

The Small Boats.

Introduction

In addition to capital warships the Royal Canadian Navy also had a variety of small boats; sloops, requisitioned yachts, motor torpedo boats, landing craft and motor launches. This exhibit deals with letters to and from personnel serving on small boats during World War II., in particular the 29th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla (*MTBs*) and Motor Launches, better known as *Fairmiles*. Despite the fact that more than 1700 men served aboard these boats very little identifiable correspondence exists. This exhibit shows examples first from people serving aboard Motor Launches, Landing craft, ending with correspondence to and from personnel serving in the 29th Canadian Motor Torpedo Flotilla.

The Canadian motor launch was originally designed by the **Fairmile** Company of England. The Department of National Defence contracted to have eighty vessels built by various Canadian boat builders on the Great Lakes and the east and west coasts. They were not commissioned but were listed as tenders to to the depot ship H.M.C.S. Sambro. They were dubbed Q Boats, M.L.s, Little Ships, Little Fighting Ships and Holy Rollers due to being unstable in rough waters. The motor launches were used as convoy escorts and submarine chasers on the St. Lawrence River, the Gulf of St Lawrence and the east coast from Halifax to Newfoundland.

The **29th Canadian Motor Torpedo Boat flotilla** was formed in March of 1944 under the command of Lieutenant Commander C. Anthony (*Tony*) Law who was also the commander of M.T.B. 459. The purpose was to patrol the English Channel, disrupting enemy shipping and enemy naval activity. The flotilla was made up of eight boats initially; M.T.B.s 459 to and including 466. The flotilla was supplemented by three additional boats; 485, 486 and 491 The correspondence of this portion of the exhibit is primarily to and from Signalman R.F. Lovelock. All mail addressed to Canadian Naval Personnel stationed in England was addressed via H.M.C.S. Niobe, a Royal Canadian Navy Base. The mail sorting and distributing was later transferred to Canadian Fleet Mail Office, Leith House, London.

The flotilla suffered a great loss on February 14, 1945 when high Octane fuel was spilled onto the water in the port of Ostend, Belgium catching fire and destroying five of the nine Canadian boats killing twenty-six Canadian sailors and destroying seven British boats killing thirty-five British sailors. The flotilla was not reformed. The remainder of the boats were merged into British flotillas, the war nearing the end. Due to the flotilla being in existence for eleven months only, very little correspondence is known.





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Unidentifiable



(1.1)



(1.2)

This is how most Canadian Naval mail appeared. The censor stamp was the only indication of where the mail came from. In some cases the censor cut out or blacked out return information on the backs of envelopes

His Majesty's Canadian Motor Launch



Specifics

Fairmile "B"

Q-050 to Q-111

112' long x 17'10" on the beam

Draught 4'10"

Speed; 20 knots

Q-112 to Q-129

112' long x 17' on the beam

Main armament;

Three 20mm Oerlikon guns, two .303 machine guns, twenty depth charges ,
Three .303 rifles and three .45 calibre revolvers.

Crew; 3 officers 14 men

(2.1)

Fairmile "B" Motor Launch Q-55

Built by Greavette Boats Ltd., Gravenhurst, Ontario

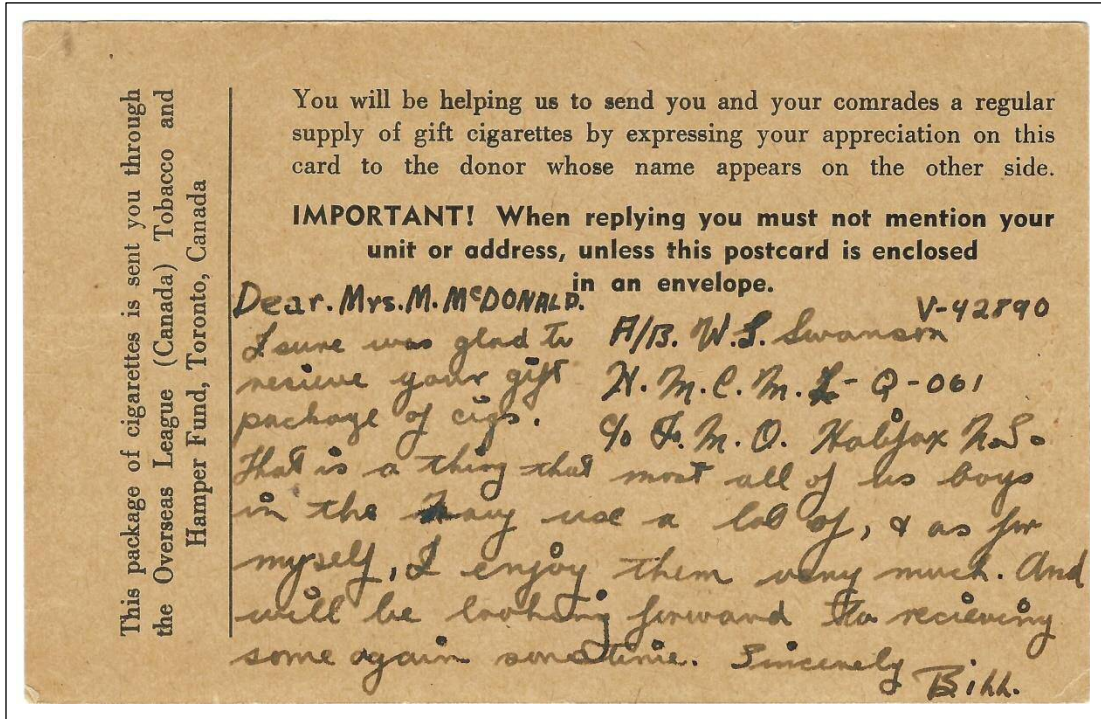
Assigned to the 71st flotilla, Gaspé, Quebec



