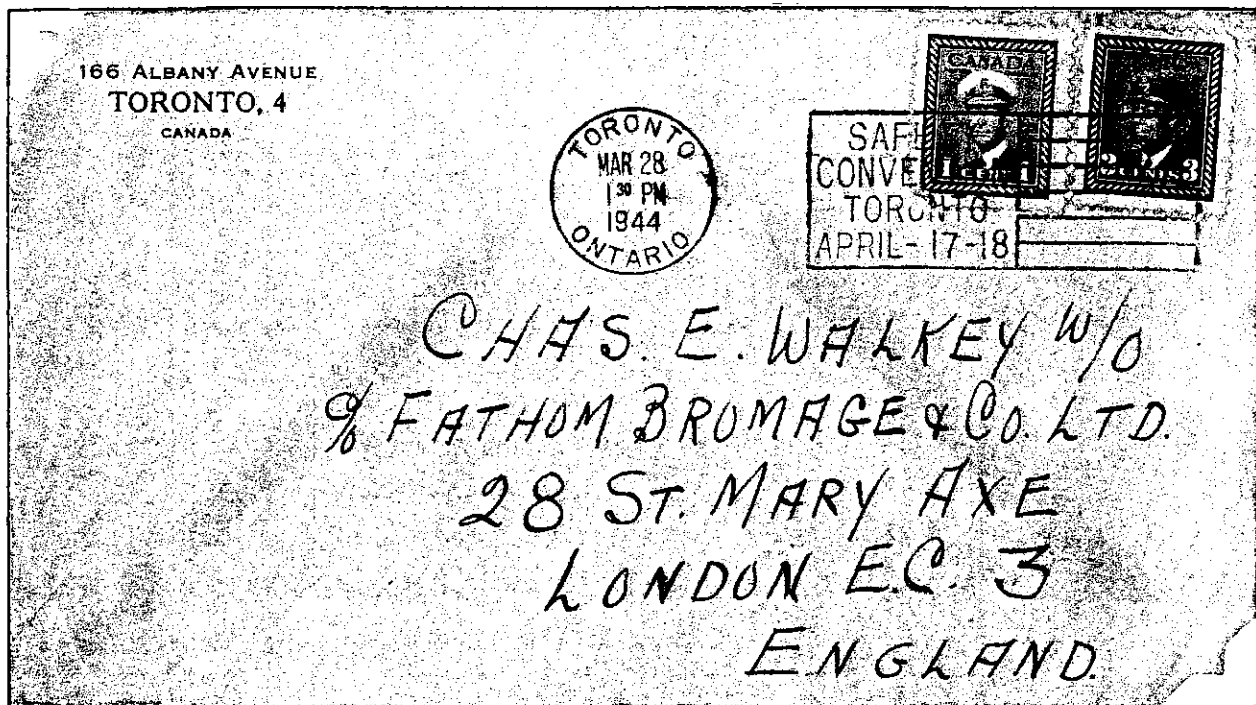
