

Postal History of the Canadian Forces in Jamaica, 1940-46

By Thomas Foster



Fig. 1

IN the spring of 1940, following the reverses suffered by the British Army on the Continent, it was considered necessary to withdraw the British infantry battalion stationed in Jamaica and Bermuda in order to strengthen the forces deployed throughout Britain. The Canadian Government at once agreed to replace these troops and those in British Guiana and, at a later date, supplied further forces for service in Iceland, Greenland and Spitsbergen.

The Canadian battalion allocated to Jamaica was known as "Y" Force, whilst the commands established in Iceland, Greenland and Spitsbergen became "X" and "Z" Forces. The units sent to British Guiana were older troops considered unfit for combat duties. The Bermuda Garrison consisted of one infantry company, on detachment from the parent unit in Jamaica.

All the Corps troops in the island remained British, but the Canadians were augmented by local troops of the British West Indies Regiment and the West India Regiment. Units of the United States Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines also served in the island for considerable periods.

The Canadians took over the British base at Up Park Camp near the village of Cross Roads on the outskirts of Kingston and the cantonment at Newcastle in the Blue Mountains. They did not possess army postal services of their own and these facilities were, therefore, supplied by Corps Troops and the Jamaica Post Office.

All mail, whether for Canada or destinations within the island, was subjected to unit censorship and, after posting at the Camp Post Office, was taken either to Cross Roads or the Kingston G.P.O., and therefore passed through the hands of the Jamaica Military Censor before being sent on its way.

The first postage rates charged were 1s per ½oz on airmail letters to Canada and 2½d per oz. on surface mail letters, although examples of the latter are known in May 1941, which were paid at 2d only. All mail for inland addresses was sent at the current local rate of 1½d per oz.

By May 17th, 1942, the airmail rate to Canada was reduced to 6d per ½oz., and in all cases, prepayment was by means of Jamaican postage stamps.

Some authorities state that Air Letter Forms were available after about 1942, but none has so far been recorded.

In the early days, units censored their own mail and applied either unit censor markings or ordinary unit hand-stamps to the envelopes. In addition, all letters were hand-stamped with the "Y" Force Military Censor marking in black ink. This was a double-lined circle with a "saw-toothed" diameter of 30 mm., the wording reading "MILITARY CENSOR" around the top with below it the legend: "Y/FORCE/No. 4", in three lines.

Several of these rubber hand-stamps were made, each identified by the number, but the author has only recorded No. 3 (Fig. 1), and No. 4, the latter being by far the commonest. They were manufactured locally and closely resemble the permanent date-stamps used by the Jamaica Post Office.

(1) Winnipeg Grenadiers.

The first battalion to serve in Jamaica was the Winnipeg Grenadiers, a machine-gun regiment, who arrived on May 27th, 1940, and relieved the British battalion. They were in residence until September 13th, 1941, when they moved to Hong Kong and took part in the gallant, but hopeless, defence of that colony.

Letters from this regiment usually bears the unit hand-stamp (Fig. 2), a double-lined oval of 56 x 36 mm., enclosing the legend "MILITARY CENSOR/THE WTNNIPEG GREÑADIERS (M.G.)" with a dotted line across the centre for the examining officer's name.

The "Y" Force marking was also applied (earliest known date, early May 1941) and, in many cases, the letter was also hand-stamped with the Up Park Camp Military Post Office rubber date-stamp in violet ink (Fig. 3). This mark is known used from May 20th to November 25th, 1941, and is usually struck on the envelope, although it can be found cancelling the stamps. It was also used as a receiving mark on incoming unit mail.

Outgoing letters were always taken to Kingston and postmarked on the automatic machine at the G.P.O.

(2) 1st Battalion, Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders (Canada).

This regiment took over the defence on September 10th, 1941, and stayed until May 20th, 1943.

Letters from its servicemen usually have the unit hand-stamp struck in black on the reverse of the envelope (Fig. 4).

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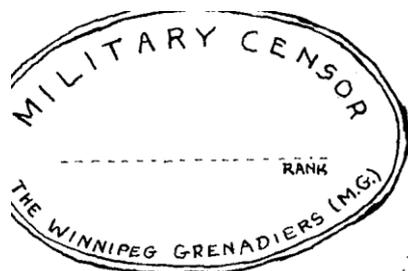


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

CANADIAN ARMY OVERSEAS

Fig. 5

Canadian Forces in Jamaica (continued from page 275)

It is a double lined oval of 50 x 31 mm. with the legend "1st Bn. A & SH of C (PL) A.F./ 'B' Coy./COMPANY OFFICE" in three lines.

Occasionally, but very rarely, they bear the rubber hand-stamp reading "CANADIAN ARMY/OVERSEAS" (Fig. 5) struck in black ink, and they always have the "Y" Force censor marking. Many of the envelopes used by the troops at this time were specially supplied and had "Canadian Legion War Forces" and its motif printed in the top left corner.

Letters sent to destinations inside the island are known from this regiment, but are extremely rare. They are always postmarked at the Cross Roads P.O. One such letter to Moneague, dated May 13th, 1942, bears the Jamaica. Military Censor marking (Fig. 6) with a diameter of 33½ mm. and struck in violet ink. The marking was initialled in the centre by the examiner and in all probability more than one hand-stamp of this type exists, although only the No. 4 has been recorded.

(3) Irish Fusiliers of Canada (Vancouver Regiment).

Arrived on the island on May 18th, 1943, and took over from the Argyles. They stayed until August 6th, 1944, but no letter from this regiment has yet been recorded.

(4) Brockville Rifles.

The last of the Canadian Regiments to be stationed in Jamaica arrived on August 5th, 1944, and remained in the island until February, 1946, when they were relieved by the 8th Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment.

Mail from this regiment is extremely scarce, and never has unit hand-stamps on it. By this time, the use of the "Y" Force censor marking had ceased (latest known date May, 1943) and in its place had been substituted a new censor marking (Fig. 7).

This hand-stamp is always struck in blue ink on the back of the envelope and consists of a small circle surmounted by a crown enclosing the legend "CANADIAN.ARM.Y.316".

All letters from this regiment were postmarked at Kingston on the automatic machine and like their predecessors, were opened by the Jamaica Military Censor and re-sealed with the normal gummed strips which exist in an incomprehensible sequence of varying numbers.

Members of the Canadian Forces stationed in Jamaica must have written many thousands of letters during their stay in the island, but very few have survived. By far the commonest items are the "Y" Force letters from the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Argyles. As mentioned previously, nothing has yet been seen from the Irish Fusiliers and only about five letters from the Brockville Rifles are known, of which one is in the collection of the author and two others in those of residents in this country.

Anyone having such covers in their collections is invited to send details of them to the author, who will be pleased to enter into correspondence on this subject.

The history of the British Forces in Jamaica is a far greater subject, but in the hope that one day it may be possible to unravel it, an appeal is made to anyone possessing letters bearing Royal Navy, Army or Air Force postal or unit markings of any period to communicate with the author. He would also be pleased to hear from anyone possessing items to or from the Gibraltar Camp (now the site of the B.W.I. University) and the internment camps established in the island during both wars.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

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