The 71st and 79th motor launch flotillas were located in Gaspé. Although there is no positive identification, it is presumed this example came from a seaman of one of the fourteen boats stationed at that port.

(2.2)

H.M.C. M.L. Q—061



(2.3)



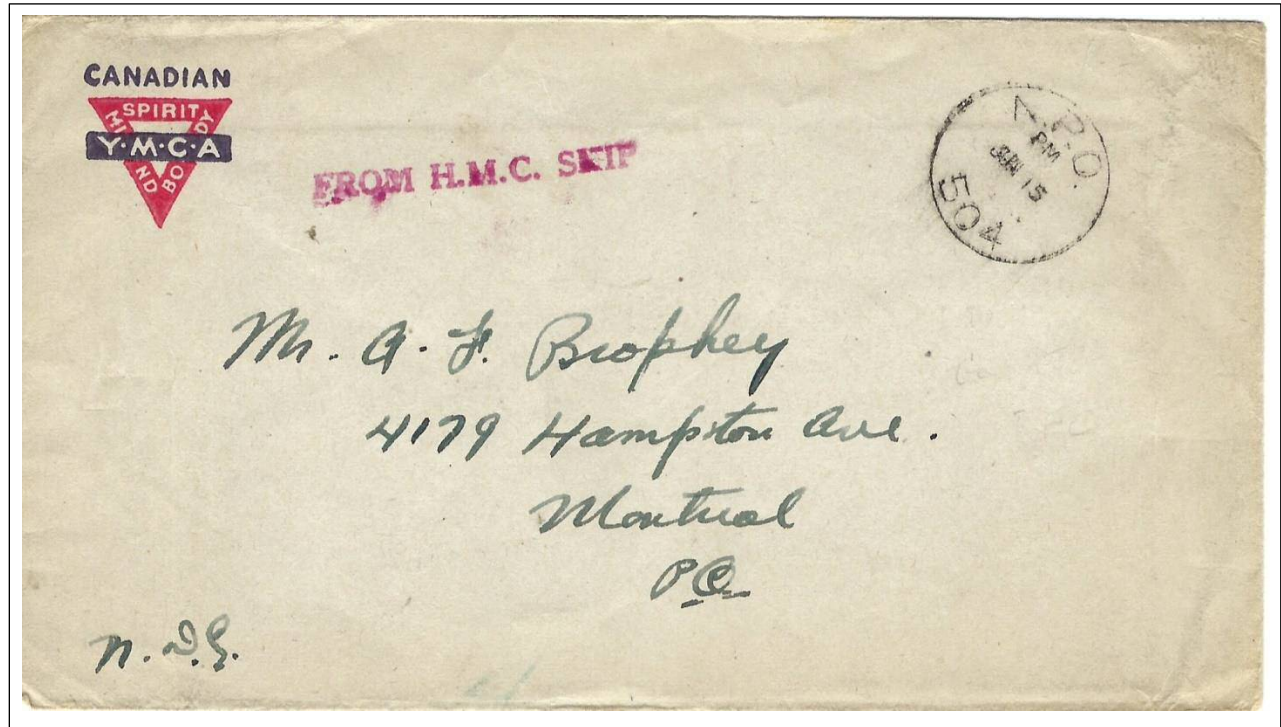
(2.4)

Motor Launch Q-061 was built by Hunter Boats of Orillia, Ontario It was completed November 11, 1941

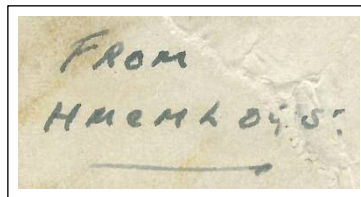
The boat formed part of the 72nd flotilla of the Sydney force.