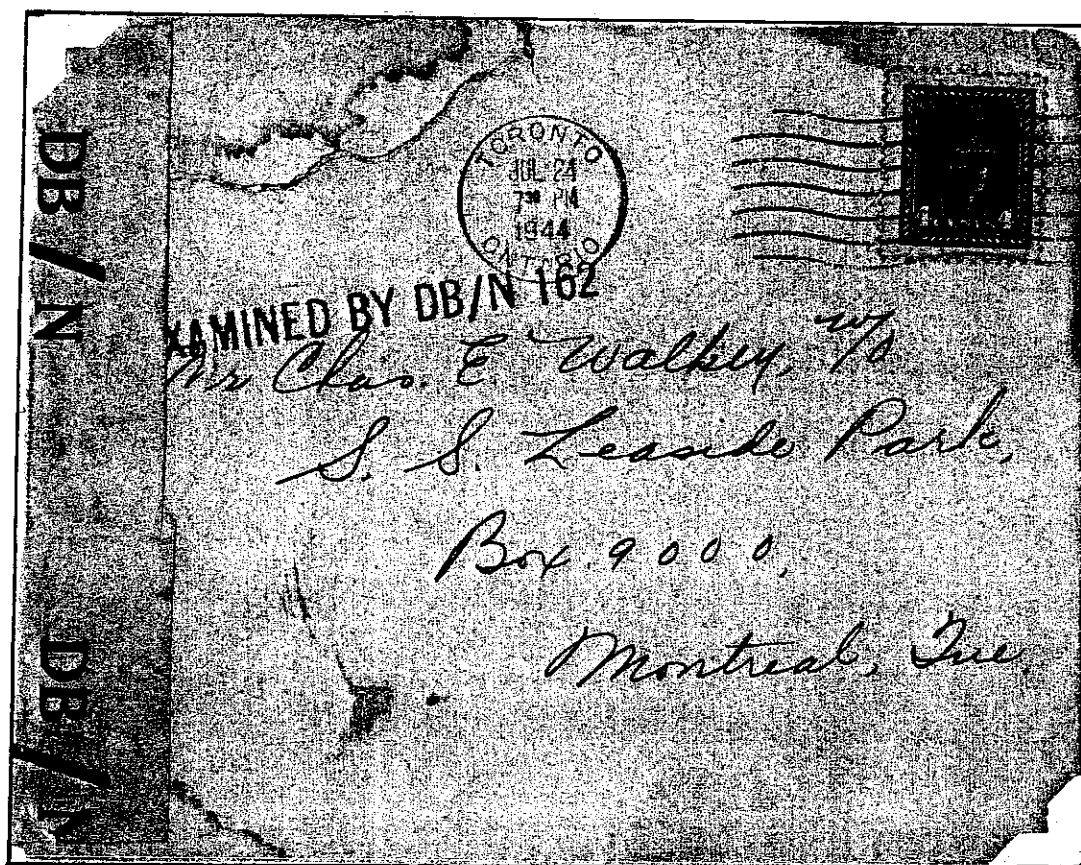


