

## Gander's Ground Observer Corps (version 2)

(Robert G Pelley 14 February 2017)

The Ground Observer Corps was formed in Canada in 1951 to supplement the military's Aircraft Control and Warning System. It was abbreviated GOBc and was modelled initially on the Air Detection Corps that was used during World War Two to help detect German subs, ships and aircraft.

But in those heady days of the Cold War, people built bomb shelters, stocked food, water and essential supplies and often owned Geiger counters in preparation for a possible Soviet nuclear attack. With approximately 50,000 civilian volunteers across Canada from every walk of life – from trappers, housewives, Inuit Rangers, Jesuit priests to high school students, the GOBc proved on numerous occasions the truth of their slogan "The Eyes and Ears of the RCAF". Gander's 72 GOBc could even count on the help of a boat:



(The caption said "72 GOBc detachment, Gander, Nfld – Mobile communication post in the Nfld area")

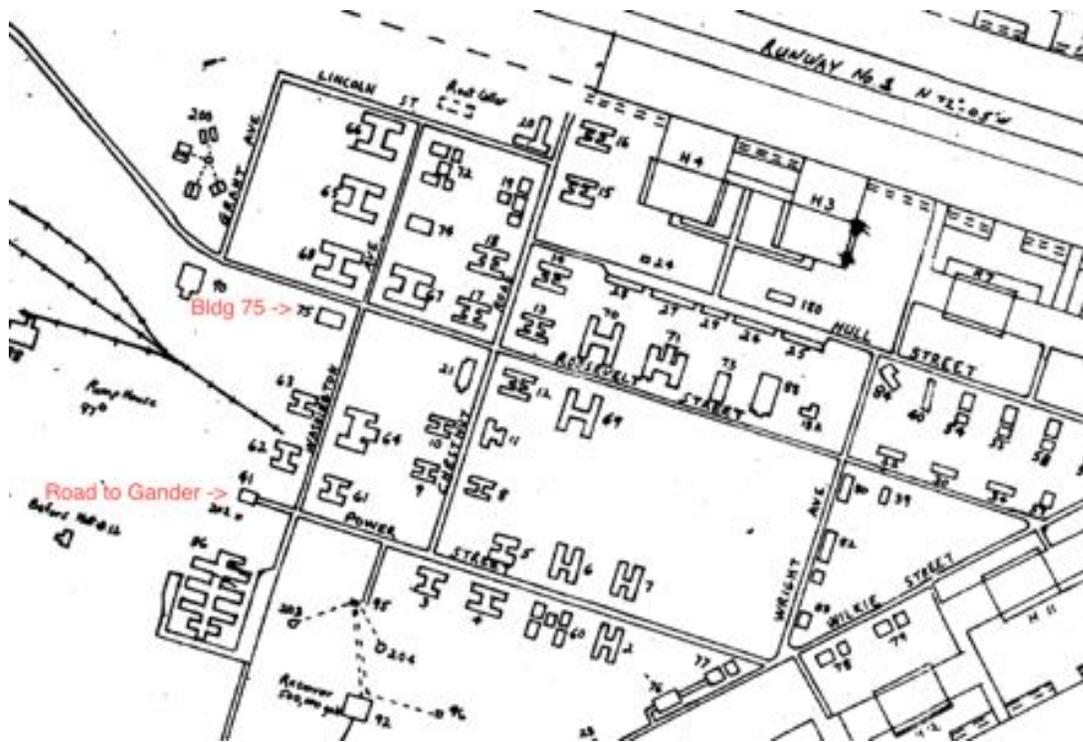
The idea was that the observers all over the countryside would keep a lookout for any aircraft they could see or hear. Their job was to identify the airplane and figure out its probable altitude, speed and direction. The observers were trained to recognize aircraft by their silhouettes even under low light conditions. They would man their posts, day and night, good weather or bad, often using their own equipment such as binoculars or even homemade electronic amplifiers to assist them. Some even built their own comfortable observation towers.