The commanding officers of this motor launch were; Lt. T.G. Denny, Lt. S.B. Fraser, Lt. J.W. Braidwood, Lt. W.L. Moore, Lt. G.W. Leckie, Lt. S.B. Marshall, A/Lt. E.U. Anderson, L.T. C.A. Balfry and Lt. J.A. Barrett. All were from the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (R.C.N.V.R.)

H.M.C. M.L. Q-095



Note the postmark is from N.P.O. 504 which is GASPE
(2.5)

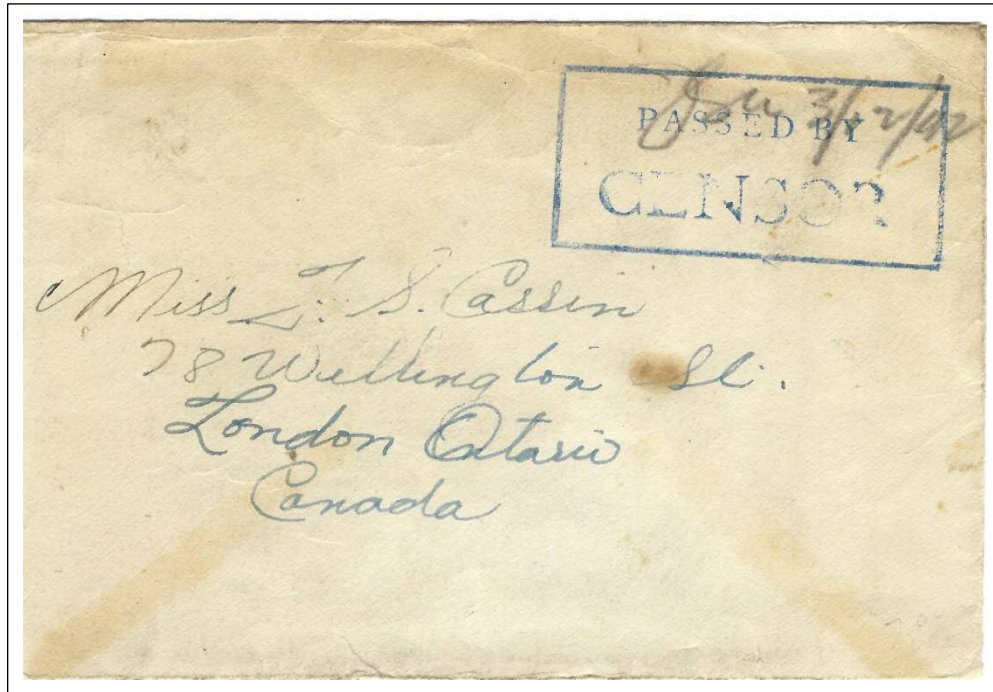


(2.6)

According to the hand written marking on the back of the cover H.M.C. M.L. Q-095 was part of the 76th flotilla based in Newfoundland. The only theory is, Newfoundland was not part of Canada at the time therefore letters mailed from Newfoundland were probably sent to a home base to be censored and distributed.

Motor Launch Q-095 was built by Midland Boats Works of Midland, Ontario and was completed the 12th of May, 1943 and became part of the 76th flotilla Newfoundland Force. The commanding officers were; Lt. J.J. McLaughlin, Lt. H.D. Pepper, Lt. H.R. Cruise, Lt. N.L. Williams and Lt. W.J. Langston. In some cases the same person was the commanding officer at different times. All were from the R.C.N.V.R.

H.M.C. M.L. Q-058



Censored December 3, 1942 on a Canadian Naval Forces cover.

(2.7)



(2.8)

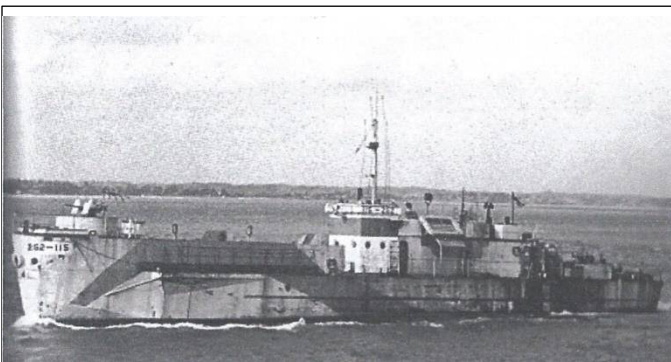
H.M.C. M.L. Q-058 was built by Minette Shields of Bracebridge, Ontario. Ordered January 3, 1941, it was completed and launched November 24, 1941. The boat was assigned to the 76th flotilla of the Sydney Force. Commanding officers were; Lt. H.K. Hill, Lt. S.E.C. Garlick, Lt. G.E. Rising, Lt. R. Synette and Lt. J.G. Chance all from the R.C.N.V.R.

