

A FRIENDLY INVASION: UNITED STATES FORCES AT CHURCHILL

US Forces had a large presence in Canada during World War II and into the Cold War. Operations in North America were a significant in terms of providing supplies to the Allies in Europe. This included the North Atlantic Ferry Route or what became known as the Crimson Project as shown in Figure 1. This presentation and summary are representative of these developments and how the two postal systems, US military and Canadian civilian, worked together in a time of crisis. The focus here is on the US Forces at Churchill, Manitoba.

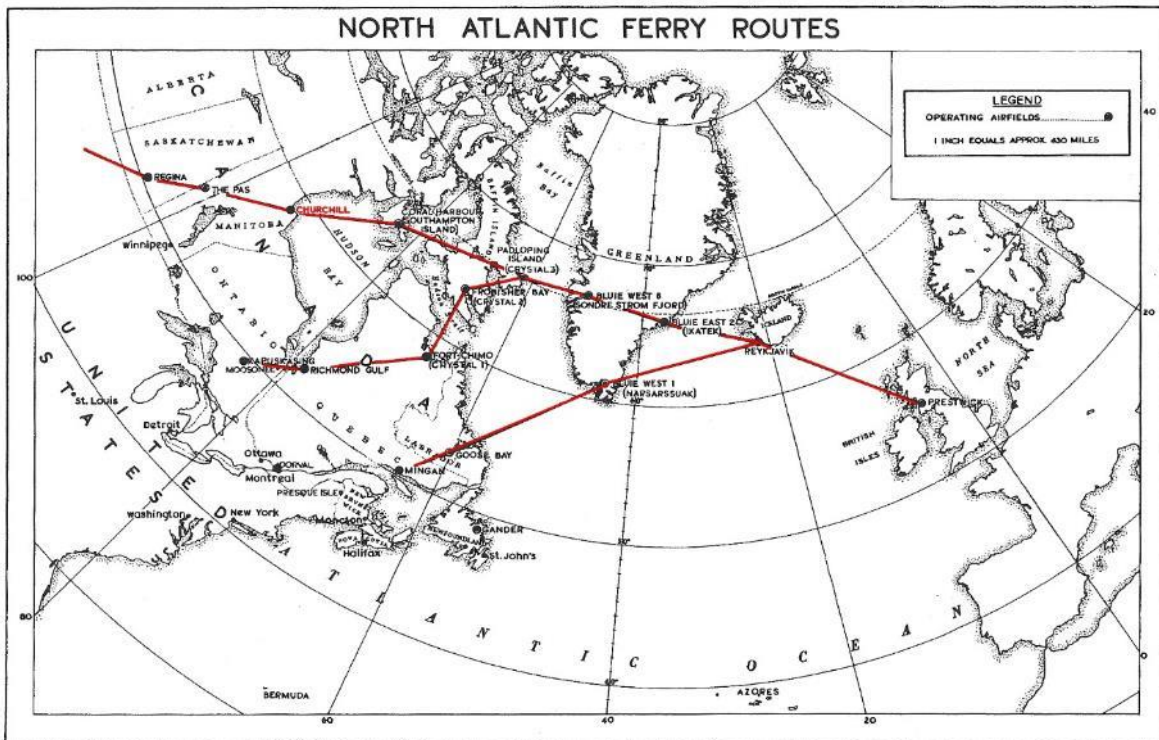


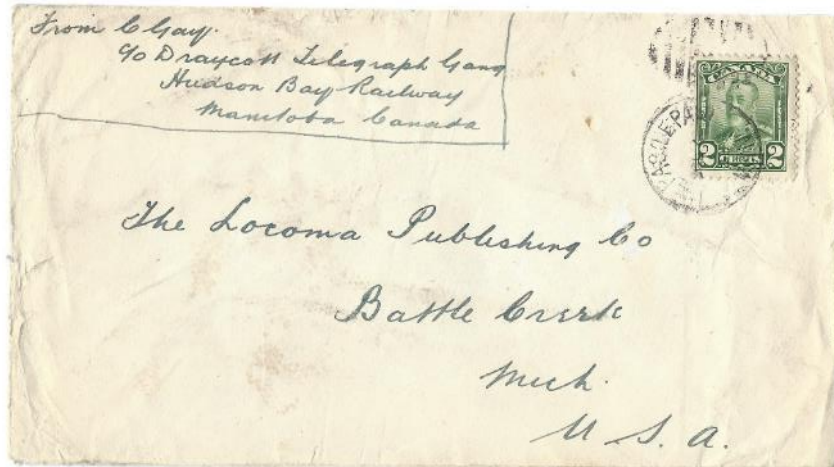
Figure 1. North Atlantic Ferry Route or Crimson Project.