FIG.2



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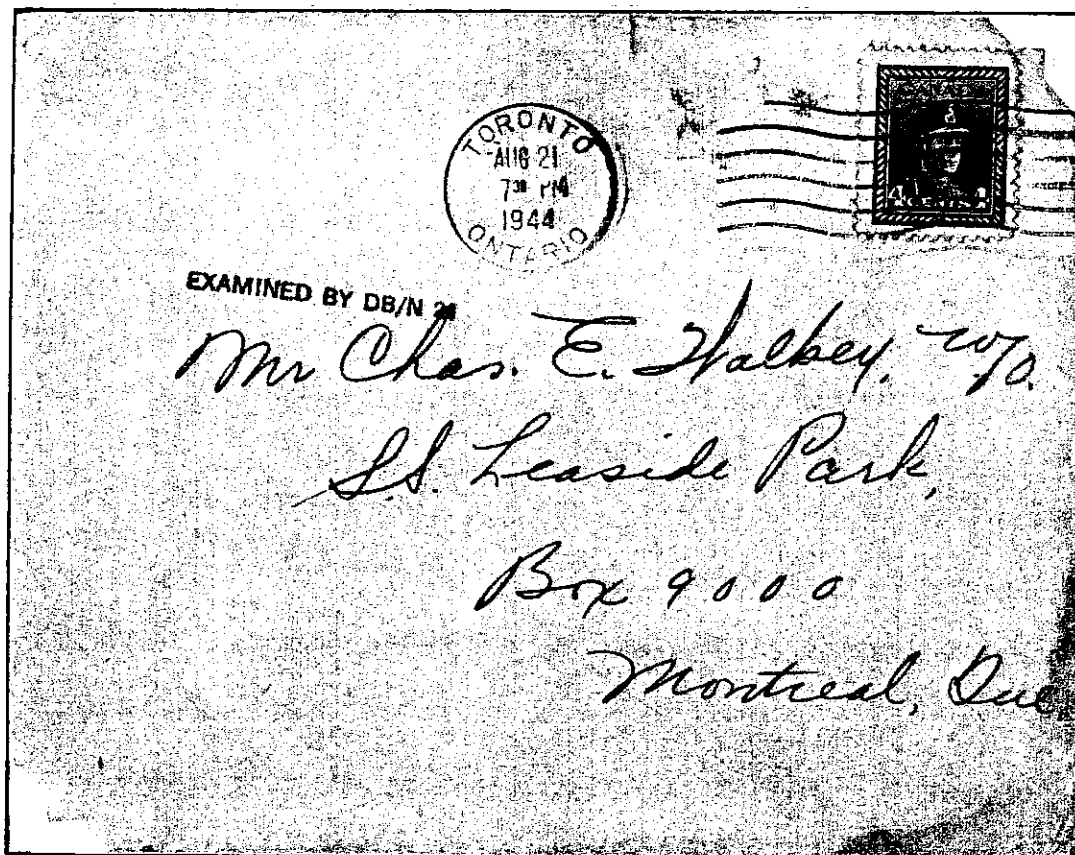