His Majesty's Canadian Landing Craft

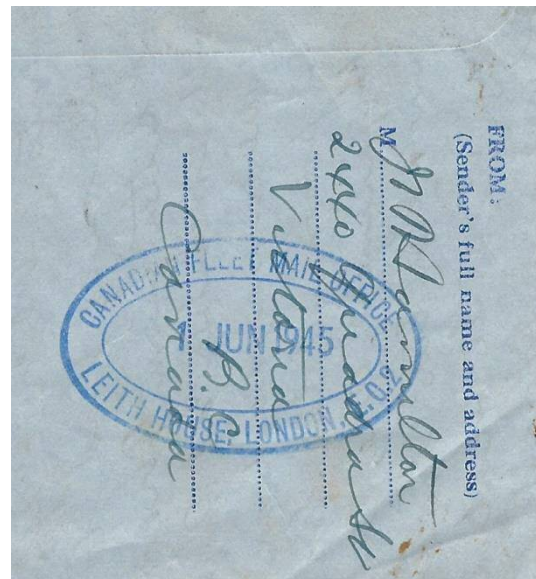


(3.1)

Dated May 26, 1945 and received at Leith House June 4, 1945. Leith House had replaced H.M.C.S. Niobe as the fleet mail distributing point. Note the letter was directed to F.M.O. Brightingsea, Essex. The contents indicated Lt. David Angus Moon had received command of a Landing Craft. Further research revealed he had been appointed to command a L.C.I (L) (*Landing Craft Infantry*) (*Large*)



L.C.I. (L)
(3.2)

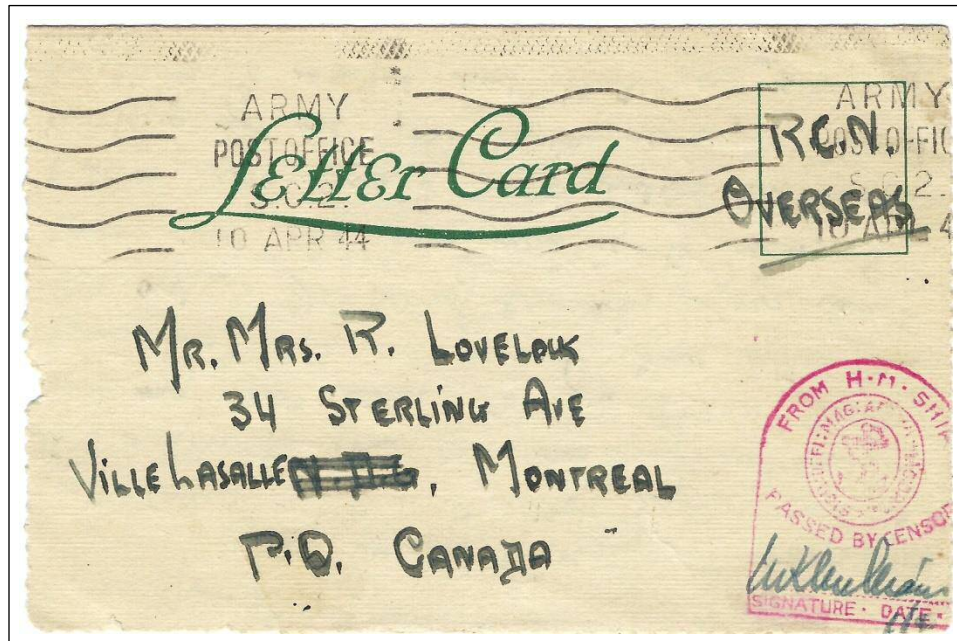


Backstamp; Canadian Fleet Mail Office

(3.3)

His Majesty's Canadian Motor Topedo Boats

From M.T.B. 459



(4.1)

**Canadian Overseas Postal Depot – London
Letter Cards were used to save on weight**

The date of April 5 indicates the flotilla was still stationed at HMCS Bee

Transcript of the contents

Same
April 5/44

Dear Mum & Dad:

Your welcome birthday card today received, it took over two months to come but was very welcome. Since my last letter to you I have heard from Aunt Elsie, and received three letters Kit and a flat 50 of Canadian fags. Aunt Elsie said she was writing to you. I believe you know I am sending her money to keep for me, she kindly consented to keep anything I wanted , and that is a big relief.

We get canteen leave every night but hardly any shore leave, it sort of drives a guy nuts, and is beginning to show a strain on the crew. We have a damn good crew aboard Mum, much better than when I left the old 89. Now I don't want you to worry about anything, we get plenty and I am quite happy. Just take good care of Dad and don't let him eat too much. Excuse the shot form of letter but we don't get much time for anything else. Cheers

Your loving Son, Ted

(4.2)

**His Majesty's Canadian Motor Torpedo Boats
MTB 459**



(4.3)

MTB 459. During the workup at Holyhead. All photos courtesy of the Naval Museum of Manitoba

Lieut Cmdr. C. Anthony Law wrote a book titled "White Plumes Astern" The story of the 29th MTB flotilla in action.

