

The American "Post Exchange" Gander WW2

(Robert G Pelley, 2019-04-13)
<http://bobsganderhistory.com>

On 09 March 1941, the first American weather personnel of 8th Weather Squadron, under Captain Clark Hosmer, arrived at "Gander Field" to support the later arrival of the US 21st Reconnaissance Squadron. Lt Bleyer and Lt Lawrence of this squadron, flying a B-18 Bolo, arrived on 20 April. Longer range B-17Cs of the USAAF 41st Reconnaissance Squadron, which started mid-Atlantic anti-submarine patrols from Gander, arrived during the same period. The United States Army Air Base was officially established 09 May 1941, with Major J.V. Crabb arriving as commanding officer.

There was little by the way of "creature comforts" in Gander in those days, as it was basically a military camp under construction.

At the end of the 1800s, the US War Department, directed commanders to establish where possible a "post exchange" for their base. From the soldier's point of view, these PX's offered two services. First, they supplied troops, at reasonable prices, with the articles of ordinary use, wear, and consumption, not supplied by the Government. Second, it afforded them a means of recreation and amusement. It was roughly a "convenience store" with a back room!

Each commander ran his PX as he thought best, but on 06 June 1941 an US "Army Exchange Service" was created to standardized how things should be run.

The first American PX was set up in Gander very quickly in 01 June 1941. As can be seen from this extract from the base diary, this first attempt was not yet up to the required standard.

To take care of the personal needs of the men, a Post Exchange was opened June 1, 1941. Occupying part of a small building, which later became the base canteen, the PX served as a store during the day and a soft drink and beer parlor at night.⁹⁴ The Post Exchange building was partitioned, and half of its space was used as a recreation room on week days and a chapel on Sundays.⁹⁵ Stock in the PX was meager and lopsided. Among the items which found slow turnover were large quantities of berry jelly, bottled olives,⁹⁶ and a too large supply of needles.

This first PX was in bldg 11 on the American side.



Bldg 11 later became the "Base canteen" and the PX moved to bldg 21 across the street.



Gander today



Shows where the 2nd PX would today

A brochure for transient personnel from 1944 gives the following info:

POST EXCHANGE SERVICE

MAIN STORE: The main store is located in building No. 21. Almost everything from "Sweets to Uniforms".

CIGARETTES: Single packs may be purchased without ration card anytime. Ration Cards for Carton purposes issued at the S & S Office, Base Headquarters, third day after arrival.

BARBER SHOP: Also located in building No. 21. Four good barbers ready to serve you. Closed on Sundays.

TAILOR SHOP: Located in the front part of barracks No. 13. Cure - all for rips, ravel, tears, baggy knees and lost buttons.

The tailor shop also offered cleaning services at 15 cent a shirt and 25 cents for a blouse. However, the quality of cleaning was not up to standard for "good uniforms". Most officers washed their own clothes and hung them up to dry inside their quarters.

There was also a problem with the sale of cigarettes. They were going for under a dollar a carton at the American PX but for three times the price on the RCAF and Canadian Army sides. For Americans, these areas were normally out of bounds, one reason being to prevent bootlegging.

Newfoundland girls were employed at American PX during the war, as shown below:



On the next pages are shown photos of the second PX in building 21.

As can be seen, these buildings were not well insulated - but the steam plant was perhaps 500 meters or so away. If the temperature went down, it was simple to turn to knob on the radiators fully counter-clock-wise!





After the war, both bldg 11 and 21 were taken over by the Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS).

There remained in building 21 after war a barbershop, run by Al Lilly (subject to confirmation). In days when kids got a haircut at least every two weeks, this barbershop offered more learning than the schools. Young men heard their fathers talk about old Gander - and of course anything else that grown men might be inclined to talk about. Best of all were the magazines like Fish and Stream, Life, Time and Saturday Evening Post. They spoke of wars in Korea, the coronation of a queen, Eisenhower becoming president - minus the fake news.

And now for the trick question - American bases facilities as classified as follows :

Units	Type of exchange
Army posts	Post Exchange (PX)
Air Force bases	Base Exchange (BX)
Marine Corps installations	Marine Corps Exchange (MCX)
Navy installations	Navy Exchange (NEX)
Coast Guard installations.	Coast Guard Exchange (CGX)

If Americans were at Gander Airport during the war only to ferry aircraft across the Atlantic or carry out maritime air patrols, why was it not called a Base Exchange as it was basically Air Force operations?

The reason is that in those days it was the US **Army** Air Force, USAAF, a part of the Army. A separate USAF was formed as a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces on 18 September 1947.