After collating their info, they contacted a “filter centre”, where airplanes thought to be of possible interest were plotted on a large table showing a map of the area of responsibility. The “telephone staff” was taught to write backwards on the glass boards, so the plotters on the other side could read the message.

The progress of aircraft was plotted via small, coloured pegs with letters and numbers showing the aircraft's status - for example, if it was a friendly civilian, military or unidentified flight. In case of a suspected attack or unidentified aircraft, a designated radar station could be contacted and fighter jets could be scrambled to check it out.

The 80 GOB C Detachment, located in Gander, Newfoundland, opened on 11 June 1954 and was re-designated as 72 GOB C Squadron in January 1955.

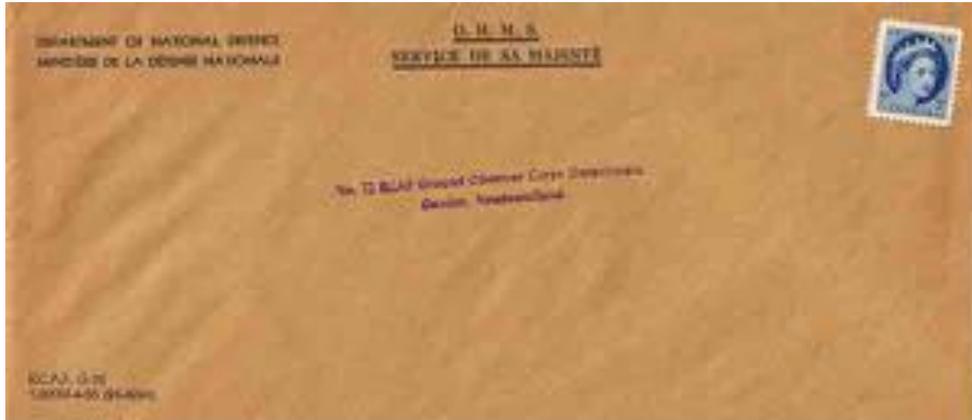
It was first established on the American side of “Old Gander”, in Building 75, which would be roughly just WNW of the present airport parking.



A short time later, it followed Gander's residents into the new town. The 72 GOBc filter centre was set up on the second floor, above Milley's Style Shop, in the shopping strip in the SE corner of Airport Rd and Elizabeth Drive. GOBc members often got together on the ground floor, in the old "Highlight Restaurant" with its great jukebox of rock-and-roll and country music.



This topic was brought up in 2012 in the former post-school-reunion “Faye’s Pages”. It started with an envelope I came across as shown below and was quickly developed by Faye Raynard, with contributions from several former members of the Gander GOBc.



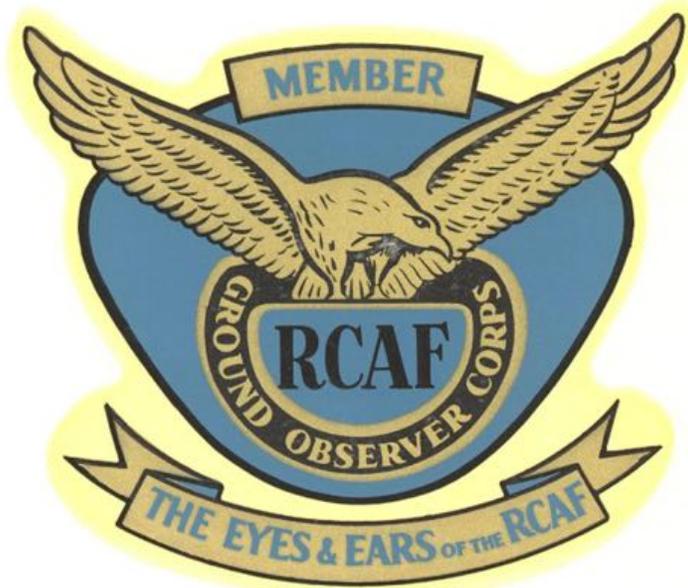
This envelope appears to have never been sent. But this is not unusual, because where there was a certain level of traffic; a military clerk would have probably prepared a number of envelopes in advance. Given the presence of a 5-cent which would give the year as 1960, this envelope could well have been pre-stamped in some Headquarters but never sent because 72 GOBc closed down on 01 August of that year.

