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# BNA pics

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The front cover shows tags from mail bags sent to and from Canadian forces serving in Bosnia.

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# The Canadian Forces Postal Service in Bosnia

*Hugo Deshaye*

## Preface

**T**HIS article was written at a quiet time of night during my military service in Bosnia in 2001 and published in French in the journal of the Société d'Histoire Postale du Québec [1]. In *BNA Topics* [2], BNAPS member Len Belle enquired about military 'baggage labels' used by Canadian forces in the former Yugoslavia. My response in the next issue [3] stimulated a number of readers, and I received a number of positive e-mails. I would like to thank Jacques Poitras, Michael Rixon and Mike Street for encouraging me to revise the article for *BNA Topics*.

## The Canadian Forces Postal Service (CFPS) [4, 5, 6]



Figure 1. Canadian Forces Postal Service

The first formal mail service for Canadian military personnel was established in 1885, during the Northwest (Riel) Rebellion. Almost fifteen years later, a detachment of employees of the Canada Post Office volunteered to provide postal services during the South African (Boer) War. The development of the Canadian Militia in the early 1900s led to the development of Field Post Offices serving summer camps and, in 1911, the formation of the Canadian Postal Corps (CPC). World War I saw a greatly expanded CPC look after the needs of servicemen and women through Military Post Offices (MPOs) in England, France, Belgium and, of course, at bases in Canada.

After WWI, the size of the Corps was reduced to suit the number of people then in the military, but it was expanded again with the outbreak of WWII. The period 1939–1946 saw Canadians serving all over the globe, and the CPC grew proportionally, with units not only in Great Britain and eventually continental Europe, but also in Iceland, Jamaica and as far away as Hong Kong and India. By the end of WWII, more than 5000 people worked in more than 170 postal units. Demobilized in 1946, the CPC

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Keywords & phrases: military mail, Canadian Forces Postal Service, Bosnia

was re-formed for the Korean War of 1950–53, and continued as Canadian units began serving as part of the complement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Canada's participation in United Nations Peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and Congo meant that the need for postal units continued. During its fiftieth anniversary in 1961, the CPC was honoured by the Queen, whose permission to use the term 'Royal' resulted in the creation of the Royal Canadian Postal Corps (RCPC).

With the integration of the Canadian armed forces in the late 1960s the RCPC became part of the Administration Branch and was no longer a separate unit. Once again, however, Canadian commitments overseas created a need and, in 1987, the Canadian Forces Postal Service/Service postal des forces canadiennes (CFPS-SPFC) was formed. It has since served in many of the world's hot spots and continues today as part of the Logistics Branch.

Military personnel of the CFPS operate Canadian Forces Post Offices (CFPOs) for Canadian forces overseas, offering a complete complement of postal services just like a post office back home. The Belleville, Ontario CFPO address, probably the one best known to collectors and non-military correspondents, is actually a drop box. All mail addressed to CFPO Belleville is picked up from Canada Post by members of the Canadian Forces Postal Unit (CFPU) and then processed at their base in Trenton, about 18km away.

## Stabilization Force (SFOR) [7]

From January 1996 to December 2005 the NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina endeavoured to help the local people carry out their daily lives in safety by enforcing peace agreements and deterring hostilities. Canada's contribution was a battle group, made up of an infantry battalion and a number of attached sub-units. Their principal activities were patrolling the assigned area of responsibility, control of weapons, and supporting the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Police Task Force (IPTF).



Figure 2. SFOR logo

Canadian troops also helped greatly to improve the standard of living of the local population through community projects, and by distributing goods donated by the people of Canada. In December 2005, NATO changed the scope and name of the operation. As of May 2006, 21 Canadians are still serving in Bosnia.

## Collection of mail from Canada for SFOR personnel

The bulk of the mail destined for soldiers in Bosnia was collected by the Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC), community organizations located on most military bases in Canada to serve the unit(s) based there. The aim of the MFRC is to support families during difficult times and to provide, among other services, collection and wrapping of mail. Letters and parcels gathered and routed by a military organization are mailed for free, regardless of weight or quantity. Military families without access to a centre of this type send their parcels at ordinary rates to CFPO 5112 in Belleville, Ontario. They are forwarded, without additional charge, from there.