FIG. 3

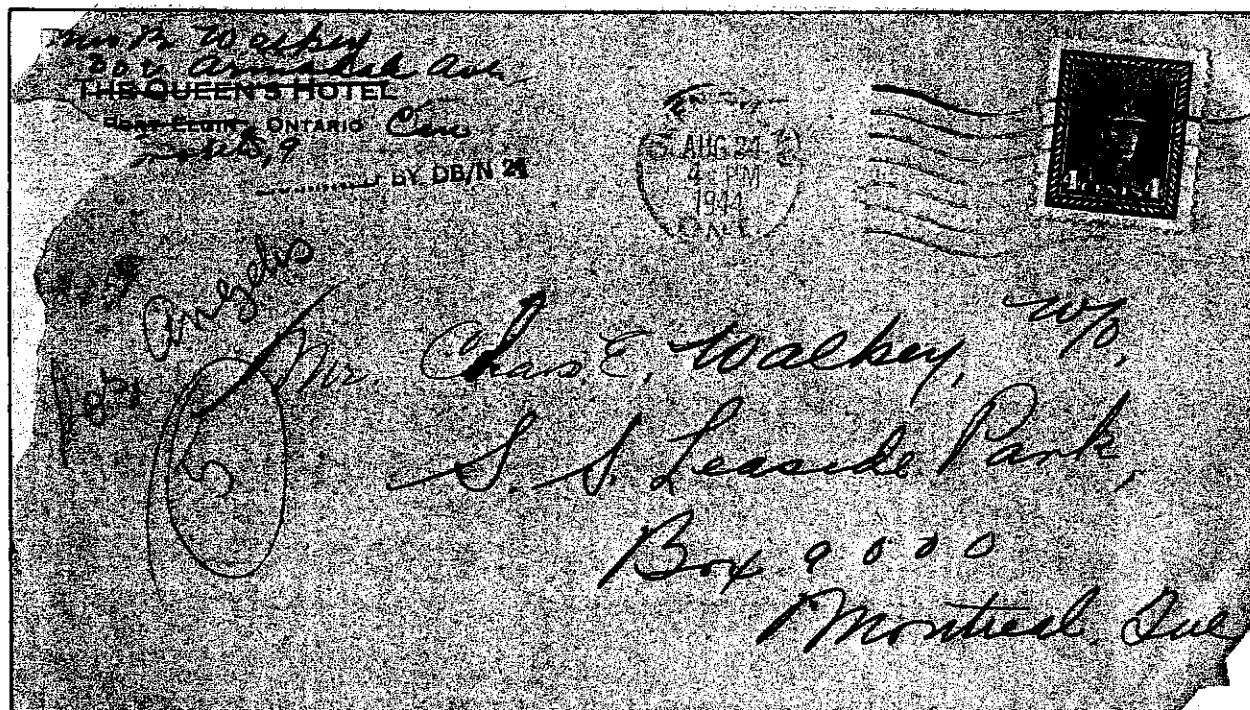


FIG. 4

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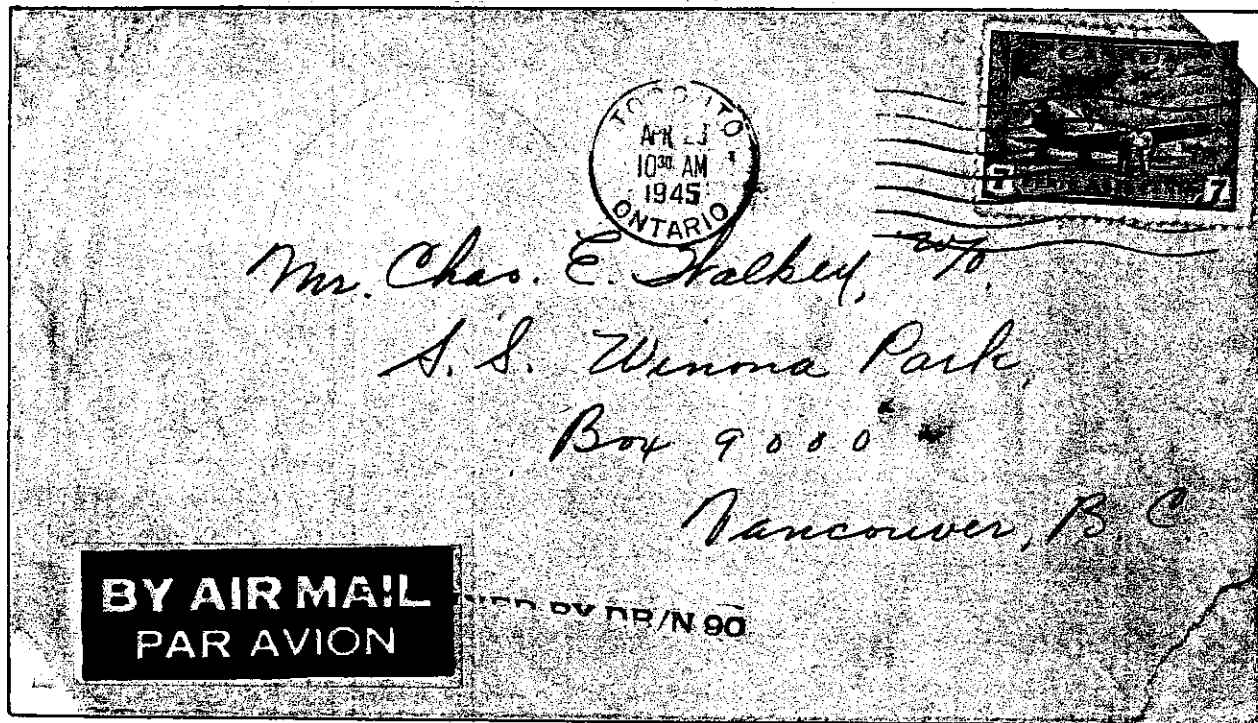