GOBc was considered important work not only for military reasons and members were very proud to be part of it because the general public was well aware of all the hard work done. People also knew that it was frequently a main source of information when civilian planes were in trouble. It was well advertised, as shown in the poster below.



Members could show their pride through the use of car decals and blazer patches:

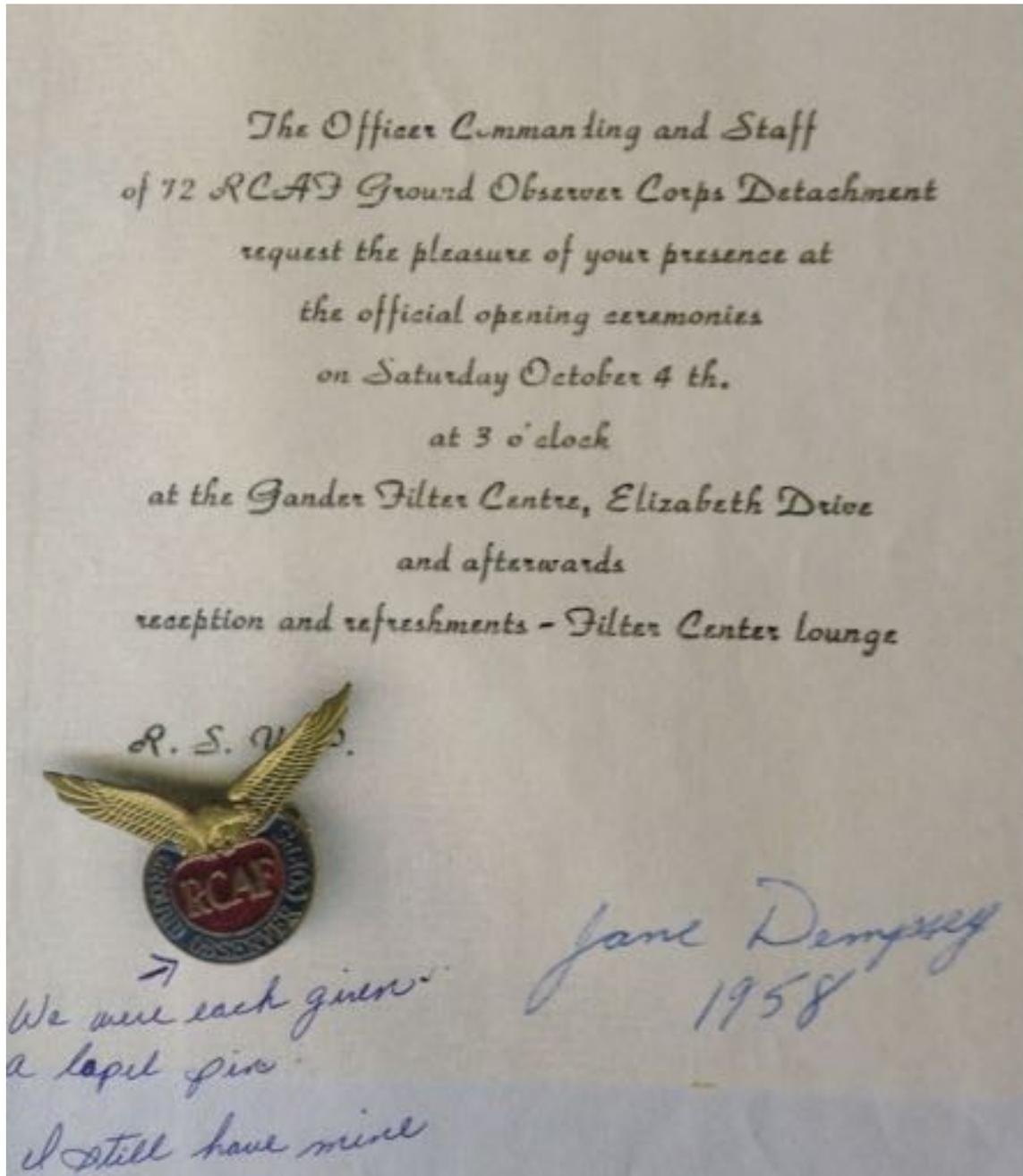
Car decal:



Blazer patch:



This blazer badge was the same style as the "wings" or GOBc pin. The photo below shows the invitation received by Jane Dempsey from the OC and staff of the RCAF Filter Centre for an official opening in 1958 (which could be when it moved into the new town). Her pin is attached to page.



The photo below shows Michal Millar receiving her wings in the late 50s from what appears to be an RCAF Squadron Leader :



Audrey (Mingo) Grantham has even managed to dig out several precious artefacts from that era:

**IDENTIFICATION DATA**

FULL NAME	AUDREY MINGO			
ADDRESS	3 Alcock Crescent, <del>St. Catharines</del>			
CITY	Gander,	PROV.	Nfld.	
SEX	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	COLOR EYES	COLOR HAIR
F	5' 4"	100	Brown	Brown

This Card May be Cancelled at Any Time and Repossessed  
by Authority of the Chief of the Air Staff

*Audrey R. Mingo*  
MEMBER'S SIGNATURE

72 - 57 - A/8  
CARD NUMBER

CAF PD14 No. R 243 FOR IDENTIFICATION ONLY

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE  
AIR DEFENCE COMMAND

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

Miss Audrey Mingo

IS A FULLY ACCREDITED MEMBER OF THE

GROUND OBSERVER CORPS

  
AIR OFFICER COMMANDING  
AIR DEFENCE COMMAND

  
CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF

FOR IDENTIFICATION ONLY

*Royal Canadian Air Force  
Ground Observer Corps*

*Certificate of Appointment*

*To all whom these presents shall come, greetings.  
Be it known that:*

Miss **AUDREY MINGO**

has been officially appointed as **A PLOTTER** in  
the Royal Canadian Air Force Ground Observer  
Corps.

Ottawa, Canada  
4 OCT. 1940

  
CHIEF OF THE AIR STAFF

It is interesting to note that these last two cards were signed by no less than the Chief of the Air Staff, the highest ranking member of the RCAF, which points out the value attributed to participation in this organization.

GObC members were kept up to date on the latest Soviet airplanes and observation techniques. This was done notably through regular bulletins such as the own shown below:



The next photos show members of the Gander GObC in the filter centre around the plotting map during the period 1958-60.



The next photo shows the certificate presented to Jane Dempsey (leader of the filter team The Whiz Kids), in June 1960, the year the GOBC was closed down.



Among the people who participated in GOBc were the following:

Jane (Dempsey) Donnelley, Audrey (Mingo) Grantham, Liz (Morgan) Marshall, Faye (Lewis) Raynard, Gwen (Green) Boyd, Michal (Millar) Crowe, Phyllis (Melanson) Sanderson, Norma (Roussel) Begley, **Margaret (Hawkins) Moore**, Marion Pardy, Jim Clark, John Malone, Ken Barnes, Leo Lannon, Dave Robertson, Angus Taylor, Bob Mckinnon, Campbell Pritchett and Jim Sharpegge (RCAF NCO-in-charge)

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I would like to offer my most sincere thanks to four ladies who either put together the original information or made important contributions and then let me call on their work as the basis of this present article.

Their contributions are much too important to be forgotten:

- ° Faye (Lewis) Raynard
- ° Michal (Millar) Crowe
- ° Audrey (Mingo) Grantham
- ° Jane (Dempsey) Donnelly