## Mail transport within Canada

Every Wednesday, the post offices at the Courcellette, Quebec and Belleville, Ontario bases coordinated with the military transport service to send the mail to CFB Trenton. After a customs check, bagging, and labelling, Trenton CFPS personnel filled out the dispatch documents and sent everything to the ‘traffic technicians’. The mail bags were loaded aboard Hercules CC-130 aircraft of 429 or 436 Squadrons destined for the Balkans, more precisely for Camp Pleso de Zagreb. At the discretion of Trenton officials, the mailbags were often sent to Toronto for transport by civil aircraft to Germany, Austria, or directly to Croatia.

## Mail transport in Europe

Once in Croatia, mail bags from Hercules or civil aircraft were routed to Pleso de Zagreb and then redirected to the nearby base at Velika Kladusa. After a quick sort by the clerks at Velika Kladusa, bags were sent to CFPO 5112 at Zgon, which was responsible for postal service for all the other bases in Bosnia, and which organized shuttles between the bases. Mail was forwarded by the first available vehicle; the schedule was largely determined by military operations, not by a regular schedule.

## Mail distribution to the troops

There was no mailman at the different unit locations. The mail was distributed to us by off-duty or volunteer members—my daily duty was to hand out the mail to my colleagues. I often needed a dolly to carry the parcels, which were far more common than letters. (Since the Internet was far faster, and in some ways more reliable, why bother sending letters?) Since families of soldiers could send parcels for free, I was often snowed under by them. Since I brought parcels, my colleagues referred to me as Santa.

There were frequent delays in receiving the mail. I can remember receiving catalogues for Longley and Robert A Lee auctions two weeks after they had taken place—as they say in the television ads, “That’s life!”

# Mail bag tags

Mail bag tags were employed exactly as if they were letters, i.e., they indicated where a bag came from and where it was going. The colours of the tags distinguished their uses. White tags were used by the carrier at the destination. Green tags were used for large sacks that contained mail bags; these were usually seen around Christmas because the number of parcels increased greatly and there was risk of loss or damage. A red tag indicated to the postmaster that the bag contained paperwork and registered letters. Yellow tags were used for outgoing mail destined for home via Toronto. Beige tags contained unofficial internal mail and newspapers.