Specifics
71 ½ ' long x 20'7" breadth. 5'8" draught
Speed; 38 – 41 knots
Main armament 6 pounder gun & 2 torpedo tubes
Mark VIII submarine torpedos fired from 18" tubes
.5 inch Vickers machine guns
303 inch Vickers gas operated machine guns
Twin 20mm Oerlikon guns after armament
Crew: up to 17 personnel



(4.4)



(4.5)

Signalman Lovelock at the flag locker



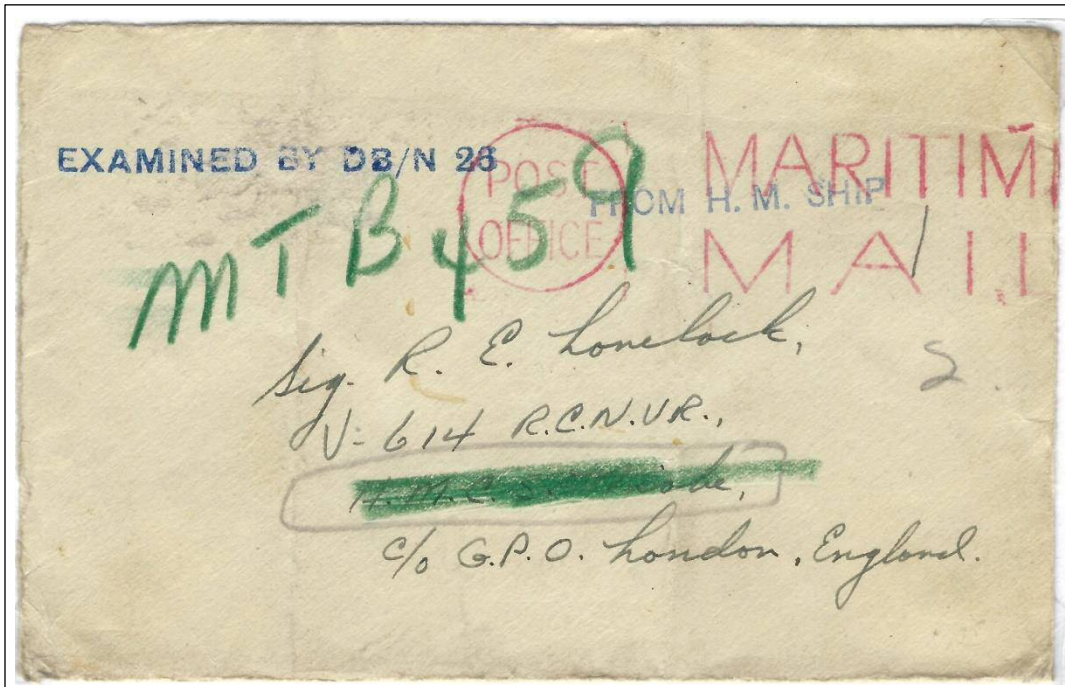
(4.6)

Twin 20mm oerlikon guns on The afterdeck

While serving on a British MTB, it was sunk. Lieut. Cmdr. Law and his crew were picked up by a German E boat and deposited on British soil. After some time in hospital the crew was sent to H.M.S. 'BEE' (Beehive) where the 29th flotilla was formed and spent a month working up before going into action from several anchorages along the coast.

H.M.C.S. Niobe served as the land based parent ship for Canadian Naval personnel

H.M.S. Beehive



Working up at H.M.S. Bee, Holyhead, Anglesey. Became operational in May.

The back stamp seen below was previously unknown

(4.7)

