

CANADIAN FORCES IN NORTH RUSSIA 1918-1919

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Although the First World War had ended, a comparatively small number of Canadian Contingents were still serving in widely separated theatres in Europe and Asia. The employment of these forces, with the sanction of the Canadian Government, had come about as a result of the situation which developed in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. One of these theatres of operation was North Russia, in particular in and around the towns of Murmansk and Archangel.

Allied intervention in North Russia first started in order to prevent the Germans from winning the war in France but later developed, following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between the Bolsheviks and Germany, to support the White Russians. However, at this point we need to step back a little.

In 1809 Finland became a semi-autonomous state within the Russian Empire but by 1899 Tsar Nicholas was beginning to undermine a separate Finnish identity by, for example, decreeing that Finns should serve in Russian units and that Finland's own army should be disbanded. Also, the gradual imposition of Russian as the third official language (after Finnish and Swedish) was ordered in 1900. As a consequence, a nationalistic movement grew up that during WW1, burst into armed conflict which, in April 1918, was supported by Germany with an army of 55,000 men under General von der Goltz.

The concern of the allies was that if the Germans took Murmansk, which was Russia's only ice-free port, the Germans could use it as a submarine base to attack allied shipping. Also, it was hoped that a Czech-Slovak legion which was operating in Siberia and was an effective fighting force against the Bolsheviks could be persuaded to turn back to fight the Germans thereby continuing operations on the Eastern border of the Central Powers (i.e. Germany and Austria).

Following a request from the British Government the Canadians agreed to send two field artillery batteries (16th Canadian Field Artillery consisting of the 67th and 68th Batteries under the command of Lt-Colonel C.H.L. Sherman) to Archangel along with 92 officers and N.C.O.'s, a few of whom served in Murmansk.

The following covers which were carried in the British Army Postal Service system illustrate aspects of Canadian involvement in this operation.

Figure 1 overleaf shows a cover from A.K. Griffin dated 21st October 1918 with an APO P.B.1 datestamp and an oval X11 censor mark. On the reverse is the emblem of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery



X42.

(RCFA) and a manuscript endorsement "Posted on arrival Murmansk". The date on the Markham receiver is unclear.

The Russia Expeditionary Postal Service arrived in Murmansk on 28th September



Fig 1

1918 and set up a temporary office in three wagons. On 10th January it moved to a large log building. This datestamp is recorded as being used between 30th September 1918 and 1st September 1919 and the series is often referred to as 'Polar Bear'.

Lieutenant Arthur Griffin was born in 1893 in Kincardine, Ontario to the Reverend Arthur Kent Griffin and his wife Lucretia (nee Powell). He had been a teacher by profession before joining the army the University of Toronto Officer Training Corps in May 1917, having previously served in the 220th York Ranger Overseas Battalion. Griffin transferred to the British Army in June 1917 as a Commissioned Officer, probably in some form of administrative or liaison role.

Figure 2 below illustrates a subsequent cover written by Lieutenant Griffin, this time showing an early use of the FPO P.B. 44 datestamp for 6th November 1918 which had been applied at Bakhariza near Archangel. This datestamp is known used between 1st November 1918 and 23rd September 1919. There it also a X61 censor handstamp. As with the previous cover the Markham receiver has been poorly struck.

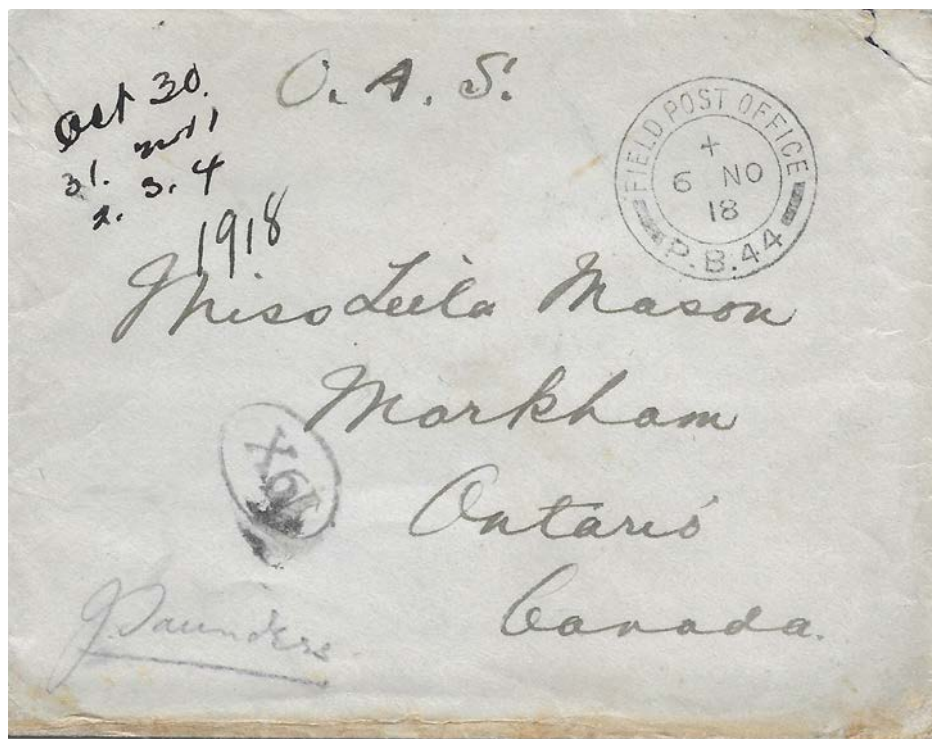


Fig 2

Allied forces, including British, Canadian and French troops, were stationed in Bereznik, Russia, as part of the North Russia Intervention during the Russian Civil War. They were primarily deployed to support White Russian forces against the Bolsheviks. Bereznik, located on the Dvina River about 140 miles south of Archangel, served as a base for some of these Allied forces.