FIG.5

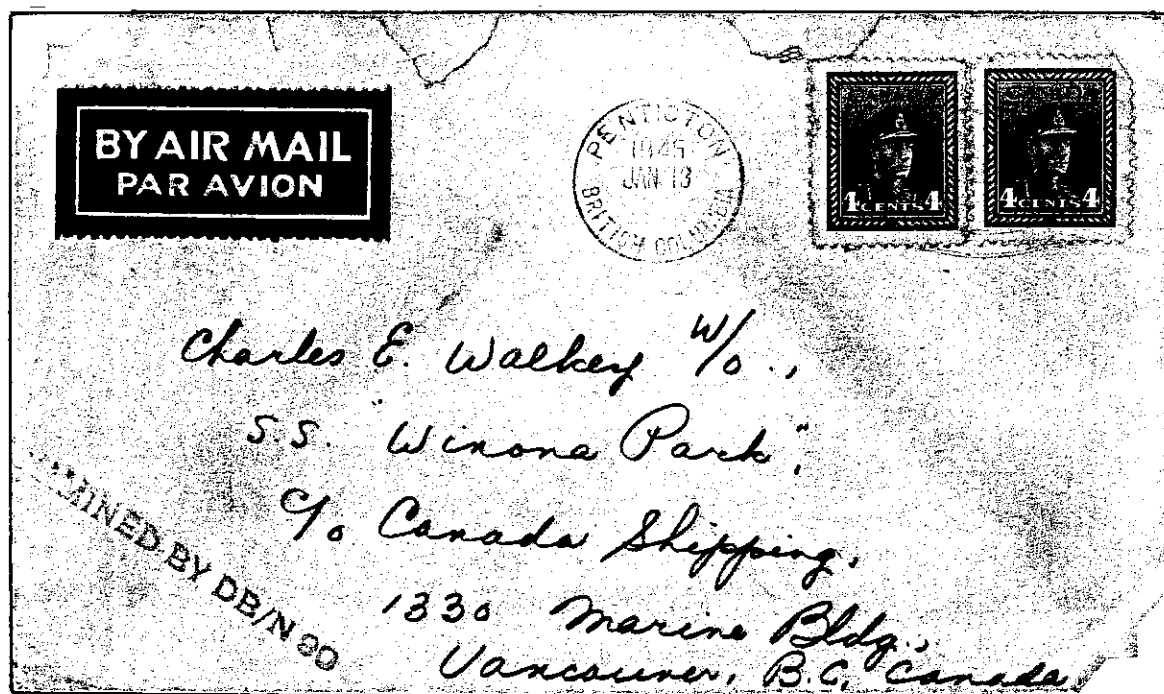


FIG.6

From Canada

CABLEGRAM

100 31 Sydney
11.11.44

Mr. Charles
15/10 S.S. McHaw
Park St. N.

NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS
IN CONNECTION WITH CABLE AND WIRELESS LIMITED

Received at: *Sp*

Date Stamp: *11.11.44*

Initials of Operator: *Sp*

Lyttelton

*I am eagerly awaiting
your arrival Dunedin
Please come and see me
soon Love
Biddy*

Tel. 129. 3,000 pades/3/41 - 175091 NOTE.—This form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this telegram.

FIG.7 (Reduced to 75%)

HMHS LETITIA FOLLOW-UP--By Mike Street

In NL#226 (January 2017, pp.1489-1491) Jon Johnson showed some very interesting items relating to the travels of HMHS Letitia in 1944-1945. There was an error in the piece--the date of Letitia's first arrival in Halifax was December 8, 1944, not December 19 (p.1490). The date caught my eye immediately because my Father, Lt. H.M. (Howard) Street was one of the passengers on that trip. In a somewhat amazing coincidence, he had served as the Provost Marshal on TSS Letitia when it took him and many other soldiers to England in early May 1942.

Seriously wounded near Caen in late July 1944, Dad underwent emergency surgery in France. After initial recovery he was transferred to the 23rd Canadian General Hospital in England. From there he went

[Cont'd.]

to HMHS Letitia for the trip home. My Grandparents received a letter dated November 27, 1944 from the Department of National Defence in Ottawa informing them that their son was aboard a hospital ship on the way home. No date of departure or arrival was given, nor was the ship named.

The December 8, 1944 issue of Canada's Weekly had a feature on the Letitia's first trip as a hospital ship and coincided with her arrival at Pier 21 in Halifax. A set of seven photos showed the ship, various officers associated with the voyage, patients, nurses, and a group of six identified officer patients standing on deck. My Father is third from the right in that picture. During our visit to Pier 21 for the BNAPEX 2008 NOVAPEX evening out, I noticed that a display of an officer's troop ship kit was missing both a Sam Browne belt and holster. We still had my Dad's so I donated them to Pier 21. [A few select cropped photos follow. Members are referred to Mike's previous "Canada's Hospital Ship Letters," NL#154 (March 2002, pp. 616-617).Ed.]