Here is a quick chronology of events surrounding US Forces that were at Churchill:

- May 1942 US proposes North Atlantic Ferry Route including Churchill.
- July 15, 1942 US Army arrives at Churchill.
- Outgoing Officers and official mail through the Churchill post office. July 18, 1942 other military mail sent with an obliterator.
- July 23, 1942 emergency date stamp used on registered mail sent by US military personnel.
- Incoming mail to US Forces to the Canadian post office until September 1942 when US Army postal system used.
- September 28, 1942 US Army Post Offices (APO) 660 and 669 opened in the town centre and closed November 6 and 7, 1942.
- November 11, 1942 APO 737 opened at the airfield.
- July 29, 1945 APO 737 closed as the base was turned over to Canada.
- US military operations at Churchill after WWII used Canadian postal system.
- 1960-63 US Strategic Air Command refuelling base at Churchill.

Before the Military shows the importance of the railway that made Churchill a transport hub and a logical choice for a Crimson Project base.

Only reported cover from the short-lived Amery, Manitoba post office during construction of the Hudson Bay Railway. Likely carried by dog team from Churchill or York Factory. The railway was completed to Churchill in 1929 making it a transport hub.



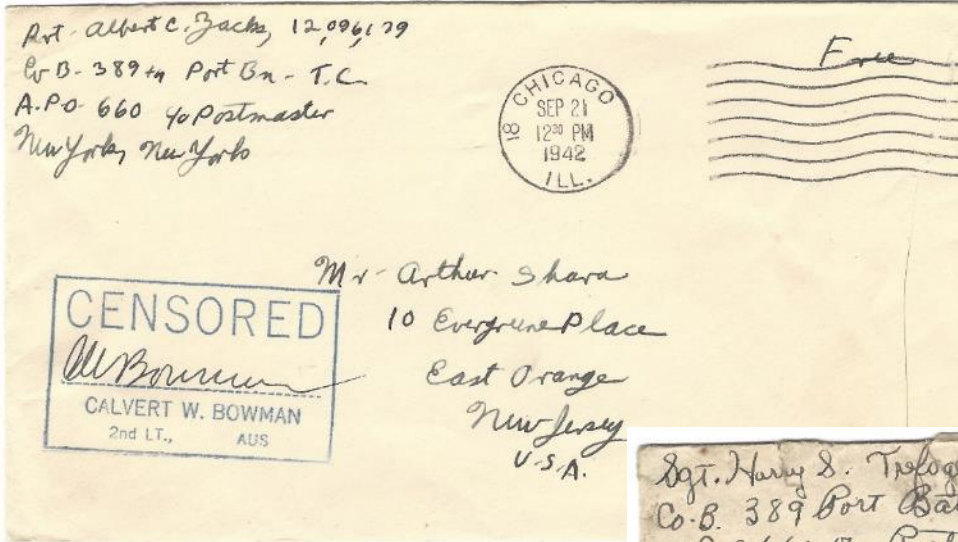
Cover from the Telegraph crew on the Hudson Bay Railway in June 1929.

US Forces Mail through the Canadian Post Office

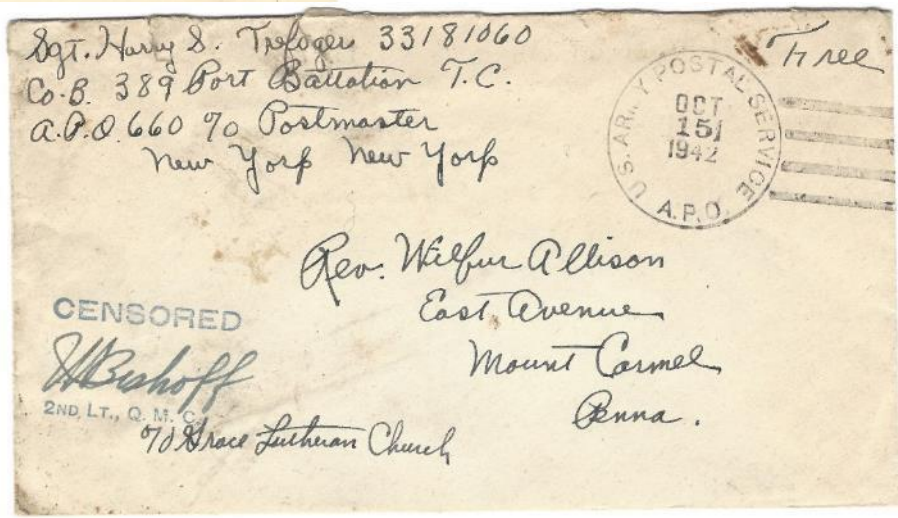
Registered airmail cover from US military person sent through the Churchill post office. Note use of the Saskatoon District Emergency No. 1 hammer and cut down registration box with Churchill Money Order Office Number 5142 above. Very unusual use of Canadian emergency markings for censorship.