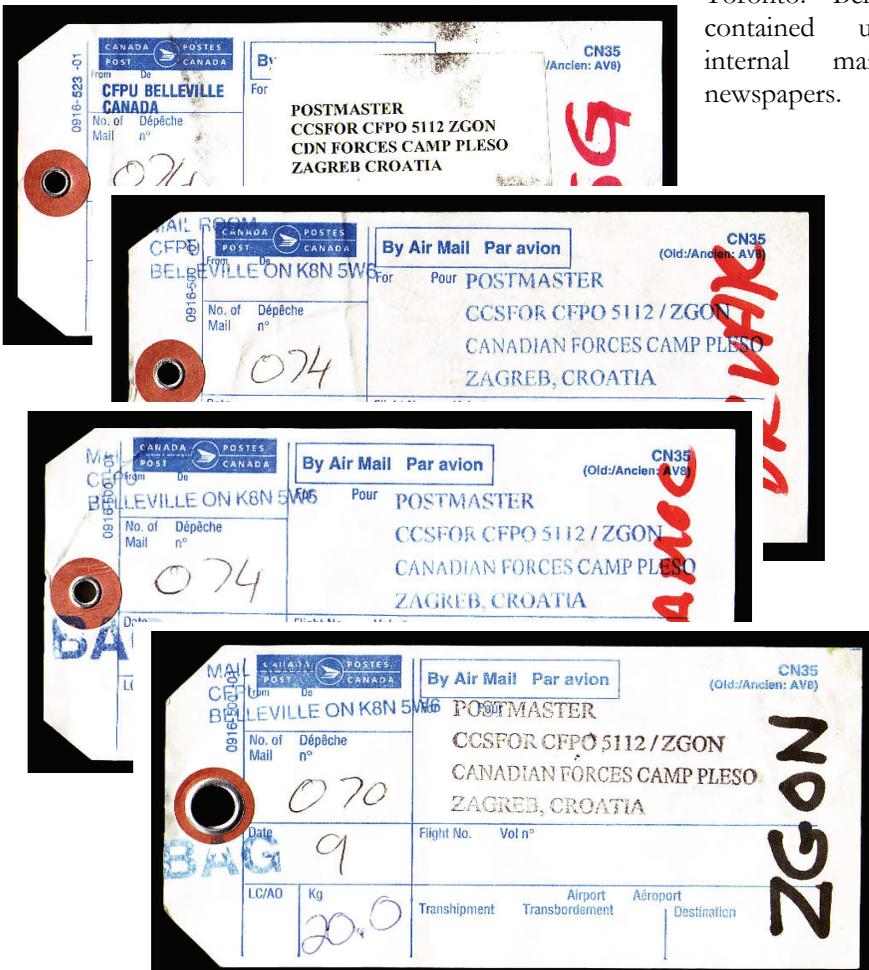
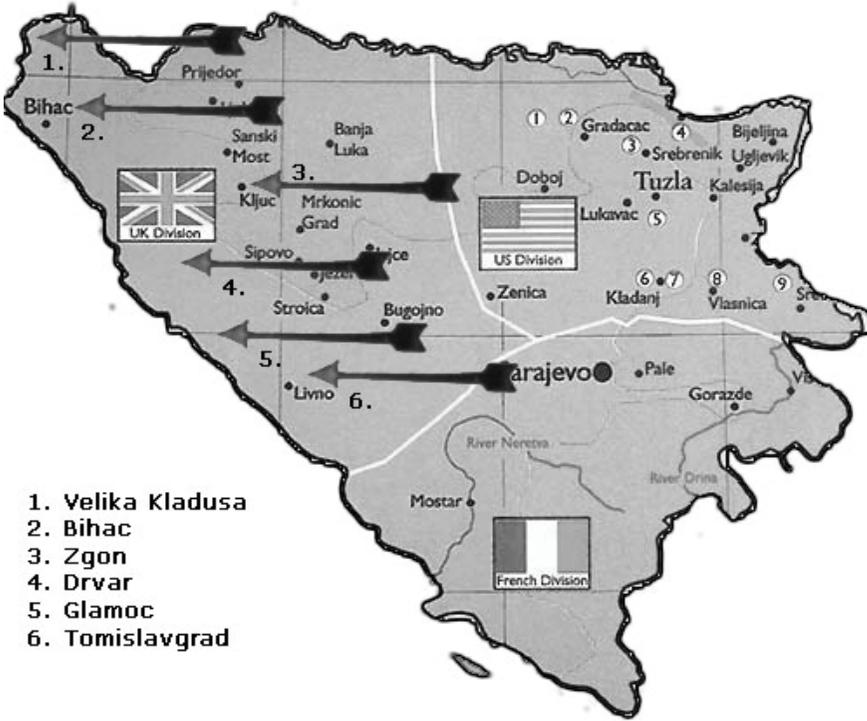


Figure 3. Mail bag tags from Canada, marked for forwarding to SFOR Units.



- 1. Velika Kladusa
- 2. Bihac
- 3. Zgon
- 4. Drvar
- 5. Glamac
- 6. Tomislavgrad

Figure 4. Map of SFOR area with Canadian bases marked by arrows.



Figure 5. Baggage tag for SFOR mail carried by non-military aircraft.



Figure 6. Tags for SFOR bags enclosing registered mail (red), other mail bags (green), administrative mail (tan), and mail for Canada (yellow).

