

Roland H. Webb and His Book

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The first, October 1973 issue of the *Canadian Military Mail Study Group Newsletter* [Number One, pages 1 and 2] featured news about a manuscript prepared by Lt. Col. R.H. Webb (1910–1970). Jim Kraemer—then Manager of the National Postal Museum (the NPM) in Ottawa—sent study group chairman Colin Campbell some questions raised by Ed Richardson, who was editing Webb’s 1970 manuscript for publication by the NPM, about “missing information” in the Webb material at the NPM: some military covers were not seen and some typescript portions were incomplete or missing. The Chairman called for members to contact Richardson or himself with any help. The only published response seen came in *CMMSG Newsletter Number Five* (June 1974)—a short note about “Lt. Col. R.H. Webb’s Handbook” saying that Ed Richardson had announced at the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada’s Convention [Winnipeg, May 2–4, 1974] that the handbook would consist of about 450 pages and be in both English and French. Its expected publication date was announced as 1975. Then came *four decades* with no news at all about the book!

In 2012, Robert Toombs, Gray Scrimgeour, and Brian Plain visited the shop of Vancouver auctioneer Brian Grant Duff. In the shop, Brian Plain noted a copy of a 1970 typescript: *A Guide to Canadian Military Postal History, 1636-1967*, by Lieut. Col. Roland H. Webb. Bob gratefully purchased it, and the odyssey began. Gray and Bob started a search and made enquiries to see if the book had ever been published and—if not—what had happened to it. Searching found a listing in several online bibliographies; these turned out to be misleading. The book had not been published. Friends passed on word that Ed Richardson had not completed his job and that perhaps one or two of the NPM staff had attempted to continue, but the book had not been completed. Our online search found a listing of the Roland H. Webb Fonds at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa (Accession 1996-085/086). Contents: 2,500 military mail covers and research notes; provenance: Gift of Mrs. Ethel Webb.

Bob was determined to see the work done by Webb published. Gray said he would help. About this time, Bob contacted Roland Webb’s son Ralph and explained our project. The Webb family had retained the original typescript of the book, and we were given a copy of it (December 2013) with their blessing and

encouragement. It was identical to Bob's copy. The Webb's bequest to NPM included a promise from the Museum that the book would be published by the Museum. In mid-November 2013, Bob studied the extensive Webb file at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) in Ottawa. He compared his copy of the book to the copy viewed at LAC (it is the same), and photographed as many Webb Collection military mail covers as he could in the time available, to use for illustrations in the book. Starting in late November 2013, Gray did optical character recognition scanning of the typescript and then Bob and Gray edited the word-processed text files. With Brian's input as external peer reviewer and author of several sections and other's help with review and provision of substitutes for missing covers, we have completed the project.

The book will be published this fall by *the Postal History Society of Canada (PHSC)* both as a bound printed version (for those placing orders for a limited printing) and shortly after as an electronic version (on the *PHSC* web site).

At last we can respond to the "missing information" questions raised in the first *Newsletter*. We have learned that after the Webb collection was sent to the NPM early in the 1970s, the Webb family in the 1980s found a very small stack of covers, which were subsequently sold. This lot may have included missing covers listed in the 1973 *CMMSG Newsletter*. Not all available covers at the LAC could be photographed, and there is also the possibility that some covers could reside in an NPM exhibit somewhere. In the 1970 typescript, seven chapters were missing; these were never written. Of these missing topics, censorship is now included as a chapter and a Canadian Forces Air Letters (AFALs) section appears as a newly-composed Appendix. We have compiled General Notes in an Introduction, listed Abbreviations, and prepared an Index. Each chapter has a list of Suggested Reading, with recent references. The book has been completed in a form that we believe presents Webb's wording and intentions, and provides a framework for future research.

Having worked with the manuscript for months, we have come to appreciate the insight and effort that went into its writing. During a decade when Webb served in Ottawa, he did research in the Archives there. He discovered much information to support his writing and collecting. His aim was to explain the operation of the *Canadian Postal Corps (CPC)*. His book describes how Canadian military mail was dispatched and delivered—from its beginning up to when he was writing.

Examples are shown to support his discussion. If Webb's own covers were not available, we have supplied, or sought from friends, suitable illustrations.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Webb was the major collector of and writer about Canadian military postal history. From 1958 to 1963, he wrote a series of 13 articles in *Maple Leaves* (*Canadian Philatelic Society of Great Britain*), he was awarded the Aiken Trophy for the best articles published in *Maple Leaves* 1960 (on MPOs). He wrote an equally-long and worthwhile series of articles in the *Canadian Philatelist*.

Roland H. Webb entered Royal Military College (Kingston) in his teens, and upon graduation in 1931, he entered the Militia and then the Canadian Army in 1933. He went Overseas in early 1940. He was present at Normandy on D-Day, in command of two artillery regiments, one of which was the 12th Field Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA). He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O) for his military service in the invasion of Northwest France in 1944 (Figure 1).



Figure 1: *Lieut. Col. R.H. Webb, of the 12th Field Regiment, RCA, is seen here (kneeling), briefing his officers and men (reclining) in the field, probably September 1944, France. (Webb Family Photo Album, with permission).*

In the early post war years, he commanded an artillery regiment at Petawawa, Ontario followed by command of Canadian Armed Forces Camp Shilo, in Manitoba. From 1951 until he retired to White Rock, B.C., in 1961 with his wife and three young children, he was Deputy Director of Administration at Army Headquarters in Ottawa. During this period, he also served with United Nations Forces in Egypt (Figure 2) and the Congo (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 2: On duty with the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in Egypt, sometime between late 1956 and 1960, likely early on. Lieut. Col. Webb, wearing UN headgear, is seen standing at the front wheel of the jeep, stopped in the desert, along the Egyptian-Israeli border. (Webb Family Photo Album, with permission).



Figure 3: Newspaper clipping, Lieut. Col. Webb, at left, with Major A.P. Cote of the UN Advance Party, which prepared for the arrival of the main body of UN Peacekeepers to the Congo. (Webb Family newspaper clipping, Toronto Telegram, 27 August 1960).



Figure 4: Lieut. Col. Webb, in the foreground, is seated in an RCAF Transport Squadron Northstar aircraft, en route home from Leopoldville's Njili Airport in the Congo, to the RCAF base at Trenton, Ontario, in August 1960. Canada's task with the UN Congo operation

was to set up and manage the UN communications network there and provide regular, scheduled logistical air flights between Dorval Airport) and the UN Congo Headquarters at Leopoldville via Pisa, Italy. The Canadian UN mission in the Congo returned home in 1964.

Webb had collected stamps since he was nine, and in adult life started with stamps again, and then squared circle cancels. In the 1950s, he advanced into military mails (he had saved his military mails from WW II and UN Operations). He was Treasurer of the Ottawa Philatelic Society and exhibited his military postmarks at numerous shows.

Roland Webb passed away in White Rock, B.C. in December 1970 at the age of 60, working at his typewriter on his book. The 1970 typescript was in progress, and incomplete (as noted above). The 521-page book will soon be published—at last.