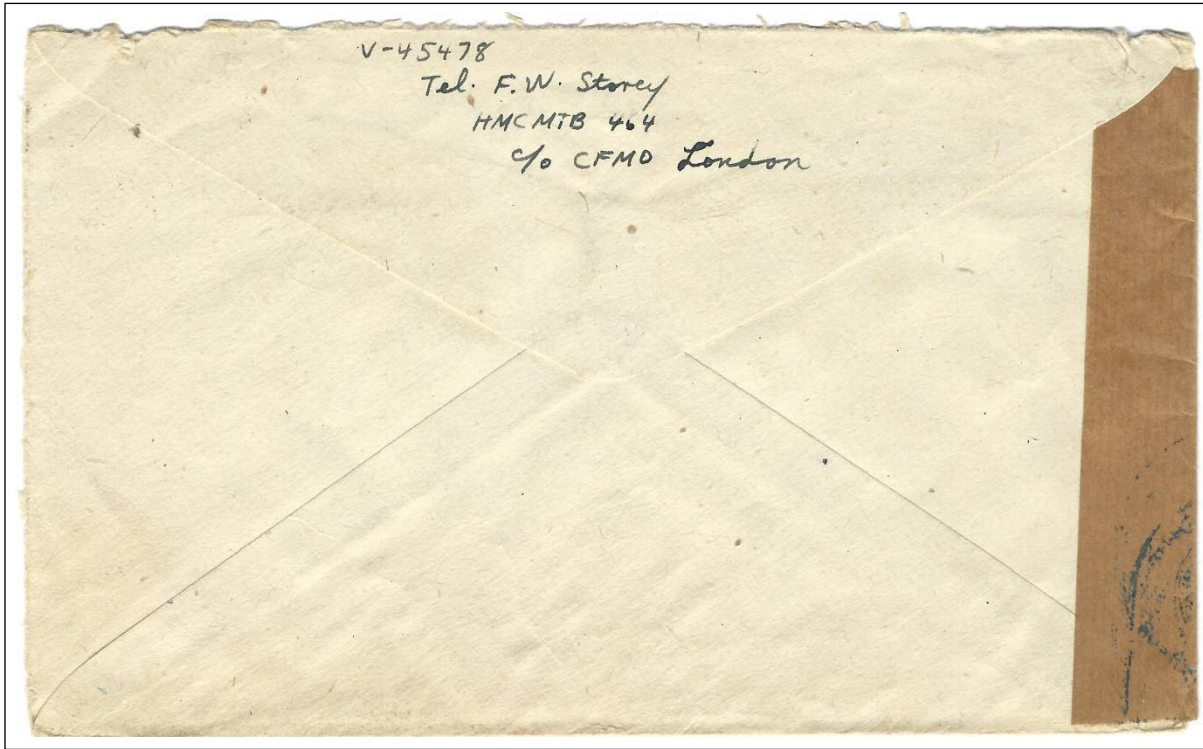


(4.8)

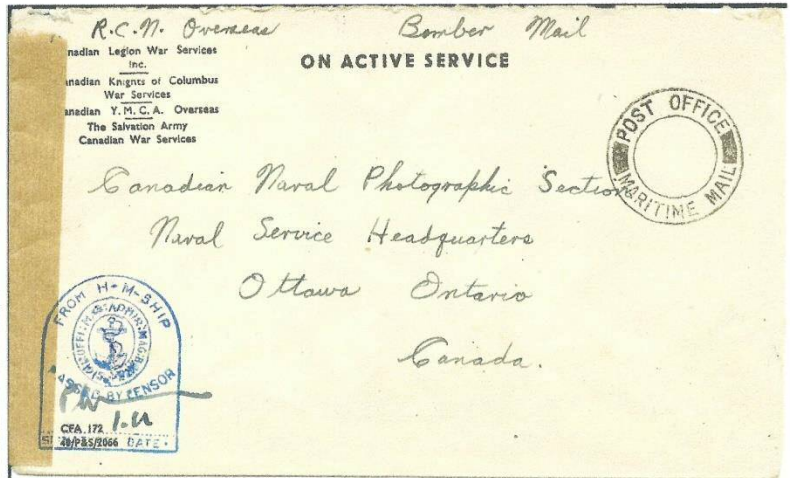
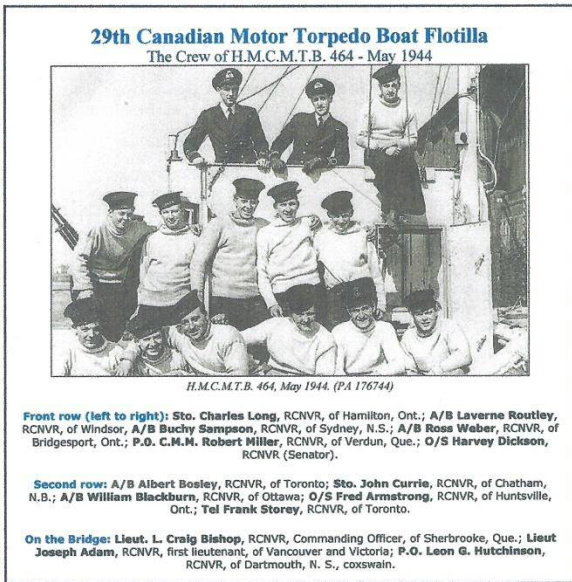
In July of 1944, MTB 459 was badly damaged in a fierce battle and was towed to safety and beached. Lt. Cmdr. Law transferred himself and crew to MTB 486, a recent replacement boat. Two crew members were killed in the action.