US APO 660 and 669



US Army Post Office 660, care of Postmaster New York was used as a mailing address for the Americans soon after arrival in July 1942. APO 660 did not open until September 28 so the Canadian postal system was used in the meantime. These covers were mailed at the Churchill post office and sent in closed bags to Chicago by rail for possible civilian censorship. A variety of military censor markings were used.



APO 660 finally opened on September 28, 1942 and used its own date stamp as shown on these covers. As the APO closed on November 6, 1942 covers with the marking are very difficult to find. Note free franked item above, official mail to the left and postage paid item below, although the sender was entitled to send mail for free. During the period of operation for APO 660, the number of the APO was not shown in the regular date stamp. The War Department directed numbers not be shown in the cancelling device for security purposes July 1, 1942 to March 10, 1943.



APO 669 opened on September 28, 1942 and closed on November 7, 1942 when most of the US military personnel left. An APO 669 cover paid for airmail through the Canadian postal system and cancelled with the obliterator only as a censorship measure, at Churchill. Civilian censorship given at Chicago. APO 669 was in the town centre and served the 330th Engineers.

APO 669 did not get its date stamps until September 28, 1942. These covers are the only reported examples. Only four covers reported with the date stamp.

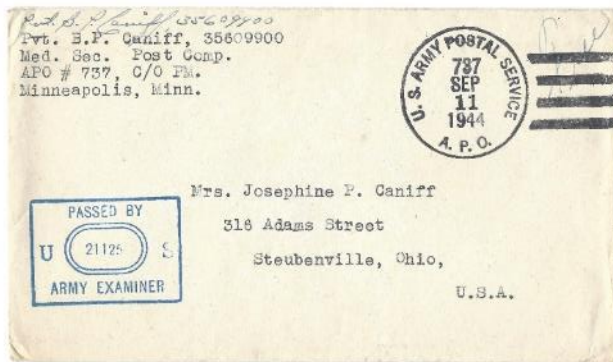


US APO 73

APO 737 opened on November 11, 1942 at the airfield site and served the 125 remaining US Forces. Base censor numbers 97, 99, 0858, 0882, and 0899 have been reported.



Race-track censor markings were also used at APO 737. Numbers 992, 994-997, 999, 21125, 21130, and 21131 have been reported.



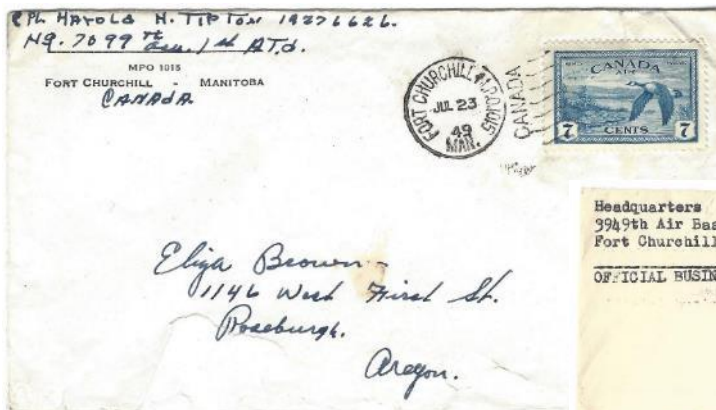
Double circle date stamps were used at US post offices for registered mail and forms. The facing slip shows APO 737 as a branch of the New York post office. The back of the registered cover shows APO 737 as a branch of the Minneapolis post office (effective February 1, 1944) as part of a reorganization.

Reuse of the Site and US Forces After WWII



The Churchill site was turned over to Canada and was used as a training and testing facility by the Canadian military. Exercise Muskox was a supported overland expedition from Churchill to Edmonton. The Canadian Postal Corps operated a full post office January-March 1946 at the base to serve Exercise Muskox.

Cover sent by the senior US military observer on Exercise Muskox. Flown from the moving force to Shilo, Manitoba.



Cover sent from the US Strategic Air Command refueling base at Churchill that operated from 1960-63 as the last American presence. Meter used from the US Army at Fort Churchill.

Canada took over Fort Churchill in 1945. It was rebranded as a Joint Services Experimental Station for the three Canadian military services (Army, Air Force and Navy) in October 1946 with a significant US presence. US personnel remained for trials, testing and research and relied upon the Canadian postal systems.



Research

Relevant records of the Library and Archives Canada RG 3 (Post Office Department) were reviewed along with secondary sources. Research on this topic was published as follows:

O'Reilly, Kevin. 1999. The Americans at Churchill in World War II. *The Congress Book* 1999. The 65th American Philatelic Congress. pgs. 145-175.

O'Reilly, Kevin. 2022. A Friendly Invasion: An Update on US Forces at Churchill, Canada. *La Posta*. In press.