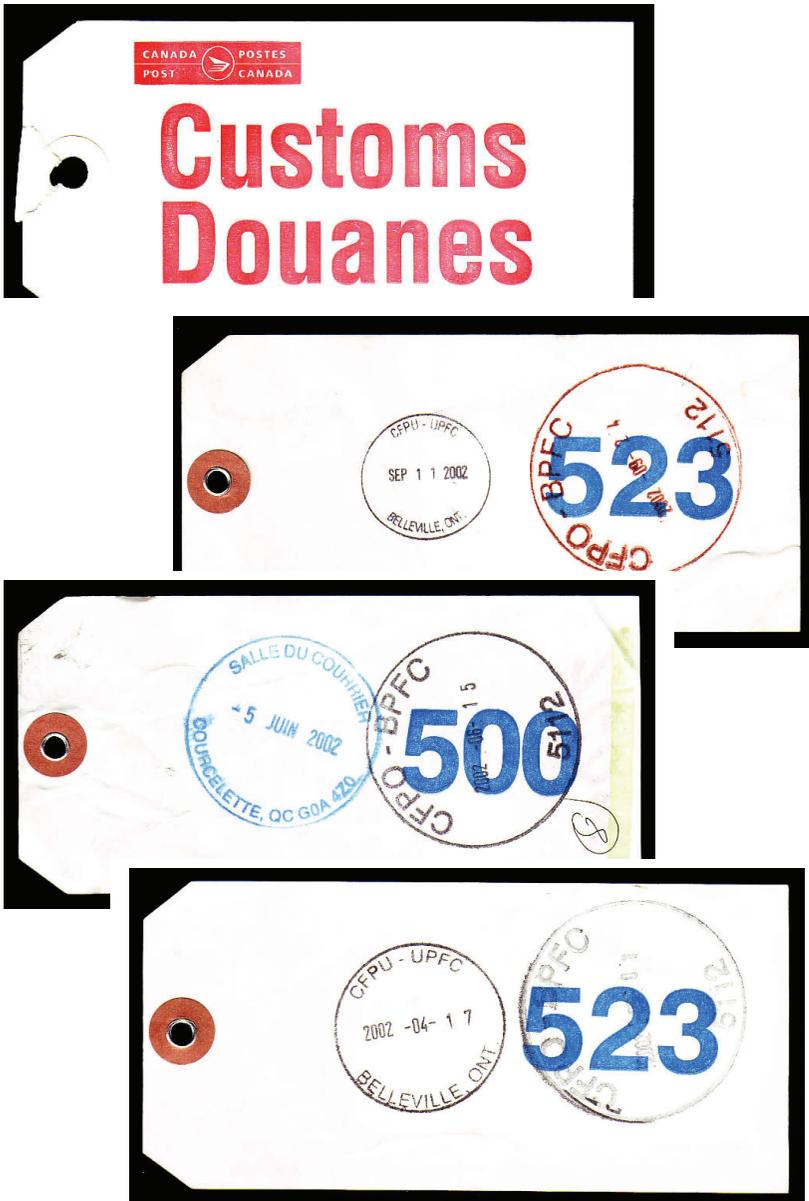


Figure 7. A Customs tag, and three tags showing dispatch postmarks of the Belleville, ON and Courcellette, QC mail units and CFPO 5112 (Zgon) receivers. The smaller Belleville postmark is not common.



Figure 8. Mailbags arriving at Velika Kladusa from Canada.



Figure 9. Mailbags waiting at Velika Kladusa for shipment to Canada.



Figure 10. Postal clerk sorting mail at Zgon.



Figure 11. Postmaster at Zgon sorting mailbags for Dravr

Accompanying this article are illustrations of some of the tags used on mail to/from Bosnia; postmarks of various postal units involved; and some photographs of CFPS personnel as they processed mail in Bosnia. The author would be interested in questions or additional information. Please contact me through the Editor of *BNA Topics*.

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For further information on the British North America Philatelic Society (BNAPS), go to:

[www.bnaps.org](http://www.bnaps.org)