(4.9)



(4.10)



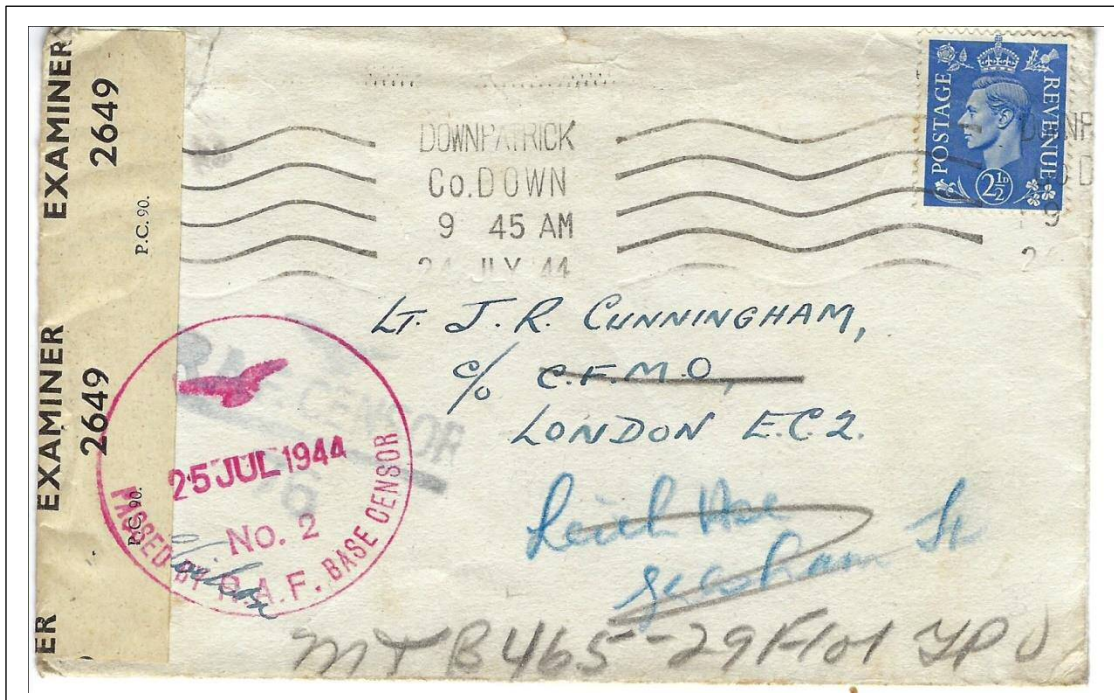
In addition to being a telegrapher, F.W. Storey, seen at the far right of the second row may very well have been the boat photographer. M.T.B. 464 was one of the boats to have survived the disaster at Ostend that claimed the lives of 26 Canadian sailors

(4.11)

(4.12)



At this point Lt. Cunningham was an officer on MTB 465 as it was still working up, out of HMS Bee (4.13)



(4.14)

It would appear that Lt. Cunningham became the second officer of MTB 465 and eventual First lieutenant. The cover is from P/O W.L. Wilson from an airfield in County Down that was first censored by a straightline censor 76 then it was examined by a civilian censor 2649 and finally received another base censor mark and signed by Pilot Officer Wilson. Officers were apparently permitted to censor their own mail. From the Canadian Forces Mail Office the cover was sent to Leith House and forwarded to M.T.B. 465



(4.15)



(4.16)

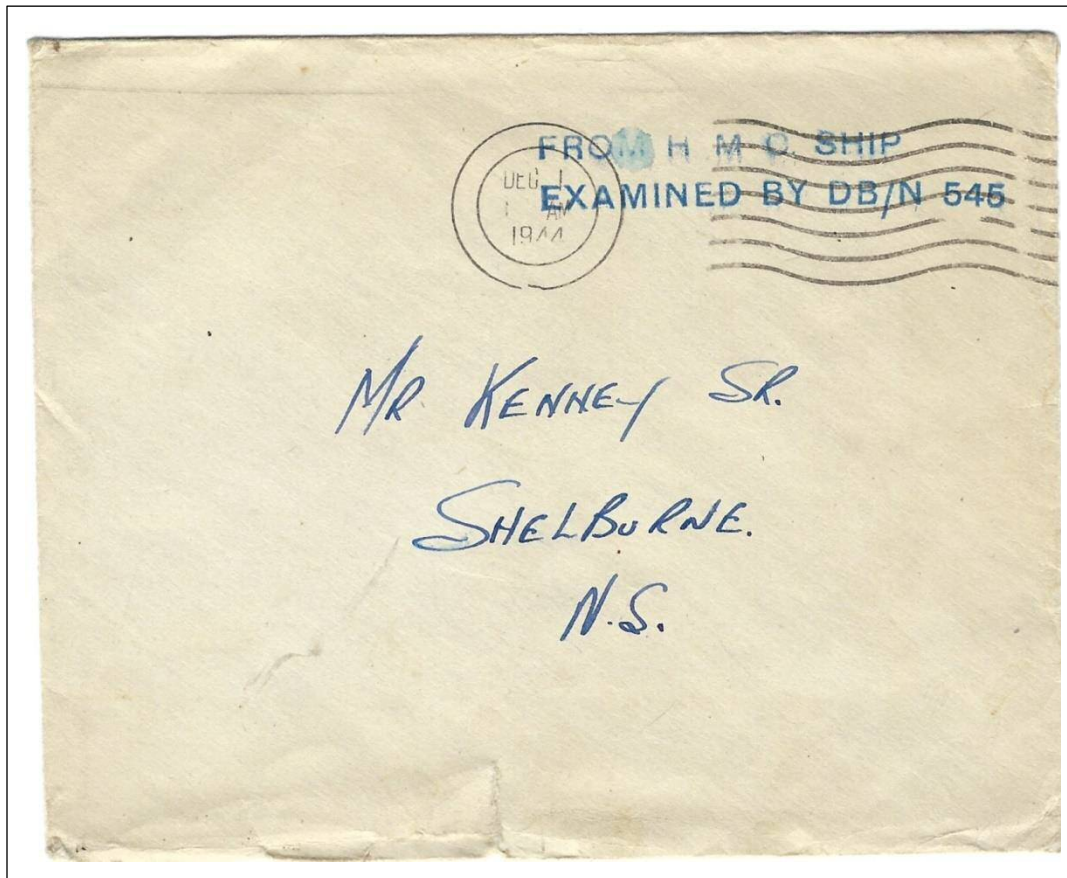
On February 14, 1945 while in the Port of Ostend Belgium with other flotillas, 100 percent high octane was spread on the water and caught fire destroying most of the MTBs. 28 Canadians and 35 British sailors lost their lives. This cover addressed to Lt. Cunningham who had replaced Lt Burke as Commander of **MTB 461** could not be delivered because MTB 461 had been destroyed in the fire. Lt. Cunningham survived. The war nearing the end, the 29th was not reformed.

