

# Gander during World War II - The mood of the times

Gander today is a pretty quiet town. It is not a place where, under normal conditions, citizens and visitors constantly wonder about the dangers they might meet the next day. During the 2nd World War however, even ordinary working folks in Gander worried about that kind of thing and lived constantly with infantry troops on the ground and fighter planes in the skies who made sure nothing went wrong.

For the bomber pilots and aircrews leaving Gander for Europe, this dire thought of danger probably hardly left their minds. These men ate, slept and prayed in the buildings some of us later called home, so I tried to have a better look at their personal lives.

One such case is the group of B-17 Flying Fortresses that left Gander on the evening of 05 September 1942 en route to their new base in Thurleigh, Bedfordshire, England.



**306th Bomb Group The Reich Wreckers**  
GROUP

In that group was a B-17F with manufacturer's serial number 41-24463. The name of the navigator was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Andrew J. Hoyt. About a hour or so out of Gander, several other planes saw a very bright flash in the night sky and his call sign answered no more.

That could be the end of a sad story right there, but I found another twist to it. I managed to acquire a very revealing envelope addressed to this young officer.

It was sent by probably a close friend, Lt H Jones, USS PC 484 - posted free Aug 9, 1942 from Miami, Florida. It was addressed to Lt Andrew J Hoyt, 423 Bombardment Squadron, Wendover Field, Utah.



But the telling note on this envelope is signed on the bottom left by a JW Wilson, Major, Officer Commanding, 10/23/42. His note is short and sweet with no frills, with all the required military brevity – just one simple word : “Missing”.

On the top of the envelope another example of impersonal wartime simplicity – a finger with the words “return to sender”.

Despite that after leaving Gander Airport, one of their planes disappeared in a ball of fire over the Atlantic, the extract below from the squadron log describes their arrival in Thurleigh on 07 September as rather matter of fact.

Organization arrives at Thurleigh 0300 hours and are immediately warned about air raid alerts and blackouts. Extra blankets and rifles issued to personnel and so to bed for our first night at Thurleigh.

The loss of a plane and its crew was already a memory. Such were the times.