Canadian Hospital Ship "Letitia"



BOTTOM: LEFT—Canadian wounded waiting to go on board the *Letitia* en route for home: Lieut. W. J. Miller, 12th Manitoba Dragoons (Paisley, Ont.), R.A.M.C. (Montreal), Capt. W. A. Buckley, R.C.O.C. (Toronto), Lieut. H. M. Street, 7th Canadian Recce. Regt. (Montreal), Lieut. J. B. Eckel, Governor (Toronto) and Lieut. D. L. MacLaughlin, North Nova Scotia Highlanders (Lawson, Ont.). RIGHT—Canadian wounded, bound for home, in one of the ward rooms of the ship. (Canadian Official Military Photographs.)



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Dear Study Group Members: Mike and I hope that your summer is going well. The feature article this issue is provided by Jon Johnson who has provided us with some seldom-seen Merchant Navy material. This is a preview of our upcoming **BNAPEX 2017 CALTAPEX** Study Group meeting. Jon has kindly volunteered to give a presentation entitled "The Canadian Merchant Marine in the Second World War". Many thanks Jon! At printing our Study Group meeting is scheduled for Saturday, September 2. Please check the BNAPS website, www.bnaps.org, for times and the room allocation. Great War censor markings have always been an important aspect of Canadian military mail. Please help Wayne Schnarr if you can. A note from member Mike Powell related to next year's ORAPEX may interest members. It is never too early to begin thinking of an exhibit and May 2018 is only ten months away!

Good luck to members exhibiting in Calgary and have a wonderful convention!

SMALL ADS

Looking for something? Have something for sale? Why not try our small ads? Buy/Sell/Trade. Still only \$1 per issue (Canadian stamps @ face ok). Copy and payment to the Editor please.

WANTED: Great War- related Royal North-West Mounted Police covers/cards including "A" Squadron, Cavalry Draft and "B" Squadron, Siberia (see Steve Luciuk's Anthology (1991) article "Riders of the Plains...."). Contact the Editor at blueputtees@hotmail.com (2/4)

WANTED: WWII Canadian P.O.W. mail from Germany (especially Dieppe-related); Canadian military postal history WWI/WWII with "missing" or "KIA" markings. Also seeking the WWII "alphabet" special forces (ie. "B", "C", "N", "W", "Y", "Z" etc.). Scans or photocopies to: Hal Kellett, #412-106 Armistice Way, Saskatoon, SK S7J 2H4 or email: hkstampsandcovers@shaw.ca (2/6)

WANTED FOR AN EXHIBIT: Postcards or photographs of "S.S. (name) Park" WWII-era freighters and tankers, ie. "S.S. Mayfair Park". Also looking for covers from or to "Park" ships (may have foreign postage). Contact Jon Johnson (403) 253-8411 or jcjperfins@hotmail.com (2/5)

WANTED: 1920-1950 D.N.D. covers with postage stamps and "Director of Records" return address cachet. Prefer airmail, special delivery, and foreign usage for an exhibit. Contact Jon Johnson: jcjperfins@hotmail.com (4/5)

WANTED: Japanese Canadian Nisei volunteers and non-Japanese Canadians in WWII Intelligence Service Far East. Especially seeking Japanese Language School (S-20) drafts, interpreters, war crimes units etc. in South East Asia Command; Canadians associated with Nuremburg War Crimes Trials; Canadian POW's in Buchenwald/Colditz (Oflag IVC) and Stalag Luft III escapers; Canadians in Gibraltar/Malta; WWI Newfoundland. Contact the Editor at blueputtees@hotmail.com (5/5)

WANTED: Sewell Camp and Camp Hughes postal history. Roller cancellations, special delivery, and money order receipts sought. Anything considered. Darcy Hickson, R.R. #2, Box 24, Brandon, MB R7A 5Y2; (204) 724-2028; Darcy@hickson.ca (8/10)