Backstamps



(4.17)

29th Motor Torpedo Flotilla



(4.18)

Cover is dated December 1, 1944

Research indicates Mr. Kenney Sr. was the father of Able Seaman J. Kenney of the 29th flotilla who was killed at Ostend February 14, 1945. A/B Kenney was not an original member of any of the eight boats that made up the flotilla

The Memorial



(4.19)

In memory of the Canadian sailors who perished in the fire that engulfed the harbor at Ostend, Belgium February 14, 1945

“The raging of the treacherous seas
Long the arch enemy of the M.T.B.’s,
Now ceases to hold us in its spell,
As we hear the tale of Ostend Hell,
The truth of cause will be remote,
and intrigue will lend its tragic note,
Here today and gone tomorrow,
As mothers and sweethearts shrink in sorrow,
but above it all is heard the cry,
Oh God, the everlasting question, WHY?”

Written by Signalman Andrew Cleeland, M.T.B. 461



(4.20)

The Small Boats

Synopsis

The purpose of this exhibit is to bring forth the fact that very little identifiable Royal Canadian Naval correspondence exist to and from personnel serving on what is considered small boats during World War II.

The Royal Canadian Navy designated their craft in the following manner; Submarines, motor launches, Motor Torpedo Boats and Motor Gun Boats were known as boats. Landing craft regardless of their function were known as such. In addition the navy requisitioned pleasure yachts and sloops and converted them to war vessels. They retained their designations of yachts and sloops. All what were known as boats were generally assigned to tenders. All other vessels from Minesweepers up to battleships and aircraft carriers were commissioned and known as ships.

As an example, of the one hundred and six thousand men and women that were enlisted in the Canadian Navy, 650 served aboard the two Motor Torpedo boat flotillas consisting of twenty one boats. Whatever correspondence is available is only identifiable by the fact it is stamped From HMC SHIPS or MARITIME MAIL as noted in examples 1.1 and 1.2. On occasion the mail director will indicate the vessel to which a letter is to go. On other occasions the name of a person to whom the letter is addressed can be found on the Naval Museum of Manitoba site if he served on a Motor Torpedo Boat. On other occasions the depot from which the letter was cancelled will help to determine the origin and type of craft the sender was serving on. On rare occasions the actual name of the vessel is part of the address. Some censors actually cut out the name of the sender and vessel from the envelope from which a letter was sent.

What must be kept in mind is the two all Canadian motor torpedo boat flotillas, the 29th and 65th were in operation for a short period of time and I have not seen an identifiable piece of correspondence from the 65th flotilla. The 29th flotilla was in operation from March of 1944 to February of 1945 when a fire at the port of Ostend, Belgium destroyed five of the 29th flotilla's boats. Therefore, correspondence from naval personnel serving in this flotilla in that period of time is very scarce and the pieces shown are all this exhibitor has seen.

I'm sure there exists more small boat identifiable covers and that is the challenge set down to turn this into an extended exhibit.

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- Wikipedia** Canadian Built Fairmile B Motor Launches.
- For Posterity's Sake** web site