The cover in fig 3 opposite is from an unnamed soldier and is the **only recorded cover** to Canada with a P.B. 55 postmark. There are no other cancels or censor marks. P.B. 55 is recorded as being in use between 28th December 1918 and 22nd July 1919.



Fig 3

Figure 4 overleaf shows the front and back of an RCFA cover from B. Kamady(?) with, on the front:

- a very faint datestamp for 25th July 1919 but the town name is indecipherable
- F.P.O. 88 datestamp for 2nd August 1919. This datestamp was in use between 9th April 1919 and 30th August 1919 at Medveya Gora (Bear Mountain) in Crimea.
- X50 censor mark,
- A manuscript signature of the censor
- A P.O. circular handstamp applied on arrival in Canada.



It appears that the letter was re-directed on arrival in Victoria. On the back are two Russian stamps both cancelled with indecipherable datestamps. This is the **only known example** of this datestamp on a cover to Canada.

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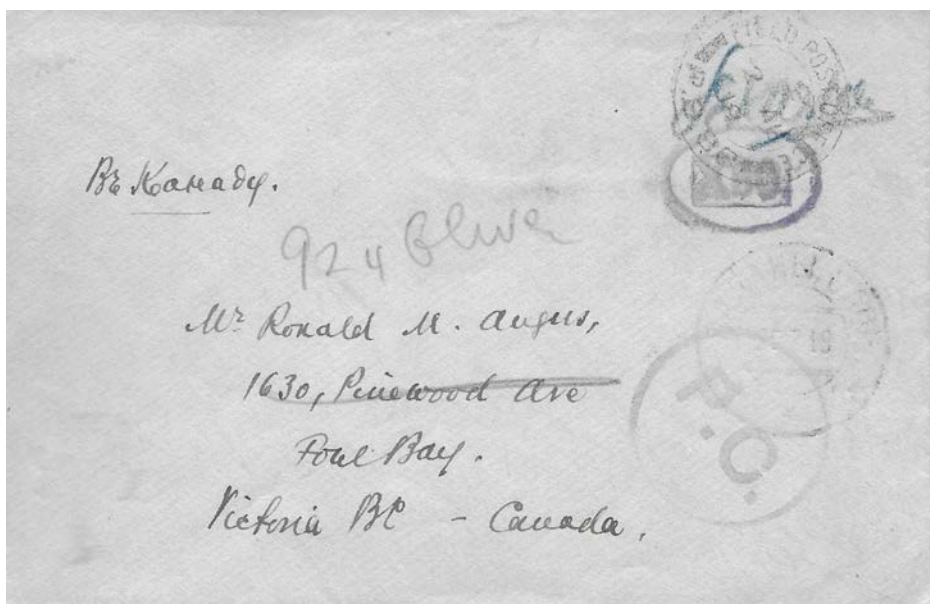


Fig 4 Front and back of cover.

Following the collapse of the White Russian Army which mutinied, many going over to the Bolsheviks who were gaining in strength, the decision was taken to withdraw

from North Russia. The process began in May and June 1919 with the final troops leaving in September that year.

The envelope shown in fig 5 below was written shortly before Lieutenant Griffin left North Russia in June 1919. It has an Archangel APO P.B.2 datestamp (Proud hammer 1 with code letter 'A') which was based in the Academy of Music building with examples known between 19th October 1918 and 24th September 1919.

The censor mark was only in use between 3rd May and 2nd June 1919.

Lieutenant Griffin married the recipient of this letter, Leila Mason in 1921, they had no children. Leila Griffin died in 1945 and Arthur Kent Griffin in 1969.

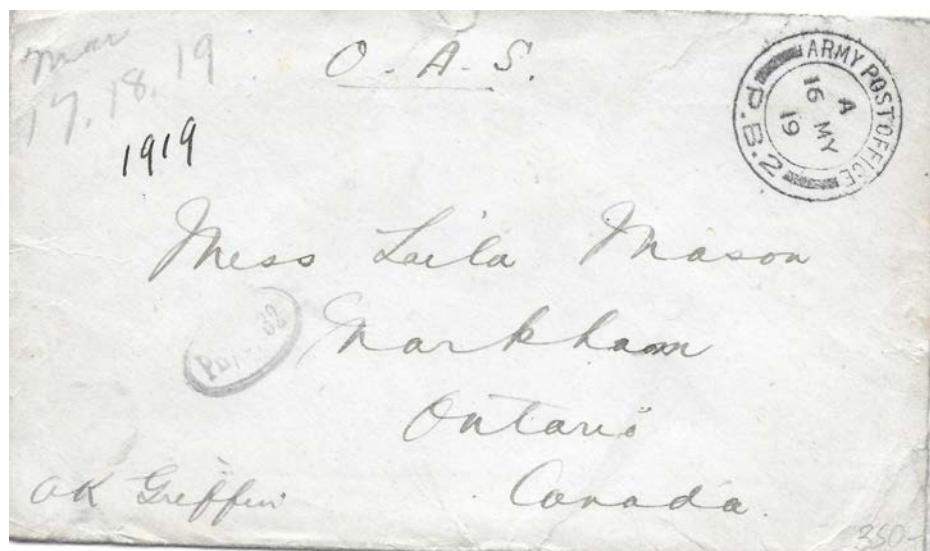


Fig 5

References:-

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